



Global Health Security Threat: Repositioning To end the Pandemic and Build Back Better. Repositioning our culture¹

Author

**Prof
Oyewale
Tomori**

Affiliation:

First Vice
Chancellor
Redeemers
University Ede

Address of Professor of Virologist and former Vice-Chancellor, Redeemer's University, Oyewale Tomori at the

NATIONAL COVID-19 SUMMIT
PRESIDENTIAL STEERING COMMITTEE

THEME: 'Pushing through the last mile to end the pandemic'.

Keywords: Epidemic, Pandemic, COVID-19, Preparedness, Human development, Post COVID.

Introduction

Being the last speaker after such erudite and distinguished speakers, leaves you at best to chew on the crumbs, except your prayers are answered and none of the speakers before you, touch on what is on your mind. I am very privileged today to use the theme of this summit to speak on something that touches my heart, something that brings out deep emotion of me, from years of experience. Since charity begins at home, I will look at the topic of global health security in the context of repositioning Nigeria to build back on ending disease outbreaks



¹ Republished with the permission of Professor Oyewole Tomori



As the individuals make the nation, and the nations make the world, so also Global Health Security is built on the foundation of National Health Security and National Health Security is laid on the foundation of individual and or personal health security. It is that aspect of ensuring personal and individual health security, I wish to focus on. We do remember of course that the WHO sees health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Build Back Better predates President Biden. It was in Sendai in 2015, that the Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo ABE, stated:

".... "Build Back Better" sounds like a new concept, but this is common sense to the Japanese people, coming from our historical experiences in recovering from disaster and preparing for the future, and it has become an important part of the culture of Japan."

It was at that same Sendai meeting that the Japanese delegation proposed BBB as a holistic concept which uses disaster as a trigger to create more resilient nations and societies than before, through the implementation of well-balanced disaster risk reduction measures, including physical restoration of infrastructure, revitalization of livelihood and economy/industry, and the restoration of local CULTURE and ENVIRONMENT.

When we discuss BBB in terms of disasters and pandemics, we often tend to forget that disasters and pandemics seriously affect our environment and most especially our culture. No matter what plans we formulate to respond to pandemics and disaster, we will surely fail, if we do not seriously address the issue of culture and environment

As I said earlier, global health security just as the individuals make the nation, and the nations make the world, so also Global Health Security must be built on the foundation of National Health Security and the National Health Security must be laid on the foundation of individual or personal health security

COVID is not the enemy

Lassa fever is of minor league

Yellow fever is yellow livered

Monkeypox is child's play

Cholera is a dehydrator



Our underdevelopment and backwardness rest on four pillars. They are the real enemies of our nation, and they are

1. Lack of patriotism, the main destroyer of our nation
2. Self-interest, the burial ground of our national interest
3. Corruption, the executor of our orderly development
4. Shamelessness, the destruction of our national pride

Over the last 60 years, these diseases, all affecting our culture, have become the combined endemic demolisher of the foundation of our individual health security which has shaken the foundation of our national health security and in turn determined our irrelevance as a nation in contributing meaningfully to global health security.

Mr. President and distinguished participants, anytime I have Nigeria on my mind, I speak with passion, I am deeply emotional, there is a fever in my body, pain wracks my whole body, and I must hold on to something to steady my stand. I have wept for this country on several occasions, I will try not to do so today. You must be wondering why. I owe this country much more than I can ever pay back. I grew up in the UN, Utopia Nigeria, for indeed at that time, Nigeria was my UTOPIA. It will be an insult to call my father polygamous, he was MULTIGAMOUS. The number of his wives that I know is more than all the excellencies, honourables and dignitaries in the high table and front row. I came in as number 39 in the list of his children. We were being bred as hands for his farm. Then, we had good governance just before the colonial masters left. The government of Obafemi Awolowo introduced free primary education in my region. It was not only free, but it was also compulsory giving my father the choice of sending me to school or going to prison. He took the simpler way out and sent me to school. From that singular act, began my journey of indebtedness to my country. After the free education in my village close to Ilesha, now in Osun State, I took an entrance examination and got admitted on partial scholarship to the Government College Ughelli, now in Delta State-nobody followed me to the exam hall or interview, from there I moved on to ABU Zaria on full federal scholarship to read Veterinary Medicine. All my education was done in Nigeria. Going to Ughelli from Ilesha, a 2-day journey was in the ARMELS transport, without any escort. Our parents handed us over to the driver, with money for our food. If there was any change, the driver would hand over the money to our parents on his return journey through our town. I left Zaria at 12 noon, on Wednesday 30 June 1971 and started work as a Research Fellow at the University of Ibadan, 8 am, on Monday July 5, 1971. I am what I am today, because, Nigeria, my UTOPIA country provided an enabling environment for me to thrive



and excel. I give glory to GOD and thank the great citizens and parents of our nation who loved this country more than themselves.

But soon an outbreak occurred, which later become endemic. It came on us surreptitiously, killing our nation slowly. It was a disease that affected the three pillars of our nation, touching every stratum, damaging every fiber of our nation. The disease slew good governance, murdered societal sanctity and eradicated individual integrity. The disease annihilated the good in our culture and elevated to prominence the ugly in our culture. The disease came in three forms- greedy self-interest, blatant lack of patriotism, and unabashed shamelessness

Today, we lie to each other. The government lies to us, and we reciprocate with bigger lies, telling the government it is doing well, when we know it is not. We clap with the loudest ovation for a non-performing leader. We acclaim in pretended joyous ecstasy, those we should not, even when we know they are not telling the truth. We pray that our king lives forever, and he says AMEN, when we BOTH know we shall all die, and none of us will live forever.

I woke up today to hear that Canada no longer recognizes my genuine vaccination card. And Britain has clamped a travel ban on us. A few days ago, I had to know there was omicron in Nigeria from outside. the same Canada was telling me that Nigerians who travelled out with negative Covid lab result were OMICRON positive, before my own CDC finally tells me that we had the variant, detected in samples collected from people recently travelled from South Africa.... Were they people on the entourage of President Ramaphosa? They did not tell. We painfully call the reactions of the UK and Canada, racism, inequity. But I say we are paying for condoning our errors of commission and overlooking our errors of omission.

Mr. President and Eminent Leaders of our country, we must apply BUILD BACK BETTER, first on our old and cherished culture. If we must reposition our country to end current and future disease pandemics, we must start with building back better, those aspects of our culture

- ✓ that revered honour,
- ✓ that treasured integrity,
- ✓ that prized probity,
- ✓ that appreciated accountability,
- ✓ that valued transparency,
- ✓ that embraced honesty,
- ✓ that practise fairness,
- ✓ that ensured equity,
- ✓ that dispensed justice fairly, and

✓ that cherished patriotism.

Mr. President, the current generation of Nigerians is much smarter than my generation, give them one-tenth of the enabling opportunity and environment which good governance gave my generation, and Nigeria will be donating vaccines to poor Europe. Nigeria will be providing loans to China, and not the other way round.

The first epidemic we must address is the one affecting our culture and true Nigerianess. We must have a nation where national interest buries self-interest. Otherwise, this summit will become a mirage and a vapour, it will be burnt to ashes by the fire of evil that plagues us. Unless we build back better on our culture, the outcome of the summit will descend into the valley of the disregarded and disremembered and become another expensive exercise in futility.

Mr. President, EMINENT PARTICIPANTS, I spoke as I have spoken, because I love you as I love my country. I have no other country. To those who say I am anti-government, I will only so, to a government that is anti-Nigeria. Nobody, no government is greater than Nigeria. I thank you all for this unique opportunity to speak my mind