

WELCOME ADDRESS BY ANEEJ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, REV. DAVID UGOLOR DURING THE ROUNDTABLE ON BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS AND POLICY-MAKING IN NIGERIA CORINTHIA HOTEL, ABUJA, SEPTEMBER 3, 2018

Protocol!

Let me join the Country Director of ActionAid Nigeria to welcome you all to this very important roundtable on behavioural insights and policy making in Nigeria. I consider this event important because the issues for discussion are relevant to the development and transformation of Nigeria. The event will also propose alternative approaches to tackling corruption in Nigeria.

Everyone here know that the present government in Nigeria is fighting corruption. Even the previous administration of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and those that came before him equally fought corruption. A number of institutions or agencies have been set up over time to accomplish this. Some as a consequence of the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Others are necessary to conduct the business of governance. The EFCC, ICPC, Code of Conduct Bureau and others are all working to check the ‘monster’ that has bedeviled our dear country for too long. A number of laws also exist to deal with the same issue and over time, people have been arrested, tried and jailed for corruption, yet the problem remains unabated.

There is a reasonable amount of available literatures that seek to explain the persistence of corruption in this context. The Basel Institute of Governance report entitled “Behavioural Influences on Attitudes towards Petty Corruption: A Study of Social Norms and Mental Models in Tanzania” published in December 2017 speaks to the issue. The report made reference to certain implementation gaps where countries continue to experience high levels of corruption despite substantial legal and institutional reforms that adhere to international anti-corruption best practices.

The new thinking now is that anti-corruption work should tend towards targeting a change in social norms which encourage corruption. This is in addition to existing efforts and strategies. The secret of this approach is that it will increase citizens’ participation in the fight against corruption and adopting such approach could make citizens build a strong resistance to corrupt behaviour.

A recent Chatham House report published in May 2017 supports this view. The report proposed the reinforcement of Nigeria’s ongoing anti-corruption effort by first understanding why people take part in corrupt activity, and full consideration of the societal factors that may contribute to normalizing corrupt behaviour. The report holds the view that this holistic approach would better position public institutions to engage the Nigerian society in anti-corruption efforts and concluded that “*as behavioural drivers influence people’s choices and preferences around corruption, Nigeria’s anti-corruption agencies should systematically integrate these methods into the long-term approach to their mandates.*”

This roundtable is thus designed to examine the gaps in anti-corruption policy development and implementation in Nigeria and whether such policy development takes into account behavioural insights. It is also in recognition of the multi-stakeholder nature of this emerging approach that we have broadened the invitation to this event to include not just government and civil society, but also private sector actors.

We are hopeful that both the presentations and the subsequent interactions at this event will ignite the debate around how policymaking can target changing social norms that promote corruption. We are grateful that the “Strengthening Citizens Resistance Against Prevalence of Corruption (SCRAP-C) project which ActionAid Nigeria is implementing, has offered the opportunity to discuss these emerging issues.

The SCRAP-C project is funded by UKAID under the Anti-Corruption in Nigeria (ACORN) Programme, which is also exploring this approach in its development work in the area of governance.

I thank you all for honouring our invitation despite your busy schedule.