

LEAD DEBATE

Sen. Rose Oko (Cross River North)

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, please permit me to lead the debate on the 2nd reading of this bill.

Please recall that this bill was read for the first time on 1st march, 2018.

The bill seeks to repeal the National Planning Commission Act, Cap 66 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, and enact the National Planning Commission (Establishment) Bill, 2017 to enhance the functionality of the commission by including provisions for the preparation of a national development plan; modalities for assessing implementation and to bring the activities of the commission within the purview of the National Assembly and for related matters.

Nigeria has had a relatively long experience in development planning beginning with the 1958 – 68 Colonial Development Plan. Medium-term development plans and national rolling plans were also developed and implemented with mixed results or rather, limited success. However, what has been consistent in Nigeria's attempts at development planning is the lack of effective implementation. This failure can be largely attributed to corruption, poor governance, lack of a clear implementation strategy and the lack of a robust legislative framework for development planning. It is the foregoing impediments and challenges that this bill seeks to address.

Permit me to highlight some of the amendment proposals contained in the Bill.

1. Objectives of the Commission under section 3

The Bill seeks to expand the objectives of the National Planning Commission. This is essentially to promote a process of national planning that is inclusive and comprehensive. It also enhances the process by providing for periodic reviews and assessment of the national development plan and subjecting it to legislative scrutiny and oversight. Regarding legislative scrutiny, the French experience in

development planning is instructive. Apart from their First and Third Development plans, which were adopted by administrative order, the plan is usually submitted to Parliament for ratification. In the Fourth Plan, the debate was a heated one and resulted both in some modification in favour of regional projects and agricultural interests and a change in the order of events. Submission to the National Assembly formerly took place at the last stage; the Fifth Plan, however, was submitted before it had been finally determined, to permit greater democratization in the planning process

2. Membership of the Commission under section 3

The amendment here seeks to engender transparency and accountability by subjecting the appointment of the Deputy Chairman and other members of the Commission to Senate confirmation.

3. Duties of the Commission (Section 7)

The duties of the Commission are further expanded to specifically include the formulation and preparation of a National Development Plan, with short and medium-term benchmarks to assess implementation.

4. National Development Plan (Section 9 and 10)

The bill under this section proposes wide ranging amendments aimed at ensuring the following –

- That the National Development Plan is people-centred and developed in collaboration and consultation with Nigerians from all levels of society;
- That its implementation is specifically tailored to the national budget;
- That specific timelines are assigned to all stages of the preparation of the National Development Plan;
- That the National Development Plan is subject to legislative scrutiny and approval;
- That the President is obligated to ensure that annual budget estimates are prepared in such a manner to achieve the specific targets, goals and objectives of the National Development Plan; and
- That adequate provisions are made for the conduct of mid-term assessment of subsisting National Development Plan with a view to verifying the extent to which targets are met or otherwise, ascertaining the reasons for failures and recommending measures to be taken to meet the goals and targets.

Furthermore, additional amendments in section 10 obligates the Commission to

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prepare and submit to the President annual reports on the implementation and progress of each National Development Plan. The President shall in turn cause the same report to be presented to the National Assembly not later than the 31st of March of the next succeeding year.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, it is my sincere belief that all of us here envision a better future for Nigeria, a future in which no one lives in poverty, where no one goes hungry, where there is work for all; where everyone lives to their fullest potentials. To realise such a society, we need to transform the domestic economy and focus efforts to build the capacities of both the country and the people. To eliminate poverty and reduce inequality, there should be accelerated growth in the economy, growth that benefits all Nigerians. Indeed, this can only be achieved with a robust national development planning framework that is steeped in transparency, inclusivity, accountability and of course, one that is subject to legislative scrutiny and oversight.

To this end, I urge you all to support this bill as it seeks to reposition and strengthen the Commission responsible for determining and advising on policies that will best promote national unity and integration as well as economic prosperity.

More so, this bill has no additional cost to government as no agency is created.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, thank you for your attention.