



## POLITICAL WILL FOR EFFECTIVE REFORM MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ACHIEVEMENT IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Political will is the ultimate driving force for national integrity, effective reform management and sustainable development. Political will is an essential tool to fight corruption and mismanagement in society. It is the driver of a robust private sector, resilient media, vibrant civil society, transparent judiciary, good administrative reforms and governance that lead to national integrity and sustainable development. The absence of political will may be highly responsible for a situation where it is estimated that one out of every six out-of-school children worldwide is a Nigerian, and which brings to more than 10 million, the number of Nigerian children that are out-of-school. Consequently, the ranking of Nigeria as 39<sup>th</sup> out of 54 African countries in overall governance is a reflection of lack of political will, weak leadership and overall governance. This must be overcome as the world heads towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda. The qualitative research design was used for the study. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistical method and result presented in tables. It was found that effective reform management in Nigeria requires political will.*

**Keywords:** Accountability, Corruption, Governance, Leadership, Mismanagement, Immunity, Impunity, Transparency.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the UN (2007) sustainable development is “development that helps populations meet current needs while at the same time not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their basic needs”. However, sustainable development may not come easily in Nigeria where even funds meant for the development of basic education are abused (SHAIBU, 2016<sup>a</sup>).

Political will for reforms implementation is essential because of the need for reforms sustainability. Girishankar, et al (2002) posits that the issue of sustainability is particularly important for institutional reforms because reforms have longer gestation periods than policy changes, which can be achieved easily.

The sustainability of governance reforms therefore depends on whether the political leadership has the political will or not, to ensure implementation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target effective from 2016, includes a target to end poverty everywhere, to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

It provides a framework to promote sustainable economic growth which includes full and productive employment and decent work for all, by the year, 2030. Political will may be defined as the visible and credible intents of political leaders to fight perceived causes or effects of corruption at a systemic level.

According to Kpundeh and Dininio (2006) political will “is the reflection of complex circumstances that incorporate the aspirations of individual leaders, a calculation of the benefits and cost that would result from changes in rules and behaviours, and belief in the ability to muster adequate support to overcome resistance to reforms and sustainable development goals”. They posit that political will neither originates nor becomes manifest in a vacuum.

Kpundeh (1999) opines that political will is a critical first starting point for sustainable and effective reform programmes, and that lack of political will is at the root of lack of transparency, accountability, good governance and leadership. He posits that leadership at the top within the body politic will always be the greatest single factor in achieving fundamental change, as it will ensure that enforcers of laws, rules and regulations and codes of conduct must perform their duties without fear or favour.

Political will is thus, a critical ingredient for good governance. According to Johnston and Doig (1999) governance is the use of political authority and the exercise of control over society and the management of its resources for social and economic development.

In the same vein, good government provides a responsive governmental and state administrative framework which facilitates good governance. Governance therefore incorporates not only the integrity, efficiency, and transparency of government, but also its effectiveness as measured by the ends to which government organization and activity are directed.

Langseth, et al (1999) insists that the eight pillars that drive sustainable development are: "political will, administrative reforms, watchdog agencies, parliaments, the judiciary, public awareness and involvement, the media, and the private sector". These pillars are interdependent and together support the superstructure of national integrity that underlies sustainable development goals.

Effective reform management necessary therefore, for SDGs achievement, requires a visionary leader who recognizes the high costs of corruption and mismanagement. With strong political will, good leadership shares a commitment to reducing the incidence of bribery, among other wrongdoings. In addition to political commitment at the highest level, efforts at effective reform management must include commitment from other agents of the state as well, by creating popular opposition to corruption as a function of the political leadership's willingness for effective reform management.

Political will for SDGs achievement is urgent in Nigeria to address the rampant corruption that plague all levels of government. Corruption in both the public and private sectors has aggravated the country's severe and prolonged economic mismanagement as the result of lack of political will. Due to lack of political will, many people in positions of authority in Nigeria have put their own interests first and the general interest of the country last.

The woeful failure of previous reform strategies has been due largely to lack of political will and dynamics of effective reform management. Previous attempts at reform management lacked co-ordination, political will, leadership and public

involvement. Effective reform management should recognize the need to reduce any incentives for corruption in society (KPUNDEH; DININIO, 2006).

Even as the world approaches the SDGs 2030 programme, Nigeria lags behind in various areas that would move its people out of poverty. Unemployment rate is not less than about 25 percent and poverty rate hovers at about 60-62 percent, access to basic education and healthcare remains a mirage.

In some states in Nigeria, over 500,000 primary school pupils sit on the bare floors to take lessons, and with over 80 percent of the teachers unqualified. This is compounded by dilapidated buildings and classrooms. With a very high proportion of unqualified teachers working in almost inhuman environments, under this condition attaining the UN SDGs target by 2030 may be very difficult. Placing the business of teaching and learning on a sound pedestal cannot be overemphasized.

Qualified teachers and conducive teaching and learning conditions are necessary to produce powerful future citizens. But disempowering teachers is tantamount to creating a future of powerless and feeble citizens that will further perpetuate corruption and poverty (ODIEGWU, 2015; EBIJE, 2015).

The ranking of Nigeria as the 39<sup>th</sup> out of 54 African countries in overall governance by the Mo Ibrahim Index of Governance in Africa suggests the lack of political will to pursue important governance related issues in Nigeria. To this extent, Ukeh (2015) insists that government should not lose sight of the fact that the essence of ranking is good governance.

Good governance itself is an outcome of good leadership. In that regard, governments need to improve infrastructure, job creation, and ease of doing business. Nigeria's constant poor ranking is a reflection of lack of good governance and failure of successive governments in the country to see governance as a human enterprise that should focus largely on the needs of the people.

Today corruption and lack of public sector accountability continue to delay effective reform management in Nigeria (FOLASADE-KOYI, et al., 2015; HOPKINSON; PELIZZO, 2006; NWAORGU, 2014; OKAFOR, 2014; KAUFMANN; DININIO, 2006; LUKE, 2015; SUNDAY, 2015<sup>a</sup>; SUNDAY, 2015<sup>b</sup>). Political will is increasingly being recognized by foresighted leaders as a veritable tool for sustainable development.

For example, Fashola (2016) posits that: "President Muhammedu Buhari's administration has demonstrated renewed political will to install a functioning urban system through progressive economic reforms that are directed at creating jobs, reducing poverty and promoting stability that are required elements to sustain growth and development"

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

In 2000, UN member nations of the world pledged their commitment to 8, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including MDG7, to integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies, reverse loss of environmental resources, reduce, by half, the population of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water, and to achieve significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

Also, item number one of MDGs requires individual nation states to develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable, and nondiscriminatory. This includes a commitment to good governance, management development and poverty reduction, nationally and internationally. It is therefore, not an over statement to insist that the achievement of these laudable objectives within the SDGs 2030 target, in Nigeria, requires political will.

Nigeria has less than good record of good governance. Economic mismanagement since the 1960s through the 2015 has created widespread poverty and a grand record of failed reform programmes. Good reform programmes such as the Peoples Bank of Nigeria, Family Economic Advancement Programme, War Against Indiscipline among others have failed largely due to lack of political will to curb corruption to sustain them.

In Nigeria, corruption forms a substantial avenue of leakage in the flood of funds for development investment. Administrators, civil servants, politicians, and contractors have stolen too much funds from government treasury and the political leadership seems to lack the political will to tackle corruption and economic mismanagement (AGWUNOBI, 2005).

Despite various reform programmes, Nigeria remains a very poor country and was unable to achieve the MDGs 1 target, by the end of 2015. Coming on the heels of MDGs initiative which had 2015 as terminal date, over 150 world leaders,

including the Nigerian President, endorsed a New 2030 Agenda for SDGs at the United Nations Development Summit held at the UN Headquarters in New York, between September 25 and 27 2015.

According to Ukeh (2015) SDGs initiative will afford the consenting countries an opportunity for a comprehensive review of their performance on the MDGs, with a view to redoubling their efforts to achieve them, in order to catch up with the rest of the world that is now moving on to the SDGs. While some nations have done very well on the MDGs, some others, mostly in Africa, did very poorly.

Nigeria has had many development plans over the years, but there is no real development to envy. Before it was education and health for all in the year 2000, there was vision 2010, and now vision 20: 2020. As it is, Nigeria does not lack big dreams such as these, but actually lacks leaders with strong political will and commitment to actualize such dreams (STAPENHURST; KPUNDEH, 1999; TRANSPARENCY INT. 2005; LUMUMBA, 2016; EZEH, 2016).

As the result of the inability of successive governments in Nigeria to curb corruption and reduce poverty, the present study believes that political will is required to address these challenges and to ensure sustainable development.

## **1.2. Objective of the Study**

The study was designed to examine the relevance of political will to effective reform management in Nigeria.

## **1.3. Research Questions**

Is there any evidence that political will is necessary for effective reform management and SDGs achievement in Nigeria?

Is there any evidence that political will is needed to fight corruption and poverty in Nigeria?

## **1.4. Restatement of Research Questions**

There is evidence that political will is necessary for effective reform management and SDGs achievement in Nigeria.

There is evidence that political will is needed to fight corruption and poverty in Nigeria.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The lack of political will on the part of political leaders in Nigeria has seen the country suffer monumental underdevelopment since political independence in 1960. Against the background that the political leadership has failed over the years, a political bureau was set up in 1986 by the Babangida military presidency to chart a path for the country's political future.

According to Agwunobi (2005) Babangida charged the political bureau to: "Review Nigeria's political history and identify the basic problems which have led to failure in the past and suggest ways of resolving and coping with these problems". The bureau was also charged to "further identify a basic philosophy of government which will determine goals and serve as guide to the activities of government; collect relevant information for the government as well as identify other problems that may arise from the debates.

Gather, collate and evaluate the contributions of Nigerians in the search for a viable political future and provide guidelines for the attainment of the consensus objectives, deliberate on other political problems as may be referred to it from time to time". Despite such political rhetoric, like many other programmes of the era, the bureau failed to achieve any meaningful purpose in terms of socioeconomic development.

Such a situation persisted mainly due to lack of political will, and there was no genuine commitment of political leaders at the highest level of government. The failure of governance in Nigeria is linked to general lack of political will to implement recommendations for effective reform management.

For example, according to Marshall (2006) "President Olusegun Obasanjo expressed a strong personal commitment to tackling systemic corruption in Nigeria, and the first bill that was passed into law after he was elected into office was the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (ICPC). Unfortunately, the problem of corruption in Nigeria is still present".

Thus, Kpundeh and Dininio (2006) conclude that political will is most effective when it is institutionalized and not dependent on the personality and intentions of

particular persons. Political rhetoric in Nigeria therefore, underscores lack of political will and effective reform management strategies.

According to Olowu (1993), in Nigeria, "Political actors often talk of accountability and integrity, but this by itself does not translate into a genuine commitment to detect and penalize unethical behaviour".

Kpundeh and Dininio (2006) posit that examples abound of exploitative rulers who have hidden their motives behind a façade of cosmetic measures or well-intended reformers who have engineered their own destruction through ineffective reform management. In the light of these dangerous traps, supporters of effective reform management process must look at several indicators that can serve as demonstrations of political will (OBIOZOR, 2015).

According to Pope (1999) structural corruption in public service is a litmus test of the service's ethics and accountability. He opines that if political will is lacking both for change and implementation of government reforms, no legislation can ever be effective in containing corruption. He states that one of the greatest obstacles to reform lies at the very heart of government, with the politicians and political interests in power.

Because public servants motivated by private greed are virtually inevitable, political will is imperative to move toward greater accountability and greater transparency if reform programmes must be effectively implemented. Lack of accountability and transparency is part of the problems of nonpayment of workers' salaries and benefits in Nigeria today. In Bayelsa State of Nigeria for example, teachers are yet to be paid the N81,000.00 minimum wage arrears since it was approved many years ago.

Retired teachers in Enugu State complain about being owed 27 months of pension. (ODIEGWU, 2015, OJI, 2015). In Nigeria, the major reform and enforcement agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), ICPC, and the National Agency for Food and Drug, Administration and Control (NAFDAC) can perform better if the political leaders muster the political will to lead the way.



This will be a good turning point, because according to Olowu (1993) "In Nigeria, even when anti-corruption agencies are created, they are usually denied the resources needed to achieve their stated purpose". In spite of lapses among other reform agencies, the political will characterized by the former director general of NAFDAC and continued by the present management of the reform agency is exceptional.

The resilience of the erstwhile director-general was incidental to the ranking of NAFDAC among 20 top food and drug regulatory agencies in the world. The agency had daily confrontations with various drug cartels that saw NAFDAC as the only road block to their ill-conceived schemes of flooding the Nigerian market with counterfeit and substandard drugs (TIVLUMUM, 2015).

According to Akunyili (2005) "drug counterfeiting is one of the greatest atrocities of our time. It is a form of terrorism against public health as well as an act of economic sabotage. Worse, it is mass murder. Drug counterfeiting violates the right to life of innocent victims. And even though it is a global problem, it affects developing countries more seriously as the poor bear the brunt of this injustice. Corruption fuels the fake drug trade.

And it is a most lethal form that plagues the health sector because it affects life directly". The prevalence of substandard products was so much in the pharmaceutical sector until; with strong political will and sagacity; the late Akunyili proved that the challenge of fake drugs could be dealt with successfully. She was honoured in 2005 by the British House of Commons for her commitment and dedication to sanitizing the drug manufacturing industry in Nigeria (TELL, 2005).

With political will it will be easier for the government to fight corruption, create employment, reduce poverty and place the nation on the way for sustainable development.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The exploratory research design was used for the study. The method is historical in nature, and does not usually require a large sample nor a structured questionnaire (Asika, 2004).

### 3.2. Sources of Data

Primary and secondary data were generated through primary and secondary sources such as interviews, observations, books, newspapers, magazines, journals, conference papers, among others.

### 3.3. Treatment of Data

Data generated were organized, filtered and coded before they were classified, in readiness for analysis.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and result presented in tables and a pie chart.

## 4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Figure 1 showed sustainable development flow line, driven by political will, postulated by Langseth, et al, (1999). It supports the theoretical framework of this study, with the critical impetus that political is important for SDG in any country.

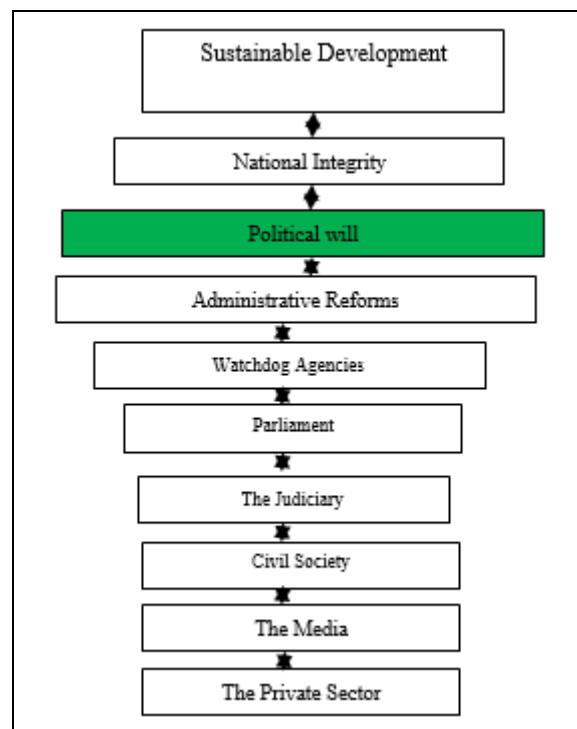


Figure 1: Sustainable Development Flow  
 Source: Adapted from Langseth, et al, (1999).

Table 1 was used to demonstrate that corruption is a very serious problem in Nigeria and capable of undermining development efforts. Reducing corruption in high and

low places requires political will; otherwise achieving sustainable development will be elusive.

**Table 1: Selected Graft Allegations Pending in 2016**

S/N	Brief details	Amount	Primary Source
1	EFCC working on 1881 graft cases	Not specified	Magu, Vanguard, vol. 25 No. 62646
2	Graft allegation: petitioner fails to appear against CCT Chairman	N44.5m	Ovuakporie & Agbakwuru, vanguard vol. 25, No. 62646
3	Alleged misconduct: CJN queries judge	Not stated	Abdulah, Vanguard vol. 25, No. 62646
4	I Didn't Influence Procurement Process – Ex NIMASA boss	N129m	Omatseye, Vanguard 25, No. 62646
5	I gave Fayose N1.2bn for Ekiti election. Omisore got N1.3bn	N2.5b	Ojo And Obogo, Daily Sun, vol. 13, No. 3518
6	Amaechi, Umana, offered me bribe – Justice Okoro	US\$38,800, N3.5m, etc	Ojo, Tsa, and Obogo, Daily Sun vol. 13, No. 3518
7	Arms deal: Presidency recovers N7bn indicts 300 contractors	N7bn	Taiwo-Obalonye, Daily Sun, vol. 10, No 3369
8	Our leaders as rapists	US\$600m,	Tunji Daily Sun, vol. 10, No 3369
9	N382b fuel subsidy fraud: EFCC grills 11 more marketers	N382bn	Alli, The Nation, vol. 7, No 2302
10	Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and the missing trillions	N30trillion	Soludo, Vanguard, vol. 25, No. 62332
11	Cover up of judiciary corruption and impunity by the NJC	Not specified – several millions of naira	Suraju, Daily Sun, vol. 13, No 3518
12	Soludo vs Iweala: The pot and the kettle: Mismanagement of the banking sector and taxpayers money	N5.67 trillion	Boyo, Vanguard, vol. 25, No. 62332
13	National Judicial Council on allegations against many judges/justices	Not specified in millions of naira	Oye, Daily Sun, vol. 13, No. 3518
14	Mr. Joseph Tony Ogah: wanted for fraud.	N36.2m	Ufot, E. (2016 <sup>a</sup> ) ICPC News vol. 11, No 1
15	Mrs. Grace Nkoyo Nwauzor: wanted for defrauding innocent job seekers.	N50m	Ufot, E. (2016 <sup>b</sup> ) ICPC News vol. 11, No 1
16	Badejogbin and Olarewaju before the court for defrauding the Federal Government of Nigeria.	N55m	Chinenye, A. (2016) ICPC News vol. 11, No 1
17	Salaries of teachers under the Federal Teachers Scheme (FTS) suppressed by government officials.	N2.16bn	Isong, O. (2016) ICPC News vol. 11, No 1
18	Unremitted Pension Funds by appointed pension managers	N28.3m	Shaibu, I. (2016 <sup>b</sup> ) ICPC News vol. 11, No 1

Source: Fieldwork, 2016 as above.

Table 2 showed selected reform agencies in Nigeria. These agencies can do better if the government shows the political will to support them, against the present position where they are perceived as none performing.

Table 2: 7 Selected Watchdog Agencies in Nigeria (2016)

Name	Purpose
Economic and Financial Crimes Commission	Anticorruption against financial and other related crimes
Code of Conduct Bureau	To regulate the conduct of public officers against corruption and false information
National Drug Law Enforcement Agency	To check corruption and drug peddling
Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission	To wedge war against corruption and other related offences
National Agency for Food and Drug, Administration and Control	To fight against drug and food adulteration and faking.
Code of Conduct Tribunal	To try government officials and others charged with misconduct.
National Human Rights Commission	To prosecute cases of human right abuses and injustice

Source: Various Decrees/Acts

As shown in chart 1, while Adeyemo, (2016) believes that 99.5% of Nigerians are corrupt, Osinbajo, (2016) insists that all Nigerians are corrupt. This is a serious matter that requires strong political will on the part of government to fight. By implication fighting corruption is essential for sustainable development in Nigeria, because it will free substantial public funds for the common good.

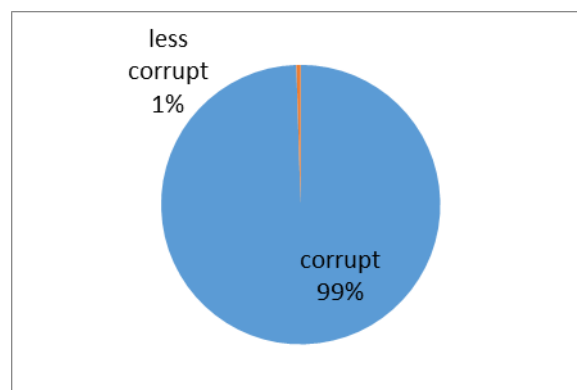


Chart 1: Perception of Corruption in Nigeria.  
 Source: Fieldwork, 2016.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Nigeria is not in shortage of reform agencies but obviously in shortage of the political will to run them effectively for the benefit of the nation. Due to the political will and resilience of the erstwhile director-general of NAFDAC, the agency proved victorious in the pursuit of its reform goals and today ranked among the 20 top

reform agencies in the world. But this cannot be said of other agencies like EFCC, CCB, NDLEA, ICPC, etc, that are frequently accused of poor performance or even corruption.

For example, under the watch of EFCC political actors like state governors have been stealing public funds with ease and impunity. In the Organized Private Sector bank executives have been known to squeeze their banks into involuntary liquidation. The laws are there in the books to punish the guilty but the political will to execute the laws is not there.

The seeming impunity of corruption in Nigeria is largely due to lack of political will on the part of government to check it. Sustainable development depends on national integrity and anchored on political will. To drive administrative reforms, watchdog agencies, parliament, the judiciary, civil society, the media, and the private sector require political will.

Where political will is weak or lacking the economic, social and political prosperity of a country will be in jeopardy, and then sustainable development will be retarded. Because of lack of political will to end corruption, unemployment and poverty rates are still very high in Nigeria. If the cash stolen by public office holders and sundry others are left in the government treasury it would have been used to provide social amenities, including payment of workers' salaries that generated unprecedented bailout.

As the world matches on to the SDGs by 2030, the importance of political will to drive socioeconomic development cannot be overemphasized. Major socioeconomic reform programmes like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is being frustrated by the lack of political will by governors to show proper commitment to it. This is even when one out of every six out-of-school children worldwide is a Nigerian.

Nigeria is among the countries that have the largest crude oil deposit among other numerous resources; unfortunately Nigeria is among the poorest and the most corrupt nations in the world. Therefore, to ensure sustainable development, the political will to fight corruption is very urgent. This can be achieved through a transparent judiciary, a strong civil society, a resilient media and a vibrant private sector.

The private sector is very important in internal development because it helps in great measure in employment generation and poverty reduction. From data analysis this study found that political will is needed to achieve sustainable development and to check corruption in Nigeria. It supports the strong views of Kpundeh (1999) that political will is the critical starting point for administrative reforms and sustainable development.

### **5.1. Recommendations**

- i. There will not be sustainable development without national integrity. National integrity depends on political will. It is therefore imperative for political leaders to demonstrate political will in unambiguous terms and in sufficient frequency for the purpose of national development.
- ii. The parliaments must make laws that support sustainable development and must be seen to show political will by not indulging in double dealing.
- iii. The judiciary as the last hope of the poor and the down trodden cannot afford to lack political will in its judgments. Transparency and accountability depends on political will to act without fear or favour.
- iv. The media cannot be intimidated if it has the political will to pursue the just course. The media reaches a large audience and its resilience is critical to ensure sustainable development.
- v. Regulatory agencies in Nigeria such as the Central Bank of Nigeria, Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation, Securities and Exchange Commission, should step up efforts in checking the activities of banks and other corporate bodies. This is necessary to reduce financial, corporate crimes, and other corporate governance breaches that threaten national development.

### **5.2. Areas for further study**

Further study should examine the relationship between weak public sector management and poverty in Nigeria. The need for such examination is urgent in view of the high level of poverty in Nigeria despite the abundance of natural resources.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Political will is very important for effective reform management and sustainable development. It is critical for the performance of reform agencies and the



proper management of administrative reform agencies like the EFCC. Because of lack of political will to fight corruption in Nigeria, in some states pupils sit on the floors to receive lessons, and about 80 percent of teachers unqualified.

Most schools are dilapidated and without adequate furniture because money to address the situation is frequently embezzled by public officers. As the world moves towards SDGs 2030, Nigeria cannot afford to stay behind due to lack of political will and bad governance.

The ranking of Nigeria as 39th out of 54 African countries on governance architecture is an indication of weak political will, leadership and governance. Ranking is an index of good governance. Good governance itself is an outcome of good leadership.

There is empirical evidence that political will is important for sustainable development. Result of the study support the hypothesis that political is required for effective reform management and sustainable development in Nigeria.

It also supports the hypothesis of Langseth, et al, (1999) that political will is the driver of the private sector, the media, civil society, judiciary, parliament, watchdog agencies, administrative reforms, national integrity, and sustainable development. Further, the result supports Marshall (2006) that there is corruption in Nigeria and Olowu (1993) that the watchdog agencies need political will to do better. This is the interest of the study.

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