



Competitiveness in selected Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries: Lessons for Nigeria

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Abstract

Accelerating National Competitiveness has become a veritable feature and objective of most national economic policies. Hence, policy makers and the academia are showing increasing interests in understanding the drivers of global competitiveness of nations. Using descriptive Panel analysis, the study reviewed the global competitiveness of selected Sub-Sahara Africa countries based on health and education; macro economy; and institutions and infrastructure. It found amongst others that, South Africa and Rwanda have the most efficient institutions in the region owing to appreciable judicial independence while Mauritius boasts of the most beautiful infrastructure. More importantly, Botswana represents the most diversified economy due largely to her developed export sector. On the other hand, Nigeria played the laggard in almost all the pillars of global competitiveness except, market size consequent upon high level of corruption amongst public officials, indiscipline and lack of political will on the part of rulers. The study therefore, recommended that a long term development plan for the energy and manufacturing sectors predicated upon huge public investment, private-public partnership, effective and efficient institutional framework would take Nigeria out of the doldrums of mono economy, poor standard of living and non- competitiveness.

Keywords: Global Competitiveness, National Competitiveness, Sub-Saharan Africa.

Introduction

The avalanche of shared efforts and concerns directed at measuring and comprehending the drivers of productivity and prosperity which in turn influences competitiveness provided excellent motivation for the daunting exercise of computing the annual global competitiveness index of national economies by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the International Institute of Management and Development (IMD). Valid competitiveness indices serve as useful tools for benchmarking the performance of nations. Put differently, they enable policymakers, business strategists and economic analysts to evaluate the shortcomings of their economies in much the same way firms apply technical benchmarks to assess themselves against rivals and thus take necessary precautions.

Going further, most of the countries in SSA are mainly primary exporters with large informal sectors. Thus, Sub-Saharan Africa's informal sector accounts for more than half of the region's GDP, employing over 80% of the population, while only one in two young Africans participates in wage-earning jobs (World Bank, 2014). Although the Sub-Saharan Africa competitiveness report in 2015 showed a region that boasted a solid average growth rate of more than 5% in the last 15 years, with real house consumption growing between 3.4% and 3.7% (Young, 2012), yet more than half of the 20 lowest ranked countries in the said year were Sub-Saharan while only four countries (Mauritius

(45th), South Africa (47th), Rwanda (52nd) and Botswana (64th) out of 138 economies ranked in 2016, met the first half. The roller-coastal performance of SSA nations, no doubt, suggests that even the said growth recorded by the region over the last decade and the boost in national competitiveness of the more “successful four” has failed to trickle down to all sectors of the regional economy. Why?

Taking Nigeria as a case study, although it has been grappling with insurgency, uncertain political climate and monocultural dependence, the country was reckoned as Africa’s largest economy in 2014. Thanks to economic reforms of diversification, liberalization and stabilization which revamped the agricultural sector. The increase in agricultural productivity, together with accelerated crude oil production, worked on one hand to increase the market size (25th), deepen the financial market (79th), and on the other promoted Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and expanded GDP to all high US\$573.3b. It seemed that the economy was poised to take advantage of its enormous economic potential as investment level jumped to 13.4% while industrial production increased to 5.5%. At the same time, exports rose from 94.3% to 95.1% causing international reserves to rise to US\$34.5m.

However, hopes are ripe that key reforms such as rationalization of the public sector in order to cut governance; enforcement of the single treasury account; renewed efforts at enforcement of tax compliance; preparation for zero-budgeting starting in 2016; and increasing the ratio of capital to recurrent expenditure to 30:70 would create more jobs, strengthen her institutions, accelerate human capital development and increase national competitiveness. Despite these drastic measures, remaining challenges include access to finance, high cost of energy and telecommunication, low capacity utilization, weak institutions, poor macroeconomic environment and decayed infrastructure (133rd). Literature on works evaluating the competitiveness of Nigeria is very scarce despite the country’s continued dismal performance. Initial attempt by Adebayo (2010) rather concentrated on the implications of Nigeria’s competitiveness for multilateral trade. Thus, it is worthwhile analysing the competitiveness of SSA to provide a reference for the government and international investors.

The purpose of the paper is therefore, to investigate into the factors that have over the years (2014-2016), improved the global competitiveness of Sub-Saharan African nations with a view to providing empirical lessons to address Nigeria’s poor competitive outlook. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section II presents theoretical and empirical review of related literature on the concept of competitiveness, While section III focuses on methodology and data. Section IV discusses results of data analysis. Section V concludes and makes necessary recommendations.

Literature Review

Competitiveness is a broad concept which has both micro and macro applications. In its micro dimension, the notion of competitiveness is understood to represent the proclivity of firms to compete, to grow and engage in profitable ventures. At this level, competitiveness rests on firms’ prowess to consistently and profitably fabricate products that meet certain open market requirements such as price and quality. Hence, uncompetitive firms that fail to beat the requirements are bound to lose or retain a small chunk of the market or even go out of business.

Economic theories that lend credence to national competitiveness include the classical theories of absolute cost and comparative cost amongst others. Adam Smith (1776), in his absolute cost theory, pointed out that gains from trade are made when moving from a situation of autarky to free trade, given absolute advantage in the production of different goods. In this regard, trade is beneficial due to differences in productivity. In the same vein, Ricardo (1817), demonstrated that two countries benefit from trade when they specialize in the production of goods for which they have a comparative advantage. Thus nations compete based on comparative cost. The theories above and those of development economics, Keynes and new economic growth, in sum, suggest that, competitiveness exists wherever there are differences in productive capabilities.

Thus, both health and education can be seen as vital components of growth and development – as inputs to aggregate production function (Todaro & Smith, 2003). Ulengin, Kabar, Onsel, Aktas, & Parker (2011), examining the implications of national competitiveness for human development using Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) on a sample of 45 countries found a two-way connection between competitiveness and human development. For example, education is fundamental to enhancing the quality of human life and ensuring socio-economic progress (UN, 1997 cited in Todaro & Smith) via promotion of technological capability and technical change in industries, while improved health has a

positive impact on productivity. Moreover, the impact of education on the nature and growth of exports, which in turn, affects the aggregate growth rate is another way human development influences macroeconomic competitiveness.

High export volume of goods and services which enable a country to conquer substantial international market share (Hchaichi & Ghodbane,2014) is a veritable indicator of international competitiveness. Guerrieri & Meliciani (2003) find supporting evidence that expenditures in ICT have a positive impact on international competitiveness in producers' exports. On the other hand, increasing international competitiveness through increased exports also depends largely on the ability to compete in technology, the ability to compete in delivery and the ability to compete in price (Fagerberg,1988). Hence, factors related to technology and capacity constitute a sine qua non for market shares and growth, while price or cost competitiveness plays a rather limited role.

Accordingly, Lin, Tseg, & Chirathivat (2004) evaluating Thailand's competitiveness based on economic performance, technological development, human resources, management and productivity, found that the Thai economy scored high in manpower utilization with competitive advantage in labour cost. But skill level of labour force, basic infrastructure, information technology, innovation capability and cooperation between suppliers and manufacturers proved to be her areas of weakness thus providing a useful reference for Thai public policies. The current global orthodoxy, showcases knowledge- driven economies/countries, regions and even cities striving tenaciously to be competitive in order to survive in the global market arena with or without any clear political or conceptual framework. The need to lessen the cumbersomeness of the challenges to staying competitive led to a proliferation of regional economic groups (COMESA, ECOWAS, EU, ASEAN, LAFTA etc) in various parts of the world. For instance, the EU integration policy aims at increasing the efficiency and competitiveness of the fragmented European economy in the face of growing internationalization, exposing countries and regions with unequal resources and technology as well as different economic structures to international competition. In line with this, Gligor (2015) found that activities of economic groups such as provision of structural funds has a significant positive impact on a country's regional competitiveness, especially in terms of economic and social indicators. He therefore, concluded that increase in absorption of such transfers accelerate investment in infrastructure, human capital and overall competitiveness without an excess burden on the national budget.

On the other hand, the WEF (2007) has equally identified education and training (human capital), technical progress, macroeconomic stability, good governance, rule of law, transparent and well functioning institution, lack of corruption, market orientation, demand conditions and market size as most germane for global competitiveness. It further notes that frontiers are different for different countries depending on the level of development (factor-driven, efficiency-driven or innovation-driven). In other words, regions are different and they may be forced to apply different strategies to retain or regain global competitiveness (Schienstock,1999). Thus, structural differences and differences in the stage of economic development do influence the global competitiveness of certain regions.

The WEF combines a number of qualitative and quantitative variables regrouped into 12 pillars to gauge the level of global competitiveness of nations. The global competitiveness rankings are quoted in policy statements and in the media. While high rankings are useful for promoting inward capital formation, poor ones represent bad policies and unwholesome economic outlooks. The review of related literature shows that Competitiveness (especially in the macro sense), is multidimensional (Schienstock,1999; WEF, 2007; Delgado, Ketels, Porter & Stern, 2012). Hence, this study aligns with the pillars of the global competitiveness index, GCI (WEF,2016) which is currently receiving global attention.

Methodology and Data

This section describes the analytical workhorse of the study. Technically, the method of analysis is descriptive statistics (such as tabulations, charts, averages and percentages) with emphasis on data covering the period from 2014 to 2016. The descriptive tools are used, in this paper to display the nature and trends of the global competitiveness (of selected SSA nations) and the necessary indicators. While 2014 represents a period of Nigeria's gradual recovery from 2009 crisis

(WEF,2014),it was more remarkable given that Nigeria fell 7 places from the competitiveness ladder. On the otherhand, 2016 presents the most current data on global competitiveness.

The study more specifically analyses the competitiveness of Sub Saharan African nations with special focus on South Africa, Rwanda, Botswana and Mauritius vis - a - vis Nigeria. These four countries are chosen on the ground that they have over the period (2014-2016) shown impressive performance on the global competitiveness rankings and thus represent Africa's pride. It is therefore, hoped that a comparative analysis of the factors responsible for the upsurge in their prosperity will provide important lessons for Nigeria to scale up accordingly. This study employs 30 indicators (see appendix 1) regrouped into 8 pillars of global competitiveness such as institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomy, health, education, market size, business sophistication and innovation. The indicators serve as proxies for the global competitiveness pillars. The institutional and macroeconomic environments form the framework within which private individuals, firms and governments interact to generate income and wealth in the economy. Hence, they exert strong influence on the competitiveness and growth of nations. Moreso, the existence of high quality infrastructure, healthy workforce, sophisticated financial markets and technological readiness are necessary for enhancing the productivity of workers and industrial firms. On the other hand, large market size holds a great potential for firms to exploit economies of scale and thus improve the competitiveness of nations. Business sophistication is conducive to higher efficiency in the production of goods and services. And in the long run, when all the factors run into diminishing returns, standards of living can be expanded only by technological innovation (WEF,2007).

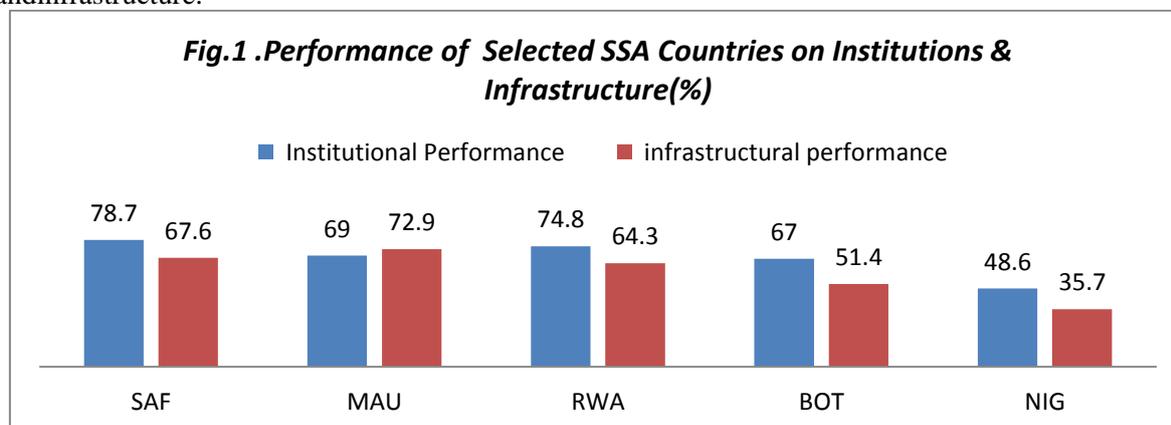
The Data measuring the variables are secondary and sourced mainly from the World Bank data and the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report (GCR,various issues). However, the WEF combines both hard and soft data to calculate the global competitiveness index of national economies. The hard data include measures of GDP, Gross National Savings, Inflation, Government budget and others obtained by the World Bank. While the soft data are on property rights, intellectual property protection,judicial independence and others (Please,see appendix 1). The soft data are products of the annual Executive Opinion Survey(EOS) conducted by WEF. An important attribute of the EOS is that the respondents are executives of companies,capturing the informed judgments of the actual participants in the economies examined (Delgado et al 2012). Survey respondents evaluate questions on the basis of a 7-point Likert scale.Hence, all the pillars of global competitiveness are rated on a 7-point scale. The closer to 7 a country scores on an indicator,the better performance. For further information on the survey process,see global competitiveness report(various issues).

Empirical Results and Analysis

Research results are organized in five sections corresponding to the performance of SSA nations on the various pillars of global competitiveness.

Institutions and Infrastructure

The figure below shows the performance of selected SSA nations on the areas of institutions and infrastructure.



Central to efficient institutional framework is judicial independence with its prime ability to promote accountability, rule of law, just and egalitarian society. From the chart, South Africa and Rwanda's institutions are performing creditably well at 78.7% and 74.8% respectively. South Africa's impressive performance is as a result of appreciable security of intellectual property rights (5.5) made possible by her strong regulatory framework and extensive collaboration between the private sector and law enforcement agents to stop the flow of counterfeit goods in the marketplace (*State Dept Office of Investment Affairs, 2001*). The nation's *strong legal structure* guarantees individual and institutional independence via appreciable security of tenure for judicial officers (e.g. non-renewable term of 12 years for constitutional court judges or until he or she attains the age of 70; a basic degree of financial security; independence in the exercise of

judicial functions as well as judicial control over administrative decisions that bear directly on judicial functions (Siyo & Mubangizi, 2012) and establishment of a constitutional court separate to the existing court system in line with international best practice. Moreover, the transparent process of appointment and removal of judges speaks greater volume (See fig. 2). For while the President appoints the Chief Justice and the Deputy in due consultation with Judicial Service Commission and the leaders of parties represented in the National Assembly, the removal of the Judges by the President must be supported by the votes of at least two-thirds of the National Assembly. In Rwanda, the situation is not different. The judiciary enjoys financial and administrative autonomy while judges confirmed in office shall hold life tenure. They cannot be suspended or transferred, even for the purposes of promotion, retired prematurely, or otherwise removed from office (Rugege, 2005). The Chief Justice and Deputy Chief Justice may only be removed from office on account of undignified behavior, incompetence, or serious professional misconduct upon petition of three-fifths of either the Chamber of Deputies or Senate and a two-thirds majority vote of each Chamber. These conditions guarantee efficient separation of power and a high level of judicial independence providing stable environment and excellent institutional framework for public and private-sector transparency and even distribution of costs and benefits of development strategies and policies. The results show that Nigeria is suffering from weak and deteriorating institutions due to piracy, adulteration and undue political dependence of the judiciary (3.4) highly subjected to the whims and caprices of the Executive.

On the other hand, the level of infrastructural development in Mauritius attests to its leadership of the region in this regard. Mauritius' infrastructure averaged 72.9% over the period and was ranked 42/144 and 37/140 in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Mauritius' boast of the best quality of electricity supply is adducible to the implementation of the Energy Policy, 2007-2025 within the context of the MAURICE ILE DURABLE (MID) VISION (see fig. 3 for highlights) which committed the Government of Mauritius (GOM) to energy security, efficiency through the development of economically competitive fuels and technologies including bold diversification initiatives in renewables such as wind and solar energy which greatly relieved her dependence on

Fig.3. Critical success factors driving infrastructural competitiveness in Mauritius

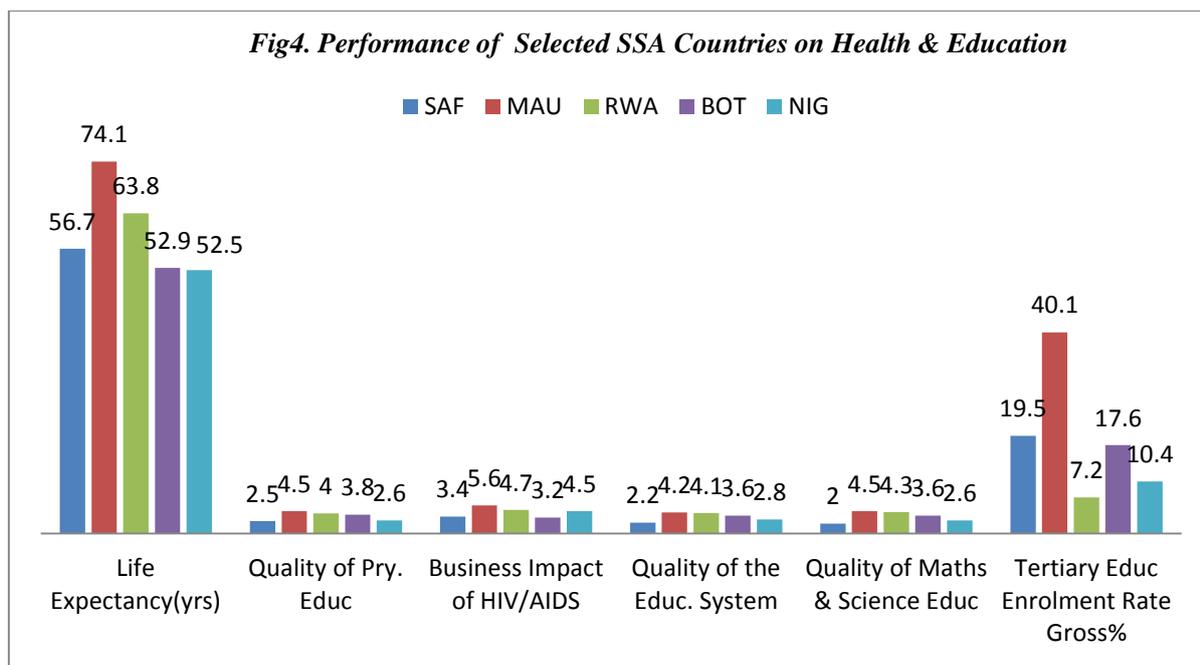
- Establishment of Energy Efficiency Management Office implementing energy efficiency programmes
 - Implementation of a long-term Energy Development Strategy via Energy Needs Study
 - Development of professional courses such as Energy Auditing, Management, Monitoring & Targeting
 - Diversification into renewable such as wind, solar, bagasse, coal, photovoltaic, carbon financing, waste-to-Energy, Geothermal Energy technology, ocean thermal energy conversion
 - Sale of 1 million compact fluorescent lamps at half the cost price
 - Grant of 10,000 to every household purchaser of solar water heaters
 - Research grants for feasibility studies of energy diversification projects
 - Introduction of time-of-day metering & tariffs
 - Consumer awareness campaign on day/night tariffs
 - Setting & enforcement of minimum energy performance standards
 - Bus modernization programme including a 25 km bus way, 12km bus only lane, route restructuring
- Financing Modes**
- MID Fund contributed by a levy of 15cents on all petroleum products, LPG & Coal
 - Low interest loans for energy suppliers & purchasers of sustainable energy products
 - Build, Operate, Own strategy
 - Global Environmental Facility
 - Increased budgetary allocation

Source: MREPU (,2009)

conventional energy sources(MREPU,2009). In Mauritius,more than 95 percent of the road network is paved with density of the total road network per sq. km of area at 1.02 km which is among the highest in the world.Interestingly,more than 60 percent of the said road network are in good condition(Zafar,2011). As the President of Mauritius(Sir Anerood Jugnauth) rightly puts it, there is no miracle.It is due simply to hardwork,discipline and will. Although Rwanda's performance on infrastructure averaged 64.3%,it far outperformed SAF in terms of quality of electricity supply and slightly better than Mauritius in quality of roads(4.9).Evidence is ripe from the results that, Nigeria is facing serious competitiveness challenges with infrastructure averaging only 35.7% due possibly to pervasive corruption amongst public officials and lack of political will.Nigeria is very far from catching up with Botswana's commendable performance let alone Mauritius, South Africa and Rwanda.While the latter are fast accelerating their competitiveness via the positive effects of high quality roads and air transport infrastructure which serve to reduce the effects of distance between regions with the result of integrating the national markets and linking it to markets in other countries,poor electricity supply has created unfriendly investment environment in Nigeria leading to high cost of doing business,skyrocketing inflation and making development impossible.\

Health and Education

Human capital development as evidenced by the drivers of the much celebrated EastAsian Miracle such as accelerated investment in basic health and education are vital to raising national productivity and competitiveness (Todaro & Smith,2003; WEF,2007;Ulengin et al 2011).



Thus, Mauritian government’s heavy investment in education improvements in the 1980s and 1990s, had caused primary school enrollment rates to reach very high levels, averaging more than 90 percent in the 1990s and 2000s(Zafar,2011) while the twin policies of Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE) and universalisation of opportunities for quality education at all levels, right from pre-primary through to post-secondary education subsectors, and for the training sector(EHRSP,2008-2020) have engendered growing quality of education system(4.2),very high tertiary education enrolment rate(40.1%) and high literacy rate(see fig.5).

Fig.5 Foundational Drivers of Health & Educational Competitiveness in Mauritius & Rwanda

| Mauritius | Rwanda |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Free education at all levels ➤ Compulsory education till age 16 ➤ Pre-Vocational Education for 2 –time repeaters of primary education exam ➤ Loan scheme to needy students ➤ Policy of fail & repeat with repeaters higher in private schools ➤ Early Childhood Care & Education ➤ Strong linkage between education & vocational training with public schools attracting brighter students ➤ Over 85% increased Public Health Expenditure since 2005 ➤ Effective Population control measures ➤ Free health care services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of school feeding & gardening • Provision of instructional & learning materials • Improved pupil- teacher ratio(Secondary) from 3:1 in 2012 to 32:1 in 2015 • Increased government expenditure on social sector • Performance –based rewards for health workers • Health insurance for public sector workers, military personnel & community insurance for the masses(98% health insurance holders) • Increased provision of modern contraceptives for women(15-49yrs) from 45% in 2010 to 62% in 2015 • Home based management of fever(for under 5 children) • Provision of multivitamin supplements for children between 6 & 23 months to forestall anemia • Distribution of treated mosquito nets, artemisinin therapy, targeted indoor spraying& institutional capacity building |
| <p><i>Mauritius Strategy for Implementation ,National Assembly Report(2010)</i></p> | |

Landmark developments in Mauritian education were recorded in two watershed years, namely 1977 when education became free at the secondary level and the amendment of the Education Act⁴ in 2005 to make education compulsory till the age of 16. Similarly, free healthcare is a foundation of the Mauritian Welfare State. The national health strategy is both preventive and curative. Since 2005, spending on the public health sector has increased by 85% to reach more than Rs 7.4 billion (about \$ 250 million) in 2010 (Mauritius Strategy for Implementation National Assessment Report, 2010). These funds for the public health sector are directed to health delivery system, services and personnel, as well as population control measures enhancing average life expectancy to the tune of 74.1 years. Rwanda follows suit with appreciable average life expectancy of 63.8 years due to the committed and forth right leader of the government which has made conscious efforts at increasing public expenditure on social security and people oriented programmes such as the Performance-Based Financed Scheme to boost quantity and quality of health services. Also, the Community-Based Health Insurance scheme, the Mutuelle De Santé, has seen a noticeable improvement in subscription rates, with roughly 79% of the population now part of the scheme (Rwanda Economic Outlook, 2016) while increasing access to health facilities (Rodriguez & Samuels, 2011). Although, Rwanda maintained competitive advantage over South Africa in both quality of education system, quality of maths and science education, the results show that Rwandans are yet to exploit the opportunity of enhancing their productivity and competitiveness through tertiary education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In SSA, four out of the five reference countries in this study boast of efficient institutions built on independent judiciary and well- secured property and intellectual property rights. This has increased the confidence of domestic and international investors while upsurging competitiveness and economic welfare. The region is 60% technologically ready to boost her competitiveness. This is good for the region because technological differences have been shown to explain much of the variation in productivity between countries. The level of development of financial markets, quality roads and air transport infrastructure in South Africa, Mauritius, Rwanda and Botswana is quite commendable. But Botswana and Nigeria still have a long way to go in achieving quality electricity supplies.

Greater variations are rather more glaring in the areas of health and education, innovation, business sophistication and macroeconomic environment. Only Mauritius and Rwanda showed revered commitment toward human capital development. The performance of South Africa and Nigeria are far below regional average and acceptable standards. These countries seem not to realize that a sick nation cannot achieve any meaningful development.

The study finds, among others that, South Africa is the most competitive economy in SSA. Mauritius has the most beautiful infrastructure, developed human capital and best sophisticated businesses. While, Rwanda's macroeconomic environment remains one of the best in the world, Botswana represents SSA's most diversified economy with a mean value of 50.6 % exports as a percentage of GDP. On the otherhand, Nigerian economy is grossly incompetent due to inefficient institutions, dilapidated infrastructure, macroeconomic instability, lack of innovation and underdeveloped human capital amongst others. Hence, to reverse the ugly trend of low competitiveness or non competitiveness, the paper recommends the following policy lessons for Nigeria.

Firstly, to resolve the energy problems of Nigeria, the paper recommends a specialized indepth enquiry into the energy needs of the entire economy from grassroot rural dwellers to urban settlers culminating into a Power Sector Development Policy (PSDP) with short term and longterm strategies for achieving energy efficiency and conservation (considering the price volatility of fossil fuels), energy security and affordability, and diversification into alternative sources such as solar and wind. It should incorporate a launch into renewable energy sources with a long term objective of actualizing an energy-independent country. To achieve this, Government should set up a special fund sponsored by at least 5% of every mineral profits tax collected (e.g Petroleum Profits Tax). It should also provide and monitor research grants in this direction. Electricity supplies free of interruptions and shortages will ensure that businesses and factories work unimpeded, boosting productivity and improving standard of living.

Secondly, to accelerate human capital development, the paper recommends upgraded hospital infrastructure, accessible and affordable Community Based Health Insurance Scheme; Early Child Education for children of pre-primary school age; free education at pre-university level; free postgraduate education for graduates with second class (upper honours); highly equipped state of the art laboratories; and a motivating salary scale for teachers and health workers. Nigeria's education sector has for too long sacrificed merit for mediocrity by promoting those who passed together with those who failed primary and secondary school exams to higher classes. Commitment in this direction, requires a re-introduction of the policy of "Fail and Repeat".

Finally, at the centre of all the lofty programmes outlined above, is institutional structure, which allows the full integration of environment and developmental issues at all levels of decision-making. Nigeria seriously requires a total overhaul of her institutions. The key policy path is to secure the independence of the judiciary with appointment of judicial officers left to the JSC and ratification by the party leaders in the National Assembly; tenure security for judges via enhanced salary scale and full control of judicial administration. On the other hand, the President should be made answerable to and removable by the Party on whose platform, he rode to power. More importantly, Nigeria needs a people-oriented constitution.

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