# Applying Tabitha's Principle of Good Works to Achieve Change Agenda in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper has arisen from recognition of the change agenda of President Muhammad Buhari in Nigeria. Doubtless to say that change agenda would be useful if leaders and individuals of necessity pay attention to values, principles and practices that promote good works, innovation and sacrifice. This, therefore, necessitated the idea of proposing the principle of good works of Tabitha in the Bible to achieve the change agenda. The methodology used is a systematic and scrupulous referenced study of primary materials, such as archives, newspapers, government or non- governmental reports and consultation of relevant books. The paper revealed that any leader who would bring about change must be committed to it. Tabitha otherwise known as Dorcas was said to be kind hearted, committed to good works and useful to her community in Joppa and because of these virtues her people would not want her dead. Her story today presents a study of a woman who accepted responsibility on behalf of others and such women still exist in the society today, dedicating their services to help others. Such was the case of late Prof. Dora Akunyili cited in this paper. Akunyili, through her love and selfless service for a positive change during her tenure in office reformed National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and lift up its standard to meet up with the international community. The paper therefore concluded and recommended that any leader who wants positive change must first start by providing an enabling environment for the citizenry. Also such a leader must be ready to mentor the youths and let them have hope for the future just like Tabitha serves as a

reliable conduit for goods and services. The paper recommended that any leader who is desperate for positive change must address fundamental issues of building public confidence in governance. Individuals too are enjoined to set about pursuing virtues that would be instrumental in changing Nigeria for the better.

# KEYWORDS: Dorcas, Change, Nigeria, Agenda, Tabitha

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#### Introduction

President Muhammad Buhari came to office with an agenda of change and this to all the well meaning Nigerians believe is a step in a right direction. The concern of the President is undoubtedly justified, given our national experience of the breakdown in the sphere of public morality in recent times. Meanwhile, before now, at one time, or the other, various structures, institutions and organization had been put in place to counter the moral and social problems. Against highway- robbery, special armed robbery tribunals were instituted, to combat corruption, a mass purge exercise was initiated against numerous public grievances, and public complaints commissions were set up in all states. Against Indiscipline, War against Indiscipline (W.A.I) was launched against ethical decay and social malady. Equally there is Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), to combat all forms of maladministration, bribery and corruption. Leaders of the nation have frequently condemned the situation into which the Nigerians society seems helplessly submerged.

In spite of all these efforts, too many things are still wrong. All ruling party so far had laid the blame on one another and many continually see the problems emanating from bad leadership. In Nigeria today, the greatest good for greatest number of people became the largest right for our population. Bribery is common, and water tap is forever dry, electricity is never stable, fuel scarcity is on the increase, insecurity of lives and properties and there is widespread of unemployment. The question then is, how could Nigeria be salvaged from these problems?

Change agenda is a welcome development but its reality depends on who is advocating for the change, and how the status in terms of virtues would have the positive influence on others. Therefore to lend a hand on this national project of reform agenda, this paper offers Tabitha's principle of good works. Therefore for the purpose of clarity, the article is subdivided into four main headings. The first and second part of the paper will be devoted to the history of Tabitha and a woman leader example in Nigeria who had the similar influence on her community. The last part will present an overview of the change agenda and how this could be made possible through the application of Tabitha's principles.

# Who was Tabitha?

According to Wilkinson, Tabitha is the Hebrew equivalent of Dorcas in the Greek language. The Greek equivalent for her Syriac name (Tabitha) may be accounted for by her

residence at Joppa, a seaport which frequented and no doubt partially inhabited by foreigners speaking chiefly the Greek language.<sup>iii</sup> Both Tabitha and Dorcas imply, "the female of a roebuck", "a gazelle- an emblem of beauty". Luke in the Acts of Apostles was said to have given both names there are three places where the words disciple or disciples include women (Acts 9: 1-2, 36, and 18: 26b).

Additionally, she may have been independently wealthy, for the home where she is laid in awaiting burial is presumably her home and has an upper room (Acts 9: 39). Evidently, she offered her hospitality with flair, for the disciples and widows congregate around her. Perhaps Tabitha chose to use her wealth to aid the poor and the widows (v.36). Luke description of Tabitha makes it easy to imagine her home as welcoming, open and full of people. Luke indicates that Tabitha's home functioned as a community center for believers.

Through the Spirit- empowered ministry of Philip, the evangelist, a Christian church was established at Joppa- now known as Jeff and from an early date the Church was not only a center of fervent evangelism but also of a well- organized social service. Possibly Dorcas came to know Christ as her savior in this church, and there and then caught the vision of how she could serve Christ with her money and needle.

#### **Her Works**

Luke indicates that Tabitha took God's commands about society's most vulnerable seriously (Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor, Zech 7:10, Deut 24:17, 20:21). She is always portrayed in artworks and commentary as the holy woman. She also sounds like one of those large- bosomed, generous- hearted women who is loved by all. This is reinforced by the next thing we learn about her. She spends her time doing good works and acts of charity. When Luke says that Dorcas was full of good works, he meant the mind "full" to refer primarily to her inward grace, which promoted the original deeds. Tabitha makes robes and clothing for the widows. Her lifestyle contrasts admirably with the characterization of the real wife from Proverbs 31: 10-31. Both display phenomenal energy, extend help willingly to the poor, proficient in needlework, seek to do good and undertake their activities with the context of faith; they were "doers" each putting feet to her faith

If a woman did not have family at this time, she was in a very precarious place or situation. Tabitha purposely sought out the poor and widows and actively saw how she could help meet their needs. In the first century, when female activities centered on daily survival for themselves and their families, Tabitha engaged in the needs of her community.

#### **Her Death**

Luke's succinct description and the outpouring of grief at her death showed how greatly the believing community and widows loved Tabitha (v.39). A strong indication that Tabitha herself thoroughly enjoyed her work and loved these people in return. However, she died in the midst of useful life. She was an admired member of the community and many people mourned her death. The widows mourning reciprocated the love Tabitha extended to them. Arguably, she met more than their clothing needs. Her hospitality and generosity probably gave them food, sanctuary, a home, a warm heart, listening ear and undoubtedly saved lives.

Luke records the miracle of her raising simply. It was a sad day for the church at Joppa when one of its most beloved and devoted members died in the midst of her works of charity. "Death loves a shining mark, a signal blow," and death certainly found such a mark in the bountiful Dorcas whose passing was a blow to the community. The vessel containing the costly ointment was broken, and the odor filled the house as never before. Kind hands washed the corpse and placed it in the upper chamber, with feelings expressed by the poet—

Sister, thou was mild and lovely, Gentle as the summer breeze, Pleasant as the air of morning When it floats among the trees.

Peter clears the Upper room, perhaps because he is distracted by the widows' noisy grief (v. 40). The Apostle must have been moved as they reverently exhibited the coats and garments Tabitha made for them. Peter spoke the word of power and authority, "Tabitha arises', and life returned. Tabitha sat, and Peter presented her alive to the saints and widows. Her return from the death must have been a great gain to her church. The resurrection of Tabitha had a twofold effect. First of all, the miracle comforted the mourners for she had returned to her life of good works and alms-deeds. "

A lesson to bear in mind is that she was the cause of revival in her environment and her transformed life attracts others to the Savior. Equally, Tabitha did not aspire to be a leader, but was content to stay in her home and try to do all she could in all the ways she could. Thus, she became a great philanthropist, and her selfless service filled the world. This is because in Joppa, there are multitudes of the benevolent and charitable organization in which women have been prominent.

In our churches and also in commendable societies, there are many public- spirited women who with humanitarian deals, are engaged in various relief activities, and whose sole objective is to do good. It is with this understanding that the next sub- heading will be focusing on the legacy left behind by Dora Akunyili in Nigeria. Although in Nigeria there are many men and women that made positive changes in their chosen career but then this work will be citing her as a case study.

# Dora Akunyili leadership role in National Agency for Food Drug and Administration Control

National agency for food drug and administration and control is a Nigerian Federal agency under the federal ministry of health that is responsible for regulating and controlling the manufacture, importation, exportation, advertisement, distribution, sale and use of food, drugs, cosmetics, medical services, chemicals and packaged water. The organization was formed to checkmate illicit and counterfeit products in Nigeria in 1993 under the country's health and safety law. Following her appointment as the Director General of NAFDAC in April 2001, a place she was for seven years, Akunyili established as a top priority the eradication of counterfeit drugs and unsafe food. Before her assumption in office in NAFDAC, fake and substantial foods and drugs were sold in Nigeria without any form of regulation. She was disheartened that so

many of her countrymen and women were fighting killer diseases like malaria and tuberculosis with little more than sugar syrup and chalk tablet, cynically packaged to look like the real thing.<sup>vi</sup>

Although Akunyili faced considerable risk to her personal safety in her fights to combat the issue of fake drugs. She has been Dora's performance has ultimately Dora Akunyili came on the Job and didn't just do her Job but took it way beyond the expectations of Nigerians. Not even a close brush with death when an assassination attempt was made on her life could deter her from continuing her job. Her defiance in getting the job done was reflected when she once quoted in an interview;

My coming here and not doing the work is greater than any sin in the ten commandments. I just leave it to God and put in the effort that is humanly possible. I refuse to be intimidated. My life is in the hand of God. They forget that so many people have died because of fake drugs, even my sister. If she had had the right insulin, she wouldn't have died vii

Dora has become so popular and beloved by many that she has taken the place of the ultimate role model in the lives of many Nigerians. Although she eventually left in 2008 to take up the position of Nigeria's Honorable Minister of Information and Communication, her legacy lives on remarkably not only in Nigeria ( and West Africa) drug market, but also in the empowerment of women, particularly in Africa. Her influence continues on today with the introduction of the Electronic Resource System by mPedigree, a social enterprise based in Ghana. Many medicines sold in Nigeria now come with the small scratch strips with a unique number or code to a toll-free number. If they say "Yes", then one can be assured that it is safe for use. If one receives "No', the medicine is fake, and the buyer is encouraged to alert the authorities by dialog a local number. According to the BBC, mPedigree now operates in eight different countries, proving that Dora had now joined the rank of her very own history-changing role model.

Dora's performance has ultimately proven that women should never be taken for granted when it comes to handling the mantle of leadership. In a society that is undoubtedly patriarchal in nature, she has succeeded in breaking the jinx that women can't do it like the men. Unfortunately, she even does it better than most men. That was proven when she bagged the Silverbird Television Man of the Year award. It's funny that it was meant to be 'man of the year' but a woman ended up clinching it. Dora Akunyili is well read and has pedigrees that have equally proven that they are not a waste of accolades since her performance has paid off. It's quite unusual in a society where there are people fronting pedigrees and achieving no noteworthy exploits in leadership. It should e noted that until the world has noticed your efforts, then you are a great person. Dora has drawn global attention and will remain a veritable point of reference in Nigerian history. In the light of this change wrought by Dora then it means if any agenda is to succeed in Nigeria, then the leaders and the populace must be ready to pay the price. viii

#### **Deducible Facts about Her**

• She was sincere

- She was committed to saving her mother
- She led by example
- She was not selfish
- She saw the needs around her and endeavored to alleviate those needs

In the light of this change wrought by Dora then it means if any agenda is to succeed in Nigeria, then the leaders and the populace must be ready to pay the price.

# What Does Buhari Change Agenda Mean?

President Buhari came into office with the reputation for integrity and a very clear agenda that is to make sure that he has been bringing security and peace safely to his country. He is very concerned about the spread and the violence that is taking place there and the atrocities and has a very clear agenda in solving some lingering problems in the country.

# Change in his parlance means:

- A country that you can be proud of at anytime and anywhere: where corruption is tackled, where your leaders are disciplined and lead with vision and clarity; where the stories that emerge to the world from us are full of hope and progress.
- A Nigeria in which neither you, nor your parents, families or friends will have to fear for your safety, or for theirs.
- A Nigeria where citizens get the basics that any country should provide: infrastructure that works, healthcare that is affordable, even free; respect for the environment and sustainable development, education that is competitive and outcome-oriented in a knowledge-economy.
- A country that provides jobs for its young people, reducing unemployment to the lowest of single digits and providing safety nets so that no one is left behind.
- A Nigeria where entrepreneurship thrives, enterprise flourishes and the government gets out of your way so that you can create value, build the economy and aggressively expand wealth.

He, however, expressed that the five agenda are implementable. He noted that all the above are possible. This is because to him that is the essence and outcome of leadership and that is why he and his party stand for change in all sectors. Also, he noted that more than ever before he is hopeful about Nigeria. Although Nigerians might have been disappointed and angry, but must never give in to the temptation to feel so weighed down by those who have failed the nation. He, however, gave a word of assurance that Nigerian will prosper again and will eventually become a country that will finally make a permanent shift from our debilitating dependence on the free-falling price of crude oil. ix

With the above in mind, the question then is why the need for all these assuring words from the President? There are needs for them because it could be said that many things had gone wrong in Nigeria that calls for urgent change. The problems are at this moment considered below.

# Why the Need for the change agenda?

The change plan become imperative because many things have gone wrong in Nigeria socio- economic situations and this will be enumerated below:

- Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with an estimated population of about 150 million and a land mass of 923,768 square kilometers which is more than twice the size of California in the United States of America (U.S.). It has abundant natural resources and is the fourteenth largest exporter of crude oil in the world. From 2009 estimates, the country has a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$377.6 billion and per capita GDP of \$2,400. Nigeria is expected to have a population growth rate of 2.3%. With these enormous natural and human resources, the country ought to be one of the world leading economies, but unfortunately, Nigeria is still entrapped in a web of socioeconomic problems which hinder her growth. For example, about 54.7 % of Nigeria's population lives below the poverty line
- Deteriorating security situation in the country,
- Nigeria is also confronted with daunting a developmental challenge which poses the serious threat to socio-economic development. These developmental problems include endemic rural and urban poverty, high rate of unemployment, debilitating youth unemployment, weak industrial output, unstable and deteriorating exchange rate, high inflation rate
- inadequate physical and social infrastructure, colossal domestic debt, and rising stock of external debt.<sup>x</sup>
- According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria's unemployment rate increased to 23.9 percent in 2011 compared with 21.1 per cent in 2010 and 19.7 per cent in 2009. The country has a youth population of 80 million, representing about 60 per cent of the total population with a growth rate of 2.6 per cent per year, and the national demography suggests that the youth population remains vibrant with an average annual entrant to the labor force at 1.8 million between 2006 and 2011. In 2011, 37.7 per cent of Nigerian were aged 1524 years and 22.4 per cent of those between ages 25 and 44 were willing to work but did not get jobs.
- The current level of social insecurity posed by Boko Haram is alarming and unacceptable
- Poor governance and weak institutions have been an integral part of Nigeria's experience since independence. Previous research work reveals that most governments in Africa are faced with challenging economic environments due to inadequate road infrastructure, inefficient ports, severe power outages and worst of all endemic corruption in government.
- There exists an uneven wealth distribution in Nigeria, with a huge gap between the very few extra wealthy and the poor masses. The wealth resides in the hands of a few who mostly are not engaged in productive ventures. These few have access to government contracts which are consumptive and not productive in nature. xi

# How far has the President gone?

Solving Nigeria socio- economic and security challenges is not an easy task due to the pluralistic nature of the country. However, this is not to say that President Buhari has not performed his best possible within the last one year. As noted by the Office of Media and Pu http://irsdjournal.wixsite.com/humanities-cultural

Thus every government in Nigeria has had to cope with the dwindling income from the oil revenue which was part of why some states were unable to pay salaries. The Ebonyi State Governor, Chief Dave Umahi, when reacting to the issue of the bailout given to states by the federal government, commended the initiative of President Buhari.

Knocks It has not been rosy for the government. There are have been complaining among the largely expectative Nigerians who are expecting the government to act with greater speed and to have recorded more achievements within the first 100 days - which has been a standard gauge for the performance of new administrations.

Mohammed has however attributed the seeming slowness of the Buhari administration to the level of decadence left behind by the immediate past government, which according to him the new administration is just unearthing and working out ways to cope with them. In fact, the APC and the presidency had to deny that it produced any particular document to the effect that it promised Nigerians some concrete achievements it would have recorded within 100 days in office. The government is even worst hit by criticisms because it has not appointed ministers, who are expected to complement the president. While the government won the administration of most Nigerians with its promise to tackle corruption headlong, the Buhari anti-corruption drive has also faced severe criticism, particularly from members of the PDP who are raising the alarm that the ongoing anti-corruption crusade is selective and targeted at members of the opposition.

The internal crisis that characterized the emergence of the leadership of Senate and the House of Representatives was also a small point in the lifespan of the administration of the ruling APC. The incident opened the government to criticisms from quite some Nigerians who felt it was reneging on its promise to up hold the tenets of democracy by insisting on party supremacy above laid down National Assembly guidelines.

That the Chibok girls are yet to return and the fact that there is no indication that they are likely to return anytime soon; after over 500 days in captivity has also been a talking point. Though the pioneers of the "Bring Back Our Girl" are yet to take the fight to the new government, agitations for the safe return of the abducted secondary school girls have continued, and the Buhari administration is being expected to do all that can be done to reunite the girls with their families. Meanwhile, the two recently rescued was due to the concerted efforts of the vigilante group

Thousands of graduates from the University and other educational institutions are sent to the labor markets yearly without buyers to swell the number in the unemployment industry. Government campaign promises to create employment in many cases has yet to be fulfilled, and where the attempt has been made at all, it is both selective and only a tip of the ice-berg. A significant number of these embrace crime and criminality out of frustration. Xii

The above notwithstanding, the government of Buhari has been able to put many things in place to ensure stable governance of which only few will be mentioned below:

- On the assumption of office, the President undertook some different trips both within and outside Africa to re-establish Nigeria's position in the global arena and solicit support for Nigeria and Africa.
- President Buhari has signed an agreement with the Chinese government to improve Nigeria's power infrastructure.
- Presidential approval for the Implementation of United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) reports 2010 for the clean-up of Ogoniland with regards to oil pollution and inclusion of stakeholders in the process of implementation.
- Continuation of the implementation of the Great Green Wall project to fight and contain desertification in Northern Nigeria initiated by past administration.
- Since assumption of office, President Buhari has maintained a clear stance on the rule of law and respect for the separation of power.
- President Buhari has continually pushed the agenda for enhancing Nigeria's global image by always demonstrating Nigeria's credentials in the 2015 general elections, which saw the country scoring high on the peaceful transition.
- The relocation of the Nigerian Military Command Centre to Maiduguri, since May 2015, contributed to the success in the fight against insurgency in the North Eastern part of the country.
- As at February 2016, the total number of persons rescued by the Nigerian troops during the ongoing operations in the North East came to 11,595.
- Cohesive international support in the fight against terrorism and assistance to victims and communities affected by terrorism, following President Buhari's meeting with G7 leaders and other world powers.
- In May 2016, Nigeria hosted a Regional Security Summit to boost military operations against Boko Haram and forge a global support for the rehabilitation of the IDPs and rebuilding of the North East.
- Recruitment of additional 10,000 persons into the Nigeria Police Force is ongoing. The recruitment will address the workforce gap which currently exists in the Nigeria Police.
- Overhaul of the dysfunctional topmost hierarchy of the Nigerian military which resulted in optimal result and degradation of the Boko Haram elements.
- Was able to bring back our hitherto military allies; which saw the United States and UK governments commit their resources to the fight against the insurgents after previously backing out of negotiations with the previous administration. The Israeli government has also indicated interest in the fight against the insurgency.
- Continuous monitoring of activities in the region of war through the use of satellite images and geographical information system is helping in fighting insurgency and strategizing against the enemy.
- The trips to our neighboring countries showed the resolve of the President to push Boko Haram elements out of existence by going for the jugular of the group, cutting their arms, food supply routes. Support has thus been mobilized through the Multinational Joint Task Force
- Another major stride is the Trans-National Organized Crime (TNOC) where the president got the partnership with regional allies in the fight against the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons.
- As part of the reconfigured military partnership, the United States donated 24 mine-resistant.

- The government has renewed its fight against oil bunkering.
- Restructuring of Nigerian Immigration to stop cross-border crimes.
- NSCDC has become more proactive in the prevention of pipeline vandalization, with the arrest of several pipeline vandals.
- Right from the moment he won the Presidential Election in 2015, the impression of the President as a "no nonsense and incorruptible leader" sent a signal to looters of public funds, with many of them returning funds that had been stolen under the previous administration.
- To create a frame work for prosecuting the war against corruption and institutionalize probity, President Buhari set up an Advisory Committee on War against Corruption.
- The anti-corruption battle is gaining ground in several high profile cases already in the courts. The administration is being guided by the rule of law in the prosecution of corruption cases.
- President Buhari enlisted the support of multilateral institutions like the World Bank and IMF, security agencies, Western countries and other friendly nations to locate and repatriate stolen assets.
- Implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) has provided greater visibility of government revenues and cash flows. Between June 2015 and April 2016, the Federal Government TSA collection clocked N3trillion.
- To further instill fiscal discipline, President Buhari directed the closure of all multiple accounts in Ministries, Departments, and Agencies of government, thereby plugging loopholes for leakages with new technology.
- To alleviate the suffering of Nigerians in September 2015, President Buhari directed the Central Bank of Nigeria to disburse N689.5 billion as the bailout to 27 states of the federation to pay salaries.
- To stimulate the economy and reduce poverty, in April, 2016, President Buhari approved deferment in the payment of the bailout as states were still reeling under the burden of the fall in commodity prices.
- Records of more than 34,000 ghost workers draining the nation's resources were expunged from the Federal Civil Service, saving N2.29 billion monthly.
- In 2015, President Buhari ruled out the appointment of a government delegation for the pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. By this decision, the government saved about one million U.S dollars and N30m of lo "ghost workers" are being identified and dealt with, while looters with multiple accounts can no longer hide their loot undetected.
- Reorganization/Restructuring of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) into a focused, accountable and transparent institution with autonomous Units. xiii

It should, therefore, be noted that the above not with standing more can still be done to improve the situation as many are still of the opinion that the President is sentimental in his approach especially in the fight against corruption. Therefore to successfully have a change agenda that is purposeful and not self-centered, there is need to look inwardly to religious principle. It is on this note that this paper is recommending the principle of Tabitha as exemplified in the following diagram.

# Recommended Guiding Principles to Achieve the Change Agenda.

The starting point is to apply the principle of Tabitha which includes among others:



Equally, the following could be added principles to adopt:

- Leadership must be committed to change
- Maintaining an environment of confidentiality is a critical component in building the nation.
- Listen and learn the change agenda would come to full realization when both members feel their viewpoints are heard and hear.
- Leadership by example- actions creates the most lasting impression.
- Shunning of selfishness.
- Consistency in the delivery of government project. There is need to focus on one major project at a time to execute, complete and implement for greater accountability and transparency.
- The desire for change must translate to imbibing the ethical values on which we can build the nation that we want. It must be a change in orientation of a greedy, grasping attitude to bringing about flair, just and equitable society.
- It must also be a change in our approach to life and living styles itself. Simplicity must be preferred to ostentatious living. Thrift must be imbibed over waste.
- A celebration of integrity over corruption.
- There is need to identify those areas of need (just like Tabitha did by making clothes for the widows), look beyond reliance on crude oil to the production of petroleum products see other sectors that have the potential to create jobs and boost domestic demand.

Lastly as rightly noted by Obasanjo in one of his statement, he says:

Rebuilding the foundations of governance involved paying attention to values, principles, and practices that promote hard work, innovation and sacrifice. "Leaders who call for sacrifice from the citizenry cannot be living in obscene opulence. We must address these foundational issues to make the economy work, to strengthen our institutions, build public confidence in government and deal with our peace and security challenges. We must address the issue of employment for our teeming population, particularly for our youths. "Leadership must mentor the young and provide them with hope for their future as part of a process of intergenerational conversation."

#### **CONCLUSION**

Every congregation or country so to say needs as many Dorcases as it can have. She was an admired member of her community whose story shows a model Christian woman. As a result of her faithfulness and sincerity of purpose she was resurrected. And as a result of her being resurrected, many people in her community were brought to Christ. What a legacy it is to teach and influence people to obey the Lord. It is, therefore, suffice to say here that though all cannot be Dorcas, instead, one can make use of the gifts and abilities God has given us to bring about positive change in our country. All that need to be done is to have the culture of justice, righteousness, compassion defense of the rights of the less privileged and be focused and avoid distractions Equally it should be borne in mind that change is not about the comfort of today but the success of tomorrow and so all must work toward achieving the desired change.

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