

## The Call for Reform: Embracing Chief Awolowo's Vision for a Better Nigeria

By Professor Ojo Emmanuel Ademola

As we celebrate the 115th Posthumous birthday of Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Oyeniya Iyanda Awolowo, GCFR, it is essential to reflect on the valuable lessons that today's politicians can learn from his exemplary leadership. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a visionary and transformative leader, left a lasting legacy of progressive governance, innovative policies, and unwavering commitment to the betterment of Nigeria. Chief Awolowo's emphasis on reform to drive progress, development, and prosperity for all Nigerians remains as relevant today as it was during his tenure. In honouring Chief Awolowo's birthday, it is fitting to consider how his principles can guide policymakers in navigating the complexities of modern governance and leading Nigeria toward a brighter and more sustainable future.

Reflecting on the indelible mark he left on Nigeria through his visionary leadership, particularly his groundbreaking free education policy, Chief Awolowo's legacy continues to resonate with many Nigerians, myself included. Personally, I owe much of who I am today to the opportunities afforded to me through this policy. In honour of Chief Awolowo's birthday, it is fitting to explore and celebrate his attributes that today's politicians can emulate for the betterment of our nation.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo was a visionary leader who played a key role in shaping modern Nigeria. His commitment to the principles of justice, equity, and progress made him a champion of the common man and a symbol of good governance. As we celebrate his 115th Posthumous birthday, it is important to reflect on his legacy and the values he stood for.

One of the most enduring legacies of Chief Awolowo is his commitment to education. He believed that education was the key to unlocking the full potential of every individual and building a strong and prosperous nation. Through his free education policy in Western Nigeria, he made education accessible to all, regardless of their socio-economic background. This policy not only transformed the lives of countless individuals but also laid the foundation for the development of the region.

Another attribute of Chief Awolowo that stands out is his integrity and transparency. He was known for his honesty and commitment to serving the people with humility and dedication. His leadership was characterized by accountability and a strong sense of duty towards the people he served. In a time when corruption and self-interest often prevail in politics, Chief Awolowo's example serves as a reminder of the importance of integrity and ethical leadership.

Furthermore, Chief Awolowo was a forward-thinking leader who was not afraid to innovate and pursue bold ideas for the betterment of society. His vision for a modern and progressive Nigeria inspired generations of leaders and continues to shape public discourse and policy-making in the country. His emphasis on infrastructure development, industrialization, and economic diversification laid the groundwork for Nigeria's future growth and development.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo was a rare breed of leader who embodied the values of honesty, integrity, and visionary leadership. His legacy serves as a blueprint for today's politicians to emulate and build upon for the collective good of the nation. As we celebrate his Posthumous birthday, let us remember and honour his contributions to Nigeria and strive to uphold the same principles of good governance and service to the people. Happy birthday, Chief Awolowo!

Chief Obafemi Awolowo's impact on Nigerian politics and society spanned from the early days of independent Nigeria to his passing in 1987. Throughout his political career, he consistently demonstrated a commitment to principles such as education, integrity, and innovation. Here are some examples of his influence and legacy during this period:

1. **\*Free Education Policy\***: One of Chief Awolowo's most significant contributions was the introduction of free education in Western Nigeria in the 1950s. This policy revolutionized access to education in the region, leading to a significant increase in literacy rates and the emergence of a more educated workforce. The impact of this policy is still evident today, as many of Nigeria's most prominent leaders and professionals from the region benefited from this initiative.
2. **\*Infrastructure Development\***: As Premier of the Western Region, Chief Awolowo prioritized infrastructure development to support economic growth and social welfare. He oversaw the construction of roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals, improving the quality of life for the people in the region. His focus on building a strong foundation for development has left a lasting impact on infrastructure development in Nigeria.
3. **\*Industrialization\***: Chief Awolowo was a proponent of industrialization as a means to reduce dependence on imported goods and create job opportunities for Nigerians. He established industrial estates and factories in the Western Region, promoting local production and economic growth. His emphasis on economic diversification and industrialization set a precedent for future leaders to follow.
4. **\*Political Leadership\***: Throughout his political career, Chief Awolowo demonstrated strong leadership qualities, including courage, foresight, and integrity. He stood against corruption and advocated for transparency and accountability in governance. His principled stance on issues such as federalism and fiscal responsibility set him apart as a leader committed to the national interest above personal gain.
5. **\*Legacy and Influence\***: Chief Awolowo's legacy continues to influence Nigerian politics and society to this day. His ideas and policies have inspired generations of leaders and activists to strive for a better Nigeria. His commitment to social justice, good governance, and the welfare of the people serves as a model for politicians to emulate and build upon.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo's impact on Nigerian politics and society was profound and enduring. His legacy of education, integrity, and innovation has left an indelible mark on the country and serves as a guiding light for future generations of leaders to follow. As we celebrate his

Posthumous birthday, let us reflect on his exemplary leadership and strive to uphold the values he stood for in the national interest.

Chief Awolowo's influence on Nigerian politics and society extends beyond the post-independence period, as he played a significant role in shaping the political landscape of Nigeria even before independence. Here are some examples of his impact on pre-independence Nigeria:

1. **\*Nationalist Movement\***: In the lead-up to independence, Chief Awolowo was actively involved in the nationalist movement to secure self-governance for Nigeria. As a prominent leader in the Action Group party, he advocated for greater autonomy and self-determination for the various regions of Nigeria. His efforts contributed to the push for independence from British colonial rule.
2. **\*Regional Autonomy\***: Chief Awolowo was a strong advocate for regional autonomy and federalism in Nigeria. He believed that the diverse ethnic and cultural groups in the country should have the right to govern themselves and develop according to their own priorities. His vision for a federal system of government laid the groundwork for the federal structure that Nigeria adopted at independence.
3. **\*Social Welfare\***: Even before independence, Chief Awolowo championed social welfare programs and policies that prioritized the well-being of the people. His advocacy for affordable housing, healthcare, and education reflected his commitment to improving the lives of ordinary Nigerians. These initiatives set a precedent for future social welfare programs in Nigeria.
4. **\*Political Ideology\***: Chief Awolowo's political ideology, which emphasized progressivism, social justice, and economic development, was a driving force in pre-independence Nigerian politics. He focused on policies that promoted economic growth, social equity, and self-reliance, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and prosperous society.
5. **\*Opposition to Colonial Rule\***: Chief Awolowo was a vocal critic of British colonial rule in Nigeria and advocated for self-governance. He played a key role in mobilizing support for the nationalist movement and challenging the colonial administration's oppressive policies. His leadership helped galvanize support for independence and set the stage for Nigeria's transition to self-rule.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo's impact on Nigerian politics and society during the pre-independence period was significant and far-reaching. His advocacy for regional autonomy, social welfare, political ideology, and opposition to colonial rule set the stage for Nigeria's transition to independence and shaped the country's political trajectory. His legacy continues to inspire Nigerians to strive for a more just, equitable, and prosperous society.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo was also known for his economic policies and initiatives that had a significant impact on Nigeria's economic development. Here are some examples of his economic contributions:

1. **\*The Development Plans\***: As the Premier of the Western Region, Chief Awolowo introduced a series of development plans aimed at fostering economic growth and industrialization. His government implemented the First, Second, and Third Development Plans, which focused on

infrastructure development, agriculture, education, and healthcare. These plans laid the foundation for the region's economic advancement.

2. **\*Agricultural Reforms\***: Chief Awolowo implemented agricultural reforms to boost food production and ensure food security in the Western Region. His government invested in irrigation projects, improved farming techniques, and provided support to farmers through subsidies and extension services. These initiatives helped increase agricultural productivity and reduce food scarcity in the region.

3. **\*Industrialization\***: Chief Awolowo prioritized industrialization as a key component of economic development. He promoted the establishment of industries in the Western Region to create jobs, stimulate economic growth, and reduce dependence on imports. His government set up industrial estates, provided incentives to local entrepreneurs, and supported the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

4. **\*Education and Human Capital Development\***: Chief Awolowo recognized the importance of education and human capital development in driving economic growth. He introduced free universal primary education in the Western Region to increase literacy rates, provide skills training, and empower the workforce. His government also invested in vocational training and technical education to equip individuals with the skills needed for employment in emerging industries.

5. **\*Financial Management\***: Chief Awolowo was known for his prudent financial management and fiscal discipline. He prioritized transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the management of public funds, ensuring that resources were allocated effectively to support economic development projects. His government was praised for its sound economic policies and financial stewardship.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo's economic policies and initiatives were instrumental in driving the economic development of the Western Region and laying the groundwork for Nigeria's overall economic progress. His emphasis on agriculture, industrialization, education, and financial management contributed to the region's growth and prosperity, setting a positive example for economic governance in Nigeria. His legacy continues to inspire policymakers to prioritize economic development and invest in human capital to achieve sustainable growth and prosperity.

If Chief Obafemi Awolowo were alive today, he would likely employ a mix of economic, social, psychological, and technological strategies to address contemporary challenges and drive development in Nigeria. Here are some examples of how he might adapt his approach:

1. **\*Economic\***

**Emphasis on Diversification**: Given the current overdependence on oil revenue in Nigeria, Chief Awolowo might advocate for diversification of the economy, promoting sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services to reduce vulnerability to fluctuations in oil prices.

**Encouragement of SMEs**: Chief Awolowo could prioritize support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by providing access to funding, business development services, and market linkages to stimulate entrepreneurship and create jobs.

**Sustainable Development:** In line with global trends, Chief Awolowo might prioritize sustainable development initiatives, such as promoting renewable energy, green technologies, and environmentally friendly practices to address climate change and ensure long-term economic viability.

## 2. \*Social:\*

**Focus on Human Capital Development:** Chief Awolowo could prioritize investments in education, healthcare, and skills training to enhance human capital development and empower the workforce with the necessary tools to compete in a knowledge-based economy.

**Social Welfare Programs:** In addressing poverty and inequality, Chief Awolowo might advocate for social welfare programs that provide a safety net for vulnerable populations, including cash transfers, healthcare subsidies, and social security measures.

**Gender Equality and Inclusion:** Chief Awolowo would likely champion gender equality and social inclusion by promoting policies that empower women, youths, and marginalized groups to participate fully in economic and social development.

## 3. \*Psychological:\*

**Mindset Change and National Unity:** Chief Awolowo might emphasize the importance of fostering a sense of national identity and unity among diverse ethnic and cultural groups by promoting inclusive dialogue, tolerance, and understanding to overcome historical divisions and promote social cohesion.

**Leadership and Integrity:** Chief Awolowo could stress the values of leadership, integrity, and visionary governance as key attributes for inspiring confidence, trust, and accountability in public institutions and leaders.

## 4. \*Technological:\*

**Digital Transformation:** Chief Awolowo might recognize the potential of digital technologies and advocate for investments in digital infrastructure, innovation hubs, and digital skills training to leverage the opportunities of the digital economy for growth and development.

**Technological Innovation:** Chief Awolowo could support research and development initiatives, technology hubs, and partnerships with the private sector to drive technological innovation, enhance productivity, and foster a culture of entrepreneurship and creativity.

If Chief Awolowo were alive today, he would likely integrate economic, social, psychological, and technological strategies to address contemporary challenges and drive inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria. His visionary leadership, commitment to human capital development, and focus on long-term planning and sustainable growth would continue to inspire policymakers and stakeholders to build a more prosperous and equitable society.

If Chief Obafemi Awolowo were alive today, he would likely advocate for a range of reforms to address the current challenges facing Nigeria and promote sustainable development. Some key reforms that Chief Awolowo might call for today include:

1. **\*Economic Reforms:** Chief Awolowo was a proponent of economic planning, industrialization, and infrastructure development. He would likely call for reforms to diversify the economy, strengthen key sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing, attract foreign investment, and create more opportunities for job creation and wealth generation.
2. **\*Education Reforms:** Chief Awolowo was a strong advocate for education and human capital development. He would likely call for reforms to improve the quality of education, increase access to education for all citizens, enhance skills training and vocational education, and promote lifelong learning to empower the workforce and drive economic growth.
3. **\*Healthcare Reforms:** Chief Awolowo believed in providing quality healthcare for all citizens. He would likely call for reforms to strengthen the healthcare system, improve access to affordable healthcare services, invest in healthcare infrastructure and technology, and prioritize preventive care and public health initiatives to improve health outcomes and reduce disease burden.
4. **\*Governance Reforms:** Chief Awolowo emphasized ethical leadership, transparency, and accountability in governance. He would likely call for reforms to promote good governance, uphold the rule of law, fight corruption, ensure transparency in public administration, and strengthen institutions to deliver services efficiently and effectively for the benefit of all citizens.
5. **\*Poverty Alleviation and Social Welfare Reforms:** Chief Awolowo was committed to reducing poverty and improving the welfare of the people. He would likely call for reforms to address income inequality, provide social safety nets for the most vulnerable in society, empower marginalized groups, such as women and youth, and promote social inclusion to build a more equitable and inclusive society.
6. **\*Infrastructure Development Reforms:** Chief Awolowo prioritized the development of critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, electricity, and water supply. He would likely call for reforms to modernize and expand infrastructure networks, invest in renewable energy sources, promote sustainable urban planning, and harness technology to enhance connectivity, productivity, and quality of life for all citizens.

If Chief Obafemi Awolowo were alive today, he would likely advocate for comprehensive reforms in the areas of economic development, education, healthcare, governance, poverty alleviation, social welfare, and infrastructure development to address the current challenges facing Nigeria and advance the country's progress towards sustainable development, social justice, and prosperity for all.

Expanding on the reform concept further, Chief Obafemi Awolowo might also focus on the following key areas:

1. **\*Environmental Sustainability:** Chief Awolowo would likely prioritize environmental protection and sustainable development. He might advocate for reforms to address environmental degradation, promote renewable energy and green technologies, implement climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, protect natural resources, and foster sustainable practices in agriculture, industry, and urban planning to ensure a healthy environment for current and future generations.



2. **\*Digital Transformation:** Chief Awolowo, a visionary leader, would likely recognize the transformative power of digital technology. He might call for reforms to drive digital innovation, expand broadband internet access, promote e-governance and digital services, enhance cybersecurity, and foster a digital economy to unlock new opportunities for growth, efficiency, and inclusion in the digital age.
3. **\*Youth Empowerment and Entrepreneurship:** Chief Awolowo valued youth development and empowerment. He might advocate for reforms to support youth education, skills training, employment, and entrepreneurship, create opportunities for youth participation in decision-making and governance, and harness the potential of youth as agents of change and innovation to drive sustainable development and societal progress.
4. **\*Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:** Chief Awolowo recognized the important role of women in society. He might call for reforms to promote gender equality, eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence, empower women economically and politically, increase women's access to education and healthcare, and ensure their full participation in all spheres of society to build a more inclusive and equitable society for all.
5. **\*Regional Integration and Cooperation:** Chief Awolowo believed in unity and cooperation among different regions and ethnic groups. He might advocate for reforms to promote national unity, foster peaceful coexistence and reconciliation among diverse communities, strengthen federalism and devolution of powers, and drive regional integration and cooperation to unlock the synergies of diversity and build a more cohesive and prosperous nation.

Overall, Chief Obafemi Awolowo's reform agenda would likely be holistic, inclusive, and forward-looking, addressing a wide range of interconnected issues to promote sustainable development, social justice, and prosperity for all Nigerians. His leadership and vision could inspire transformative change and mobilize collective action to overcome the current challenges facing Nigeria and build a brighter future for the nation and its people.

There are several lessons that today's politicians can learn from Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a prominent Nigerian statesman known for his visionary leadership, progressive policies, and commitment to development. Here are some key lessons that today's politicians can draw from Chief Awolowo's legacy:

1. **\*Visionary Leadership:** Chief Awolowo was known for his visionary leadership, long-term planning, and strategic foresight. Today's politicians can learn the importance of setting clear goals, articulating a compelling vision for the future, and developing comprehensive strategies to achieve sustainable development and societal progress.
2. **\*Ethical Leadership:** Chief Awolowo was known for his integrity, honesty, and commitment to ethical governance. Today's politicians can learn the importance of upholding high ethical standards, transparency, and accountability in public service to earn the trust and confidence of the people.
3. **\*People-Centered Policies:** Chief Awolowo prioritized the welfare of the people and implemented policies that aimed to improve the quality of life for all citizens. Today's politicians can learn the importance of putting the needs and aspirations of the people at the centre of their policymaking and ensuring that policies are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable in society.

4. **\*Education and Human Capital Development:\*** Chief Awolowo placed a strong emphasis on education and human capital development as the foundation for social and economic progress. Today's politicians can learn the importance of investing in education, skills development, and healthcare to empower the workforce, stimulate economic growth, and reduce poverty and inequality.
5. **\*Unity and Nation-Building:\*** Chief Awolowo advocated for national unity, social cohesion, and the promotion of a shared sense of identity among diverse ethnic and cultural groups. Today's politicians can learn the importance of fostering inclusivity, dialogue, and understanding to overcome divisions, promote peace, and build a stronger and more cohesive nation.
6. **\*Innovation and Adaptability:\*** Chief Awolowo was known for his innovative thinking, willingness to embrace change, and adaptability in the face of challenges. Today's politicians can learn the importance of embracing innovation, technology, and new ideas to address complex problems, drive growth, and stay ahead in a rapidly changing world.
7. **\*Courage and Resilience:\*** Chief Awolowo demonstrated courage, resilience, and perseverance in the face of adversity, imprisonment, and political challenges. Today's politicians can learn the importance of standing up for their principles, remaining steadfast in the pursuit of their goals, and overcoming obstacles with determination and perseverance.

Overall, today's politicians can draw inspiration from Chief Obafemi Awolowo's legacy by embracing visionary leadership, ethical governance, people-centred policies, education and human capital development, unity and nation-building, innovation and adaptability, courage and resilience. By embodying these values and lessons, politicians can contribute to building a more just, prosperous, and inclusive society for all.

In conclusion, Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo's impact on Nigeria remains profound even decades after his passing. His commitment to education, integrity, visionary leadership, and national development serves as a blueprint for today's politicians to follow. As we commemorate his posthumous birthday, let us not only reflect on his legacy but also challenge ourselves to embody the values and principles he stood for. By embracing Chief Awolowo's vision and emulating his attributes, we can strive towards a better Nigeria for current and future generations. Let us honour his memory not just in words but in action, working tirelessly towards a more prosperous and united nation. The enduring legacy of Chief Obafemi Awolowo serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for today's politicians, urging them to embrace reform, innovation, and inclusive governance in their quest to build a better Nigeria. By embodying Chief Awolowo's values of integrity, vision, and service to the people, policymakers can confront the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century with resilience, tenacity, and foresight. As we commemorate Chief Awolowo's posthumous birthday, let us heed the lessons of his leadership and strive to create a nation that reflects his ideals of progress, justice, and unity. Through genuine reform and transformative action, we can honour Chief Awolowo's legacy and realize the full potential of Nigeria as a beacon of hope, prosperity, and opportunity for all its citizens.

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