OBAFEMI AWOLOWO FOUNDATION ROUNDTABLE | 26 NOVEMBER 2026

Neo-Awoism

Reimagining the Awolowo Developmental Philosophy for 21st Century Nigeria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

US$7.5bn	16	17	15
Cost today of the Western Region plans of 1955 to 1965, as presented	Observations in the communiqué	Suggestions to strengthen the framework	Recommendations for the next stage

THE OCCASION

The Obafemi Awolowo Foundation convened a three hour virtual roundtable of scholars, public intellectuals, policy makers and development practitioners to examine Neo-Awoism, a proposed doctrine for Nigerian development presented by Mr Tilewa Adebajo. The chair, Ambassador Dr Olatokunbo Awolowo Dosumu, Executive Director of the Foundation, explained that the concept did not originate with the Foundation, whose role was to provide an independent and non partisan platform for scrutiny, not endorsement. Five questions guided the evening: relevance, adequacy, translation into policy, gaps, and the route to public institutions. In adapting the means, she said, the ends must not be lost: the welfare and dignity of the people. Mr Kayode Samuel and Professor Banji Oyelaran-Oyeyinka were the discussants, and Professor Seun Kolade moderated.

THE PROPOSITION

Mr Adebajo asked why Nigeria, which stood level with South Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia in the 1950s, is still seeking stability while they deliver growth. His answer was the Western Region record: two development plans, costing about US$7.5 billion in today's money, delivered free primary education, a university, industrial estates and lasting institutions, on the strength of planning, fiscal discipline and partnership with private enterprise.

Neo-Awoism seeks to keep those principles while adapting them to globalisation, digital technology and present constitutional and security challenges. Its ten pillars run from human capital and competitive federalism to fiscal discipline, infrastructure, meritocratic government and responsibility to future generations. It revives Awolowo's "regime of mental magnitude", extended to scientific inquiry and digital fluency; argues that public morality must rest on institutions, not only on personal example; treats federalism as an instrument of development; and proposes "market driven welfarism", in which private enterprise creates wealth and the state acts as strategist, regulator and guarantor of public goods.

WHAT THE ROUNDTABLE CONCLUDED

1 **The record is not in dispute. The label is.**

Several participants argued that everything presented as new is already Awoism, and that the real failure is of practice. With millions of children out of school, one asked what has become of Awoism itself. The roundtable asked what, precisely, is new.

2 **The doctrine needs an ideological spine.**

The second discussant said the pillars read like a development bank strategy; a doctrine must choose. He and an invited respondent asked for grounding in Awolowo's own writing and his democratic socialism, with an activist state ahead of the market at Nigeria's stage of development. The framework should state what it retains, reinterprets or revises, and why.

3 **Politics comes before economics.**

This was the dominant theme. Many held that Nigeria is short of leaders with character, not of ideas, and that ethical leadership needs transparent institutions, enforceable rules and a legal framework. Some asked whether four year cycles can sustain long plans; others replied that Awolowo governed for about five years, and that continuity of purpose is the lesson.

4 **A regional success must prove it can travel.**

Some doubted that the philosophy can be carried across a divided federation. The chair replied that its core, the good of every citizen, is neither partisan nor ethnic. Participants urged the South West states to demonstrate results, and asked for a clear constitutional route to fiscal federalism that is matched by revenue capacity and accountability.

5 **The framework has gaps.**

Security, health and full employment should become proper pillars. Proposed additions were rural industrialisation, Nigeria in the age of artificial intelligence, advanced human capital and a restatement of Awolowo's economic philosophy. Historical claims, including on war financing and rare earth minerals, should be verified. Others insisted on first things: primary schools and electricity.

6 **The next generation must be brought in.**

Nigerians under 45 know little of Awoism. The Obafemi Awolowo Future Leaders Fellowship, whose first cohort has just finished, was cited as a good start.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Refine the concept paper** with the Foundation, separating principles, policy proposals and constitutional changes, and defining how Neo-Awoism differs from classical Awoism and other models.
- **Build a foundation in Awolowo's writings**, fully referencing historical assertions.
- **Add new pillars** on rural industrialisation, artificial intelligence and advanced human capital.
- **Develop "market driven welfarism"** with clear responsibilities for the state, private enterprise, communities and citizens.
- **Set measurable targets**, costs, timelines and the fiscal and constitutional reforms required, and test proposals against Nigeria's past development plans.
- **Develop policy briefs** naming objectives, finance, responsible agencies, risks and outcomes.
- **Invite critiques** from all regions, sectors and younger Nigerians.
- **Judge progress by verifiable results** in learning, health, employment, productivity and living standards.
- **Continue the dialogue** through working groups and further roundtables.

The roundtable left the proposition with its core intact and a clear list of work still to do. In the chair's words, this was a first step on a long journey.

Figures are as presented by speakers and have not been independently verified. The full Report and Communiqué accompanies this summary.