



Nigeria and the Vision 20:2020 Projection: Building Castle in the Air?

Azeez O. Olaniyan^{1*} and Dele Adetoye¹

¹Department of Political Science, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between authors AOO and DA. Author AOO did the design, wrote the introduction, the literature review, the historical part and the first draft. Author DA wrote the other main part as well as the concluding aspect and several of the materials used by him were later incorporated into the main body of the work. The both authors jointly worked on and also approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Vision 2020 is the objective of the Nigerian government to grow the size of Nigeria's economy from a position of 40th in 2005 to the 20th Nation in the world by the year 2020. The drafters of the vision had believed that by 2020 Nigeria will be one of the 20 largest economies in the world able to consolidate its leadership role in Africa and establish itself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena. But given the Nigerian government's history of performance, high level of incompetence, overwhelming corruption and infrastructural decay, can we reasonably expect anything to come out of Vision 2020? This paper answers to the contrary. Using historical antecedents of vision failures as point of departure, as well as the current lackadaisical attitude to governance by the Nigerian leaders, the paper sees the whole idea of vision 20: 2020 as an unrealizable projection.

Keywords: Nigeria; vision 20: 2020; economy; politics and illusion.

*Corresponding author: E-mail: olaniyan444@yahoo.com; deleadetoye@yahoo.com;

1. INTRODUCTION

Towards the photo-finish of Olusegun Obasanjo presidency, there emerged a pattern of envisioning that foresaw the Nigerian state emerging as “among the top 20 economies in the world by the year 2020, with a GDP of at least \$900 billion, a per capita income of \$4,000 and a 70-year life expectancy rate, from the present 46.5 years rate, according to the 2007/2008 United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report [1]. Expectedly, the goals and aspirations envisaged in the vision were incorporated and made an article of faith by the succeeding Yar’Adua administration, who promised a GDP of not less than \$900 billion, representing a 300 per cent increase as well as a per capita income of \$4,000, from the prevailing \$1,128; availability of adequate infrastructural services; reduction of infectious diseases to the barest minimum; a modern technologically-driven agricultural sector; and a vibrant and globally competitive manufacturing sector that contributes significantly to the GDP with a manufacturing value added of not less than 40 percent” [2]. It soon became a fulcrum upon which President Yar’Adua sought to realize his seven-point agenda, which includes Critical Infrastructure, the Niger Delta, Food Security, Human Capital Development, Land Tenure Changes, National Security and Wealth Creation.

And in what seems a demonstration of seriousness, the Yar’Adua government instituted a 305-man man panel on the implementation of the vision [3]. The committee, which was initially made up of two strategic bodies: Steering Body comprising of 235 members and Business Support Group, consisting of 70 members; was further subdivided into several working groups with 57 thematic areas, all aimed at making the vision a reality in just eleven years to the projected year. However, in spite of the setting up of the various committees, panels and innumerable words of assurance from the President as well as highly-placed government officials to the realization of vision 2020, the number of skeptics amongst the generality of Nigerian masses continues to grow and there seems a general tendency to see the whole idea of vision 2020 as a grand deception by the Nigerian government [4]. This raises some pertinent questions: What is the vision all about? Can the vision leapfrog Nigeria from the nadir of underdevelopment to the zenith of development? What connection exists between visioning and development? What is the historical antecedent

of visioning in Nigeria? Is vision 2020 realizable? What are the problems associated with visioning in Nigeria? This paper seeks to interrogate these posers.

2. VISION 20: 2020 AND HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF ENVISIONING IN NIGERIA

Vision 2020 was essentially an abstraction from an assumption and/or a projection that originated outside the shores of the Nigerian state. It was essentially a projection of probability which owes its origin to the work of Goldman Sachs, an American based Investment and Securities Company, who projected that given observed trends then (in 2005), if the economy continues to grow at such high rates, Nigeria could join other countries like Brazil, India, China to be among the top 20 economies in the world, and surpass countries like Spain, Belgium, Poland, the Nordic countries, Israel, Romania, South Africa and Egypt, by 2025 [5]. Using the Sachs report as a point of departure, President Obasanjo, in cloak with the Central Bank of Nigeria, then decided to shorten the prescribed time frame by five years; hence the Vision 20-2020. In a way therefore, the vision emerged as the framework for developing Nigeria in line with Sachs’ projection.

Historically, Nigeria’s socio-political and economic history is rich in dreams and envisioning, which are captured in high sounding adjectives, clichés, acronyms and phrases. In fact, post-colonial Nigeria has been turned into a huge laboratory where all sorts of economic experiments are carried out; making Falana [6] concluded that “Nigeria has been in a permanent state of socio-economic and political transition”, unfortunately with a caveat that “it has been that of transition to nowhere”. Every decade has witnessed one form of dream or the other. The early 1970s witnessed the dream codenamed the National Development Plan, which was designed to catapult Nigeria from the abyss of underdevelopment to high level of development. The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the popular Economic Stabilisation Acts and Austerity Measures by the President Shagari administration, which was also formulated to ensure modesty as a panacea to frivolity and also jumpstart the economy, which had been badly hit by the misfortunes in the oil market, and ultimately lift the Nigerian nation from the economic doldrums.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were the era of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which was said to have no alternative. SAP was instituted by the Ibrahim Babangida Military Presidency and was touted by the supporters as the all-curing panacea to Nigeria's problems. SAP was touted as the best way of achieving economic prosperity for the Nigerian state and, for a long time, was said to have no alternative. Specifically, SAP was a product of deceit and grand plan of the government to hoodwink Nigerians. On 1st October 1985 Babangida announced the rejection of IMF loan, allegedly on the people's voice; but in July 1986 he introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) [7,8]. Embedded in the programme was the removal of subsidies, deregulation and devaluation of the local currency, tax increases, privatization and commercialization and scrapping of commodity boards. SAP eventually turned out to be a kiss of death as it resulted in the collapse of industries and rationalization of the workforce; and this set in motion, the process of gradual impoverishment of a vast majority of the populace. In the words of Attahiru Jega.

"Clearly the combined impact of the socio-economic crises and SAP exposed the Nigerian state as reckless, insensitive and irresponsible, if not structurally weak and incapable of meeting its basic obligations to the Nigerian people...As the state itself became lawless, so too did the citizens increasingly rely on lawlessness in state-civil society relations and inter-personal relations... The negative effects of IMF pushed many Nigerians into increasingly vibrant civil society groups, with many of these gravitating around the politics of identity [9].

Specifically, the end product of SAP, as pursued by the Babangida administration was untold hardship, unemployment, growing poverty, disillusionments, despair and desperation among the generality of the populace, especially, the youths. And this became a major factor in mass enlistment in anti government movements [10]. The Babangida era also witnessed the popular cliché of everything for all by year 2000. Then Nigerians were told to expect everything by the year 2000. Several committees and panels were also set up. Ministerial and official broadcasts were made and the impression of seriousness was giving to the masses but as the 'magical year' drew closer, it dawned on the people that it was all a grand deception, which it eventually turned out to be.

However, the concept of envisioning as a way of deciding "where we are, where we want to be and how to get there", was introduced into the Nigerian political firmament by General Sani Abacha via the popular Vision 2010 [11]. This entailed the assemblage of socio-economic, traditional and political elites in Abuja to fashion out ways the Nigerian state would become an economic giant by the year 2010. Amongst the topmost supporters of the vision 2010 was the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), which had touted Abacha's vision as the magic wand for Nigeria's development and economic recovery [12]. However, and in the contention of Falana, when the whole idea of vision 2010 was consigned to the dustbin by the Obasanjo regime, upon its emergence in 1999, none of its protagonists could muster the audacity to ask him to pursue the product of the oft-touted vision and none of the experts could summon the intellectual courage to defend the principles and ideas in Vision 2010.

The coming of President Obasanjo, as argued heretofore by Falana, led to the abandonment of Abacha's Vision 2010 and for the first four year-term, nothing was put in its place. There was no economic blueprint until the second term when he assembled some World Bank and International Monetary Fund, IMF-inspired experts who constituted his economic team. The team came up with the National Empowerment and Economic Development Strategy, NEEDS, which was described by its authors a "Policy Support Instrument, PSI, approved by the IMF as medium term "poverty reduction strategy". At the end, NEEDS turned out to be a phantom programme in the long series of deception politics Nigerian government love to play with the masses. NEEDS, and its variants of SEEDS and LEEDS (for states and local governments), never achieved any of the objectives it was designed for. It was the same Obasanjo regime that put in place Vision 2020, who left office without even putting in motion the preliminaries for spelling out his own Vision 20-2020 not to talk of doing anything towards its actualization, which his successor, President Umaru Yar'Adua appropriated and incorporated into his Seven Point Agenda.

One major issue emerging from the foregoing historical excursion is that part of the strategies of successive administrations in the country in their efforts to reform and reinvent the Nigerian state and boost its economy were the various programmes and policies geared towards the

reorientation and mobilization of the populace. This became pertinent, given the importance of the masses, their morale, psychology, belief and perception in the process of material and social production. Of the various national orientation policies embarked on by successive administration in the country, three such attempts stand out because of their scope and profound changes in social behavior that they envisaged [13]. These policies are the ethical Revolution (1982), War Against Indiscipline (WAI) (1984); and Mass Mobilization for Economic Recovery, Self-Reliance and Social Justice (MAMSER) (1987). All these were aimed, essentially, at moral re-orientation and reawakening discipline and respect for constituted authority, among others [14]. However, all these objectives were not achieved because the leaders themselves needed a large dose of the drugs they are prescribing for the masses. The masses saw, and still see through this hypocrisy and therefore are further insulated from and immune to these prescriptions. It therefore becomes problematic for the government to convince or mobilize the populace to support any of its programmes because of the mutual distrust and suspicion.

What the foregoing suggests therefore is that the current envisioning is not entirely new. It has series of forerunners; but all have always turned out to be grand failure. Now, given the fact that Vision 2020 is nothing but a reincarnation of previous visions and efforts, a fundamental question raises itself. And it is that will Vision 2020 not go the way of all the previous plans and dreams? With the exception of isolated pockets, majority of which are mostly government officials, the answer tends towards the affirmative. Why is this so? Perhaps the answer lies in a combination of factors, which shall be the focus of analysis in what follows.

3. VISION 2020: BASIS FOR PESSIMISM

Nigeria's vision of becoming one of the leading twenty economies by (the) year 2020 has met some pessimistic views. Such pessimisms border on philosophical underpinnings, socio-cultural, political and economic factors.

3.1 Poor Intellectual Base

From intellectual-deficit angle, a simple analysis of the vision shows its poor intellectual foundation. Its foundation was erected on mere speculation, and not on any profound intellectual

orientation. Dele Seteolu believes the entire vision is conceptually flawed because it was based on market-led economy, which is inappropriate for a country like Nigeria that is grossly underdeveloped [15]. According to Femi Falana [6], one of the indices of such intellectual problem is exemplified in the reckless interchangeable use of terminologies by government officials saddled with codifying and formulating the vision policy. These include Vision, Strategy, Policy, Programme, and Measures etc. In the analysis of Falana, a vision is a broad compass indicating the direction, which an organization or even a nation intends to move, which is also the goal. Some strategies need to be adopted to realise a vision, otherwise it would remain a mere dream. For instance, to realise the Vision 2020, the nation needs workable strategies of development of building a modern, industrial, political economy. The strategy is about what a country wants to achieve in the long run and that implies that a number of short-term steps should be taken. These are matters of tactics to make the strategy work. Therefore, in the contention of Falana, to make a strategy work, appropriate policies need be formulated. If a nation wants to be one of the 20 biggest economies in 2020 as encoded in Vision 2020, it has to come up with policies in education, health, infrastructure, industry, finance, security, power, energy etc in the broad strategies fashioned to make the vision feasible. For each policy to become a reality the government should embark on a number of programmes of action. Within a programme you may need to adopt a number of measures. So a vision is not synonymous with a strategy, policy or programme". The conflation of these terminologies by the government officials indicates shallowness of intellectual base of the vision.

3.2 Lack of Originality

One of the problems of the vision is its lack of originality. According to Akin Oyeboode, it is a product of speculation or forecast of Goldman Sachs; and thus, neither autochthonous; not indigenous or home-grown. Added to this is what he calls the "legitimation crisis attending the country's governing elite", which ensures that after the failure of the promise of life more abundant to all by the year 2000 and the much-touted Vision 2010, which had been in a state of suspended animation for as long as one can remember, Nigerians had become "wise" and simply refused to be easily taken in by "yet

another case of *déjà vu*". He then summarizes his argument that.

"The mantra of the two years since President Yar'adua came to power is to grow Nigeria's economy by 2020, to become one of the top twenty in the world. It is either a monumental delusion or the regime does not even understand the meaning of the commitment it is making. There are no serious plans; there is no road map; the role of education is not adequately appreciated; industrialisation is not seen as a strategic sector for concerted national development; research and development is not given a pride of place as basis of national rebirth, which in turn will valorize the contribution of national intellectuals. The list can go on and on! The Nigerian people get a feeling of being deceived by a government which does not have popular legitimacy in the first place and whose body movement deepens suspicion that it is committed to the old ways of doing things: rigged elections using a compromised electoral system [16].

In the same vein, Usman Abubakar identified four reasons for pessimism. These reasons include the origin of the Vision (which he said came from Goldman Sachs, a USA-based investment and securities company); the objectives of the Vision, which seems to have been dreamed up somewhere in Paris; the wretchedness of the institutions that are supposed to implement the Vision (e.g.: a ruling elite that is addicted to corruption, not to mention the near total absence of infrastructure); lastly the inherent policy confusion of a nation "that got itself converted to the Neo-Conservative religion of 'No National Planning'" but is now inexplicably offering a National Vision Plan. Abubakar believes it was wrong, if not stupid, to base a national vision on the projection or speculation of a commentator who is far removed from the Nigerian realities, peculiarities, problems and aspirations. According to him, there is no guarantee that the projection of two digit growth of our economy will last up to 2020; and also that any growth occasioned largely by the lucky fortunes of an oil boom may not last.

3.3 Socio-economic Factor

In what will pass as an economic problem of vision realisation, the former Central Bank Governor, Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, admitted the tall order of the Vision, when he argues that the realization of the vision requires not less than consistent 13 percent annual growth rate of the

nation's GDP from the present 6 or 7 percent, aside from an annual capital investment of some \$40bn (cited in Godwin, 2006). Nigeria is currently ranked 40th globally and 3rd in Africa. It has a Gross Domestic Product of \$294. 8 billion while Egypt has (\$432. 9b) and South Africa (\$467. 6b) [17]. The economy is not really showing any sign of improvement. Then how can Nigeria jumped to the first 20 in less than a decade?

Also while Olatunji Dare described it as a "vacuous slogans and alibis for doing nothing"; Itse Sagay, referred to it as "FG's craziest concept and the most ridiculous type of aspiration" [12], Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State, in a lecture delivered at the Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) was reported to have dismissed Vision 2020 as "another project that is not realizable" due to what he described as "our unserious approach to it and that Vision 2020 will remain a vision until it is followed with definite action" [12].

In the opinion of Reuben Abati [1], Nigeria is said to be the 40th economy in the world, but its conditions are far below the scale. The state of critical infrastructure in the country is horrendous. The contribution of manufacturing to GDP has been dropping consistently over the years, in the face of massive de-industrialization. The Nigerian economy is also heavily import-dependent. Difficult local conditions, and a continuing disconnect between monetary and fiscal policies as well as high costs of production have conspired to make imports more attractive and affordable. Politically, the country faces an enduring crisis with the electoral system routinely compromised by professional politicians, a situation that is further compounded by the failure of governance and rank corruption within the system. The social sector is also troubled. Religious and ethnic differences continue to result in violent confrontations. Human Rights abuses abound [1].

3.4 Lack of Political Will

Related to this is the penchant for poor implementation of policies. For example, the various MDG projects (2007 Water Project, 2008 Blue Health Facility projects, and 2009 Water Pipeline projects, which are geared towards realizing the vision 2020) that were originally billed to be executed at the various wards and local governments so as impact directly on the life of the people were poorly done. This was so

because contracts for the projects were awarded based on partisan political patronage and they were mostly not executed. The net effects of this are that the people for which the projects are meant in these programmes benefitted minimally from them [18].

3.5 Lack of Masses Support

In addition to the foregoing, part of the reason for pessimism is the huge gap between reform policies and the people. The operational success of the vision hinges largely on the support of the masses. However, the fact of the matter is that Nigerian populace are often not reckoned with by the leaders; hence the difficulty in mobilizing them. Most of the development agenda of successive administrations such as Vision 2010 of the Abacha administration and particularly NEPAD under the Obasanjo civilian government are a product of paternalistic efforts of the Nigerian elite, just like vision 2020 which still wears the toga of earlier programmes whose fruition had always eventuated in a mirage [16]. The failure of these 'vision' can be anchored on the fact that they were not canvassed among the various populations of the country. Hence, the methodology can be faulted on grounds of consultation. The point here is that there is a kind of disconnect between the ruler and the ruled; between the state and the citizens, hence the emerging phenomenon of a state without citizens. With this mind set of the citizenry, it does not appear as if government can mobilize the support of its citizens for its programmes.

4. CONCLUSION

The Nigerian crisis of development, to which successive governments in the country had sought solutions, is not only an economic crisis; it is to a large extent, human and social as well. The Nigerian people have been preoccupied with finding the reasons for the continuing poor performance. Some prescriptions and panacea that have been applied have not only failed, they have also worsened the situation [16]. The Nigerian populace had always expected a stellar performance from their leaders but such expectations had always met with disappointments. It is expected that whatever program or policy (vision or mission) the leadership in Nigeria is adopting to re-grow or reinvent the Nigerian State, such must be an endogenous process that must be responsive to the national and local needs and aspiration of its people. People constitute both the means and

ends of development. Of all the productive forces of any society, the human component is the most important. This is so because whatever vision or mission any society is pursuing, the humans are the fulcrum or the hub around which other things gravitate. In this wise, development must be a people-centred process. When development is independent of the people, its benefits are enjoyed only by the elite.

In our estimation, however lofty the ambition of vision 2020 is, it does not appear as if the people would buy into it. We say this in the light of recent events in the country. The Universities which ordinarily should be the bedrock of research and development have frequently embarked on industrial action because of official negligence. A society is as developed as its education, particularly, the University education. The country is also facing a destabilizing violence from the Boko Haram in the North-Eastern part of the country and the Niger-Delta ethnic militants in the oil-rich southern part. It does not appear as if any investor would be encouraged to invest in a crisis-ridden society - not with the bombings, killings and kidnapping incidences in the country. The country is allegedly loosing 150,000 barrels of crude oil per day to oil thieves in the Niger-Delta. Oil is the main back bone of Nigeria's economy. Corruption among officers in both private and public sectors grow by leaps and bounds, and government does not seem to be doing anything to curb the situation. Only recently an individual public officer stole the entire pension fund meant for retirees, while the Aviation Minister procured two bullet proof Bomb cars with an outrageous sum of N255m; cars that ordinarily should not cost more than N50m per one. With this kind of attitude on the part of the leadership, it becomes difficult for the masses to give support for government programmes.

While visioning as a concept is a veritable framework for development and it is a universal practice. Indeed, most of the world's developments are products of visions and dreams. However, its operational reality goes a long way in its realization. The Nigerian Vision 20: 2020 happens to be a plan that is not realizable owing to the reasons adumbrated in the foregoing analysis. However, for a realistic visioning, it is imperative that it must evolve out of the people and embody their realities, peculiarities and aspirations. Furthermore, it must be rooted in profound intellectualism besides sincerity of purpose. It is not possible to

achieve the objectives of vision 2020 in Nigeria in an atmosphere suffused with corruption, general infrastructural decay, and pervasive immiseration of the generality of the Nigerian populace, general discontent and absence of good governance. According to Abubakar, given the way we are going, this re-incarnation dubbed V20-2020, is almost certainly would go the way of "Housing for All by the year 2000", "Education For All", "Green Revolution", "War Against Indiscipline" and similar promises. In other words, facts on ground do not suggest the possibility of attaining the lofty objectives of vision 2020. Insisting on its pursuance is tantamount to seeking what is neither practicable nor feasible. It is simply seeking pies in the sky; or building a castle in the air.

However, for the vision not to remain a mirage, certain fundamental things need to be addressed. The first is the issue of corruption. That corruption is a problem in Nigeria is already an established fact. It has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. Secondly, there must be massive investment in infrastructural development. For example, Nigeria with a population of over 150 million cannot boast of more than 4,000 Megawatts of electricity [16]. Modern economy runs on constant power. Suffice to say that Nigeria has to invest in massive power generation to realize the vision. Thirdly, there must be involvement of the people in the vision to such an extent that they will see it as their own. Ownership of the vision will propel massive participation for in the words of Aize Obayan [19], "ownership provides a right to review and be part of an evolutionary process that results in a well-defined realistic and sharable vision". The last is the political will on the part of leadership to drive the vision to success.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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