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Vision 20:2020 and Sustainable Development in Nigeria; (A Political Economy Perspective)

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Abstract

Since her foundation in 1914 and subsequent independence in 1960, the Nigerian state has frontally battled developmental and other related challenges. With the assistance of development experts, Nigerian governments at various times have initiated programmes aimed at alleviating poverty, fighting corruption and improving the standard of living of her people. Sadly, these development programmes which most often stipulate time frames and are driven by targets to be accomplished continued to collapse one after the other. Being one of the most recent of these developmental blueprints, Vision 20:2020 was expected to drive Nigeria's effort towards emerging as one of the World's twenty largest economies by the year 2020. Unfortunately, less than ten years to the terminal date of this vision, there is nothing on ground to show that it could be actualized. Drawing heavily from the analytical strength of political economy, this paper critically looked at the concepts of development, vision 20:2020 and sustainable development in Nigeria. The observation is that weaknesses in institutional and legal foundations, policy inconsistency, corrupt and rascally political class among others which continues to combine to frustrate developmental blue prints may derail the Vision 20:2020 aspiration. The paper submitted some empirically derived recommendations that may provide the necessary ingredients needed by this vision to actualize its 20:2020 dreams while delivering sustainable development to Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria is a third world state yearning for political stability and sustainable development. Since her fifty – one years of independence, the various political administrations (Civilian and/or Military) have experimented with diverse of strategies aimed at entrenching socio-economic and political development and also sustaining it. Lately, such aspirations have been further stretched to also see Nigeria emerge among the twenty world largest economies by the year 2020.

Given the size of Nigeria and her enormous wealth, such ambition would not have been out of place but for the fact of other numerous contradictions that continues to plague the young state. Kew and Lewis (2010:365) have observed that Nigeria, with 130 million people

inhabiting 356, 669 square miles, rank as the most populous nation in African and among the ten largest in the world. A center of West African regional trade, culture and military strength. A British colony from 1914 until its independence in 1960, Nigeria's location in West Africa, its size and oil producing status have made it a hub of regional activity. Demographically, it overwhelms the other fifteen countries in West Africa with a population that is nearly 60 percent of the region's total. Moreover, Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) typically represents more than half of the total GDP for the entire sub-region.

Despite this huge platform for greatness, a number of critical challenges have shaped the character of the Nigerian state and illustrate the difficult path that the country has taken during the past half a century. Nigeria's recent history reflects influences from the pre-colonial period, the crucial changes brought by the British colonialism, the post-colonial alternation of military and civilian rule and the economic collapse since 1980 precipitated by Nigeria's political corruption and its over reliance on the petroleum industry.

Since the Nigerian colonial state was conceived and fashioned as interventionist, with broad license to intrude into major sectors of the economy and society, the principal goals of the British colonial enterprise became to control the Nigerian economy and to marshal the flow of resources from the colony to the metropole. A secondary concern was the creation of an economy hospitable to free markets and private enterprise. Thus, Nigeria's interventionist state extended and expanded its management of the economy including broad administrative controls and significant ownership positions in areas as diverse as agriculture, banking, commerce, manufacturing, transportation, mining, education, health, employment and eventually oil and natural gas (Ibid: 375).

After independence in 1960, Nigeria's civilian and military rulers alike expanded the interventionist state which came to dominate all facets of the nation's economic life. Even though successive governments began in the late 1980s to reverse this trend, but privatization and economic reform have been piecemeal at best. President Obasanjo promised to sell off government interests in the telephone, power and oil sectors, although the state remains by far the largest source of economic activity. Efforts by the regimes of the fourth republic to promote better macro-economic management and to root out endemic corruption have not yielded results in the form of economic growth, employment or the reduction of poverty.

Under such prevailing conditions, development could not take place nor was there any socio-economic progress to sustain. The mere fact of continued foreign domination of the socio-economic aspect of the state by the interventionist state and their allies means that development plans and policies putting them in place are removed from the control of Nigeria's leadership. This coupled with the corruption mentality of the Nigerian political class easily explains why well articulated and beautiful development strategies have over the years not translated into physical and sustainable development. Given the enormity of such contradictions, vision 20:2020 as yet another development blueprint designed to catapult Nigeria high up among the twenty leading economies on the global economic ladder by the year 2020 could, to say the least, be hardly achieved.

Conceptual Issues

(i) **Vision 20:2020** – Development and growth have been under the threat of those who should preserve them. They have been subjected to their whims and caprices. Every Nigerian knows that the failure to provide the people with honest and transparent leadership has

resulted in resource hemorrhage and arrested development. The Nigerian state which showed so much potential has been held hostage by a cabal or some bourgeoisie elements in power for a fairly long period of time. Consequently, Nigeria is suffering artificial brain drain while her creative talents are being sucked away to other centers of development. It is this unhealthy state of affairs that informed the emergence of this economic blueprint popularly referred to as vision 20:2020. Vision 20:2020 as a programme is recognized as a means of fast tracking the economic growth of Nigeria. This economic blueprint is aimed to put Nigeria among the twenty developed economies by the year 2020.

(ii) Development – Almost every sector one observed there is mounting evidence that the system that currently drives governance in Nigeria as a nation is not working. Nigerians are not benefiting from the normal objectives for which people belong to countries. Apart from the failure of government to protect Nigerians from local and foreign threats, the level of her infrastructural deficit can only be compared to countries that have just emerged from decades of war. Development, according to Okowa (1996) comes from hard work, discipline, commitment, skills and the intelligent utilization of the above faculties of man in a sustained manner over a fairly long period of time. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Nigeria. Indeed, some ugly things had happened in Nigeria since 1960 that might have put her reputation in danger. One thing is certain – there is serious disconnect between leadership and the people. There had been no direct line of communication between the rulers and the ruled. According to Adeleye (2011:25) “there has been, and still, ample room for intermediate officials to exert their pernicious influence or play dirty politics in the execution of their official duties.”

The concept of development would have gone a long way to enhance and sustain the concept of vision 20:2020 if it were properly executed. For Ake, (1996:56) a development strategy is a comprehensive programme of social transformation. It calls for a great deal of clarity and concentration of purpose for the society at large. The whole hope for development as far as the Nigeria economy is concerned is eluding her because development projects may be initiated for wrong reasons. Often time, developmental projects may be located in places where they are least beneficial economically on account of political considerations. It becomes logical to say that development is the process by which a society undergoes social and economic transformations geared towards improvement in the quality of life of the citizens.

(iii) Sustainable Development – Whatever the perspective that exists for development, it is also widely accepted that development will make little sense if the capacity to sustain its outcome is not there. To that extent, sustainable development has emerged as the current line of thinking in development discourses. Since the interest of this paper centres around how vision 20:2020 can deliver sustainable development in Nigeria, conceptualizing sustainable development becomes pertinent.

Sustainable development connotes development that endures, one that will not roll back or recede even in the face of threatening reversal waves (Omotola 2005). It is development that can guarantee the protection of the environment and resources today and tomorrow. It is also one that is self sustaining and meets the needs of the present and future generations (World Bank 2002). It is important to note that sustainable development is multi-dimensional

and seeks to promote spatial, social, political, economic, and psychological linkages not only among the different sectors of the economy but also among the different regions of the national economy. As such, it encourages equitable distribution of wealth rather than merely emphasizing Gross National Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growths alone. (Akinbode 2003).

(iv) Political Economy – The whole concept of vision 20:2020 will be more meaningful if it is predicated on the analytical tradition of the political Economy. Political economy which looks into the problems of development in society is a cross disciplinary and holistic approach to social analysis. Scholars like Ake (1981) and Nikitin (1983) have made elaborate contributions on the subject-political economy. Political economy writes Momoh and Hundeyin (1999:38) is both a concept as well as a field of study. As a concept, its usage and application cuts across virtually all the disciplines in the social sciences. It is a technical and yet quite useful tool of scientific analysis. It provides for a holistic study of issues, phenomena and policies in any society. The question of why some people are rich and others are poor, the problems and the urge for primitive capital accumulation, the domineering role of capital in society, the control of developing countries by the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank and the IMF), the hegemonization of the Euro-dollar, the social responsibility of the state and the underlying forces and motives behind government's policies, actions and programmes, the social relations of production, distribution and exchange in a particular social formation among others can only be scientifically studied within the context of political economy.

For Collier (2006:2), political economy is about the sources of political power and its use for economic ends. Since the end sought by political economy is economic development, political economy will, therefore, attempt to demystify the puzzles surrounding the sources of wealth of nations, why some countries are rich and others are poor, what conditions creates and facilitates development among others. It is at such junctures that vision 20:2020, development, sustainable development and political economy come to fuse.

According to Aina (1986:1), political economy has passed many phases before being raised to the present level of discourse. In the 19th century, economics was referred to as political economy both in name and also in terms of its subject matter. After liberal scholars, for the purpose of building theories that supported free enterprises had divorced economics from politics, political economy approach was once more recently rediscovered and rehabilitated as a major tool for sharper analysis of socio-economic phenomena.

Three major perspectives of political economy have been isolated. While Mishau (1982:2) sees classical political economy as concerned with the growth and development of economic systems and societies, the Marxists see it as the science for understanding the society in its entirety. For instance, Nikitin (1983:13) conceives political economy as a unified and harmonious doctrine including three integral parts: philosophy, political economy and the theory of scientific communism. Political economy for the Marxists deals with the production of material wealth; the basis of the life of human society.

Dissatisfied with the existing perspectives for the lack of capacities to provide strategies for holistic analysis for social development, some Latin American economists who are working in the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) kicked. The result of their agitation was a third major perspective in political economy known as the World System Perspective.

Apart from the 'globalist' elements, the World System perspective, particularly its dependency variant was also developed as a set of critical renunciation of the analysis, propositions and policy formulations of the conventional social science theorizing on underdevelopment. As carefully observed by Badejo (1990:8) its emphasis as exemplified by the early works of Andre Gunder Frank includes:

- The fact of international relation and international exploitation and domination.
- The necessity and importance of history, and
- The need for a radical transformation of the underdeveloped societies from their capitalist existence into socialist societies before development can occur.

This paper admits that while none of the variants of political economy was relegated, the Marxian and the World System/dependency perspectives were particularly beneficial. This is because while the foundation of the Nigeria state and its subsequent sub-servient role in the international political economy could adequately be explained within the World system perspectives, political class impunity, corruption, cronyism and general economic decline currently plaguing Nigeria could be explained within the nexus of the Marxian political economy.

That, the political economy of Nigeria continues to project political power in bad light while transforming vices such as leadership corruption, impunity of the political class, discrimination of the norms and values of probity and accountability, sycophantic party democracy and cronyism in political relationships among others is a huge antidote to sustainable development. As observed by Igwe (2010:13) corruption has tragically devastated African societies and made millions of people destitute. From South Africa to Egypt and from Gambia to Eritrea, the tentacle of corruption reaches everywhere. From the highest political offices to smallest administrative units of government, corruption ring bell all over Africa. Given this prevailing scenario which is worsening in Nigeria, it remains to be seen how the vision 20:2020 policy framework can provide the ascendancy ladder for Nigeria's elevation up among the world's twenty (20) largest economies by the year 2020.

Vision 20:2020 as Economic Blue Print

(i) **The Relevance** – Vision 20:2020 is a guide about the challenges of visionary leadership and good governance in Nigeria. This blue print is aimed primarily to put Nigeria among the twenty most developed economies in the world by the year 2020. The administration of late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua had proposed to provide plan for development processes by setting the target of catapulting Nigeria to become one of the top (20) economies in the world by the year 2020. The regime had tagged this ambitious long term plan of action vision 20:2020. This vision, it was believed, could be a reliable one. What is left is for the president to assemble a dependable team to assist in achieving its goals and targets. The doubts that have trailed the vision 20:2020 Action plan flows from the monumental corruption currently ravaging the Nigeria state. It is for this that Bishop Ojo, former national secretary of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria had lamented that the late President might think that he had some people with him not knowing that for this people, it is business as usual. According to Ojo (2009:46) "I think vision 2020 is laudable but who knows what might happened if the president is not there, we need to pray for credible people who will live above board and

write their names in posterity". This is where the credible words of the Bishop regarding vision 20:2020 come to matter. What needs to be acknowledged is the fact that a working document in the form of economic plan has been designed to improve the country's socio-economic and political development to at least move the country to a greater height where the country will be seen to have emerged among the top economies of the world.

Its relevance can be felt in areas like agriculture where people should be encouraged by the government through provision of small scale loans to encourage farmers and artisans to go into the production of goods and services such as were obtainable in the early 1970s. Once this type of development commence, Nigeria within the shortest possible time will become a resource ground for the exportation of food stuff and other economic needs to neighbouring countries. It is in appreciation of this fact that governments across the globe have begun to shed weight in respect of their investment in these sectors and by the same token, begin to actively encourage the organized private sector to fill the gap left by the weight shed. Government encouragement has been in the form of creating an environment of (law and order, infrastructural development among others) and direct financial injection (intervention).

This in turn necessitated the need for small and medium scale enterprises – SMEs which have often been the choice for the intervention. The reason, even in today's world of severe economic meltdown, remains as justified today as they were centuries ago, when it was first held that SMEs are society's economic live wire. Recently, the strategic economic importance of SMEs was given credence by the alluring experiences of the Asian Tigers – China, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the BRICS states – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa which have used micro-credit-funded SMEs to reflate their economies and are now world beaters. (Monu 2009:45). The Small and Medium Enterprises where agriculture play a key role adapt more rapidly to changing economic situations and consumer taste.

(ii) Its Impact – Bearing in mind that the thrust of this economic blueprint is aimed at sustainable development, it will help to make a realistic impact in the lives of the Nigerian people if adequate attention is given to the SMEs, particularly as it relates to agriculture and industry. This is because by making the most effective use of the skills of their workforce, SMEs have a general propensity for efficiency relative to the big firms. The import of this is best appreciated against the background of the fact that higher level of efficiency imply lower production cost and arising from this higher level of product competitiveness and higher profit level for the SMEs.

In tandem with this global trend, the Nigerian government has, since 1999, begun to take measures to rekit the SMEs as part of efforts at reordering and redirecting its crude oil propelled economy and part of these efforts include the institution of the vision 20:2020 under which aegis, Nigeria hopes to be among the (20) most advanced and industrialized economies by the year 2020. Achieving the objectives of vision 20:2020 through the SMEs has been given effect through the institution of SMEDAN – Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria to provide for the SMEs. It is, therefore, necessary to stress the fact that both vision 20.2020 and SMEDAN are to be augmented by a pre-existing agency-the Bank of Industry (BOI), which is meant to provide loans on soft terms for the industrial sector particularly the SMEs.

Constraints of Vision 20:2020

As good as this action plan may seem, there are still persons within the corridors of power who may not deem it necessary to ensure that the plan does achieve its laudable objectives. Already, only a few patriotic citizens will admit that all has not been well with Nigeria. We say this because those who are currently profiting from the sheer shenanigan that is going on in the name of governance are contented with maintaining the status-quo so that they can continue with the looting of the national treasury. In his observations, Arikawe (2009) identifies the poor attitude of Nigerians to work, infrastructure decay and poor education curricular as the major impediments to the realization of the vision 20:2020 objectives. He went further to say that government was committed to the realization of this dream but observed that high level corruption, quest for money especially by some Nigerians who do not want to work to make such money and poor power supply were seriously threatening the effort. Sometimes, well paid positions are created just to give jobs to people whose political support is considered important. The country pays for no service rendered. Worse still, it pays for nuisance value. In some cases, people are over paid for what they did not do in order to keep them happy, creating demoralizing disparities between reward and effort.

The crisis of survival appears to be jeopardizing the nation's development strategy. It calls for a great deal of confidence in the leadership and a great deal of commitment by all. It calls for a great deal of clarity and concentration of purpose for the society at large and it calls for social consensus especially on the legitimacy of the leadership.

Vision 20:2020 and Nigeria's Development Strategy

Matched with the horrible and complex nature of Nigerian political system, vision 20:2020 and its anticipated objective of making Nigeria rank among the twenty (20) topmost economies in the world by 2020 remains a remote and unrealistic one. A development strategy changes too many things and not necessarily in a way that supports the survival of the leadership nor even in ways that are predictable. In this sense, it runs against the instincts of a leadership whose preoccupation is to survive and to maintain existing order. Considering the very horrible security situation in Nigeria today, such a possibility already stares everyone in the face. There is always a huge price to pay when a nation is left in the hands of irresponsible and wayward elite to do the only thing it knows how to do – plundering. This elite primitively bleed it pale and callously run it aground. This is today, the story of Nigeria and the situation is becoming horribly complicated. Those outsmarted in the grab and plunder game have taken up arms to get their own share of the cake, provoked mainly by the sudden wealth being flaunted by the lucky few with easy access to public funds. Now, the smell of blood and death hangs on the air like a dreaded epidemic fear walks on all fours. This is because of the dreaded Islamic sect popularly referred to as the "Boko Haram". Yet, the looters are still busy plundering, hoping to use what they have accumulated to purchase safety and comfort for themselves in the midst of death and destruction. According to Ejimkeonye (2009:18) Nigeria appears to be the only country where people are busy eating and drinking poison and yet wishing to live. Nigerian rulers live their whole lives destroying the country and yet wake up each morning expecting to see it flourishing like a "May Flower". According to him, you don't bring home ant infested faggots and expect to be excused from the visit of

lizards. Nigeria is too young to die. It has never been this unsafe, and no part of the country is immune.

Nigeria's judiciary that is supposed to be the beacon of hope has been severely politicized. Politicians now make laws to suit their personal interest since it guarantees that they have the national cake to themselves. Elections in Nigeria are no longer the true test of ones popularity and ability. Where the election is not favourable to the candidate in question, he/she uses some desperate means to get justice by giving what it takes to the judiciary to have his way. Yet, we are talking about an economic action plan the vision (20:2020) that will place Nigeria among the top economies of the world.

Added to the above dilemma is that the power and energy sector of the Nigerian economy has become epileptic and moribund. If this vision must be actualized, there should be some semblance of seriousness on the part of government to make provision for adequate and stable supply of electricity. But this has not been the case. Almost every street in Nigeria today has been converted to industrial area because of the excessive noise of generators with very thick smoke emitting the very dangerous carbon air. This obviously is because government is finding it difficult to make provisions for adequate supply of electricity. We are saying that if this action plan must be achieved, it requires that adequate preparation must be put in place by the government to sustain it and encourage the people.

Conclusion

Vision 20:2020 is a developmental action plan of the Yar'Adua administration aimed at fast tracking the pace of socio-economic development of Nigeria in such a way that by the year 2020, Nigeria would have emerged as one of the twenty (20) largest economies in the world. Its forerunners in Nigeria's economic planning includes the First and Second National Development Plans and also the Operation Feed the Nation and Green Revolution.

Unfortunately, despite the laudable objectives and developmental targets of this vision, there are visible fears that political variables may militate against its success. This is even as monumental official corruption, ruling class impunity, security challenges, administrative incompetencies and culture of wastage all of which facilitated the derailment of the previous development plans are still rampant among Nigerians.

Vision 20:2020 and sustainable development are heavily dependent on each other for their objectives to be actualized. Yet, the connecting linkage between them remains extremely weak. It is in realization of this that the authors conclude that the Nigerian state and government must purge the system of all the centrifugal variables mostly political, administrative and attitudinal for the developmental objectives of vision 20:2020 and sustainable development to be realized.

Recommendations

The puzzle remains what is to be done to reposition Nigeria and get it set to achieve the objectives of vision 20:2020 and sustainable development. Any vision aimed at catapulting Nigeria, despite its present rating, into the league of global big economies by years 2020 must be sweeping, radical and fundamental. To that extent, all segments of the Nigerian society including the political, economic and socio-cultural must come in unity to make this vision become a reality. Our recommendation, therefore, is that a holistic approach cutting

across the marxian through the dependency to the welfarist perspectives be explored in strengthening the Nigerian society.

- (i) The class character of the Nigerian society must be addressed with the aim of stamping out all forms of oppression including class and ethnic marginalization. Strong institutions and agencies that can check the impunities of the political class must take root in the system and the frequency of structural violence against the masses of Nigeria must be halted.
- (ii) The culture of probity and accountability of public officers to the people on how resources allocated to their sectors for developmental purposes are used must be entrenched and sustained while the virtue of transparency in public offices and even private enterprises must be encouraged and celebrated. By so doing, those responsible for implementation of the laudable objectives of the vision will become less inclined to involvement in corrupt practices.
- (iii) Nigerians must be socialized into the mentality of collective self reliance and collective struggle against poverty, ignorance and backwardness. At all levels, education curricular must be designed to accommodate those variables that build confidence in Nigerians and unity among the vast pluralities of the Nigerian state. It is only when this is done that the collective struggle will destroy poverty and ignorance and pave way for the actualization of vision 20:2020.
- (iv) The dependency garb Nigeria and indeed most African states continue to wear in International Economic Relations has continue to militate against the realization of this laudable vision. A situation whereby London, Paris and Washington D.C continue to adjust and regulate the vision 20:2020 policy and its implementation is, to say the least, a sad news for the entire idea of national development and vision 20:2020 in particular.
- (v) There is an urgent need for attitudinal change among the people of Nigeria. Nigerians must imbibe and showcase positive attitudes towards their responsibilities and judgments. This understanding may have informed Jonathan (2009:05) to assert that attitudinal change is the key to development. A country like Nigeria where unwillingness of the people to change from the bad to the good order need attitudinal change if the aspirations of vision 20:2020 must be realized.
- (vi) Finally, it has been suggested by research and development experts that education, research and innovation are the three major factors that will help place Nigeria among the world's top twenty economies by years 2020. Research being the process of proffering solutions to human problems through well defined methods is intertwined with education and innovation (Orakpo 2012:30). Establishment of research fund by the federal government and presentation of researches with clear cut statements will speak out the direction which Nigeria wants to channel her developmental efforts.

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