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Failed Development Vision, Political Leadership and Nigeria's Underdevelopment: A Critique

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's underdevelopment is more of poor implementation than lack of development visions and programmes. Policy summersault and development projects abandonment are common. Political leaders need to be sensitized on putting society interest first and committing to development visions and programmes. Nigerians need to be sensitized on holding political leaders accountable to campaign promises and development programmes. Using the critical research method of analyzing available secondary information, this study reviews continual ineffective implementation of development visions and projects. Individual and corporate commitment to the banishment of corruption is recommended for way forward in the country's development.

Key words: Failed development visions, political leadership, underdevelopment, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, which accounts for one-fifth of the population of the African continent, is very critical to Africa's business and development. Hence, this critique focuses on Nigeria's underdevelopment arising from failed development vision and programmes.

Where there is no vision, the people perish is an aphorism that has become common knowledge among the Nigerian political leaders, who often articulate visions in colourful and expensive development plans, policies, programmes, etc., but mostly for chanting. They are chicken-hearted in the implementation of these plans, except to enrich cronies, political stooges and royal choristers or sycophants. At the end of the tenure, no actualization of the vision and no regrets for the failure; no review and no direction. Yet, such a non-performing leader often aspires to continue in office even after his tenure has expired. If and when, he leaves or steps aside or is forced out of office, the successor jettisons some of the visions of the previous leader(s), adds to the list and repeats the circle of chanting vision slogans for inaction. He may even abandon all the programmes of the previous leaders for his new ones, or panel-beat them to feign some air of originality, ingenuity and sagacity.

Although, Nigeria is the second African exporter of crude petroleum oil and the sixth in the world, the nation's underdevelopment is associated with weak management and corruption. Nigeria has been overtaken in development by the middle 1990s by some other developing countries that were worse than the country in the 1960s. These countries include Malaysia, Indonesia and Venezuela. Nigeria lags behind many sub-Saharan African countries, including Cameroon, Zambia, Senegal, Ghana, Togo and Benin in GNP per capita. The income of the average Nigerian declined by 10% from 1993 to 1994, when the GNP per capita dwindled from \$310 to \$280. There

was further decline to \$260 in 1995. The country abounds with abandoned projects and policy summersaults. The words of the political leaders are not their bonds, nor do people hold them accountable to their promises (Eneh, 2000, 2006).

This study was undertaken to sensitise both the political leader and the led on the evils of development project abandonment and policy summersault resulting from corruption in high places.

Information is power. A sensitized political leader is likely to take development visions more seriously and will insist on their good implementation. A sensitised people will hold the political leader accountable to his development promises.

The research looked at some of Nigeria's development visions, policies, projects, programmes and plans from 1970 to date vis-à-vis the country's underdevelopment consequent upon their poor implementation. Nigeria is awash with captivating development visions, policies and plans, but corruption-induced failure of implementation of development projects on the part of the political leaders is responsible for underdevelopment in the country. In spite of numerous and sound development visions, policies and programmes articulated in colourful and expensive development plans, why are there poor implementation of development projects and underdevelopment in Nigeria?

The study used the critical research method of identifying and analyzing available secondary data and information to review the recurring occurrence of ineffective implementation of development visions and government projects in Nigeria and made recommendations as to the way forward in the country's development.

According to Oji (1997), the social contract theory postulates that:

- Each man in the society surrenders all his rights to the community; the community is therefore sovereign and its power absolute. However, it is the act of the people that establishes Government
- People enter into social contract among themselves and between them and Government whereby they agree to surrender certain rights to the state in return for security and the protection of their inalienable rights. These rights include the right to life, property and liberty. All men are born with these rights equally and the Government must protect them. Where the Government fails to do so, the citizens reserve the right to challenge its authority and if necessary, overthrow it. Thus, the citizens retain the supreme power to hire and fire

The legitimacy of a Government and its power to govern a people depends on their consent. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Government to perform for the people, much as it is the responsibility of the people to monitor the activities of the political leaders with a view to renewing their mandate for good performance or using constitutional provisions to fire them for non-performance.

Definition of terms: Political leadership is a ruler that guides the people to achieve development visions or goals. It is critical to a country's development (Eneh, 2007).

A development project is a subset of a programme, which is a long-term development plan (five, ten years). A project is an activity sometimes within a programme directed towards the achievement of given objectives (Onah, 2006a).

To avoid failure arising from deviation and human error element and to ensure the realization of project objectives, monitoring and evaluation are undertaken. It involves coordination and

efficient use of resources for the attainment of stated objectives. Monitoring assesses the quantity as well as the quality of the activities and output. It is mostly concerned with the delivery process. The exercise leads to the discovery of difficulties that were not foreseen before the commencement of the work. Amendments may thus be recommended. Monitoring precedes evaluation and is used to ensure progress towards expected outcomes. Evaluation usually comes at the end of a project or programme. There could be midterm evaluation to know the impact of a programme on the people (Jhingan, 2007).

FAILED DEVELOPMENT VISION, POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND NIGERIA'S UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Immediately after the Nigerian civil war in January 1970, the Gowon-led federal government (1966-1975) came up with the vision of the 3Rs: Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, as part of a follow-up development plan to the No victor, no vanquished declaration to end that war. Till date, marginalization, which led to the war, has not become anachronistic in Nigeria. Rather, ethnic militia and insecurity are tools for resisting continued grave marginalization of some sections of the country, which unarguably account for the human and material resources of the nation. In burgeoning poverty, the people are far from being rehabilitated and the economy has degenerated overmuch from the pre-war situation of the early 1960s, when the Eastern Nigeria's economy, for instance, was adjudged one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Eneh, 2005).

The Gowon administration also launched the Second National Development Plan with 5 main goals of building: (1) A free and democratic society, (2) a just and egalitarian society, (3) a united, strong and self-reliant economy, (4) a great and dynamic economy and (5) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (Eneh, 2008; Onah, 2006b).

Over 37 years after the Plan was launched in 1970, none of its 5 goals has been achieved. Instead of a free and democratic society, we have a militarized Nigerian society, with a great havoc done to the psyche of the citizenry. For a just and an egalitarian society, we have injustice and insecurity conundrum characterized by child abuse, ritual murder and extra-judicial killing, cultism, hostage-taking, ethnic and religious riots. Far from being united, strong and self-reliant, the Nigerian nation is divided along tribal and religious lines. Patriotism is a stranger to an average Nigerian's lexicon, the federal character and Nigerian factor having replaced merit and rights. Rather than offer bright opportunities for all citizens, Nigeria is a land of failed people, with corruption, kleptocracy and unemployment characterizing the country's political leadership. Wrong reactions or responses to this ugly situation include brain-drain (Eneh, 2008).

Under the cover of addressing poverty and the food needs of the nation, the same administration also came up in 1972 with many programmes, including the Import Substitution Programme, the National Accelerated Food Production Programme and the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank. But, today, the country is worse off with import dependency and food insecurity (Eneh, 2008).

Similarly, the Obasanjo-led federal government of 1976-1979 introduced the operation feed the nation. The Shagari government of 1979-1983 came up with the green revolution. The Buhari/Idiagbon administration 1983-1985 introduced the war against indiscipline, to which the Abacha government added corruption, to get war against indiscipline and corruption. The Abacha-led government also baptized the Babangida's Better Life Programme to obtain the Family Economic Advancement Programme and introduced the Vision 2010. The Babangida-led

government of 1985-1993, known for political Maradonaism and self-styled evil genius, had the longest list of development visions and programmes, including the National Directorate of Employment, the Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, the Better Life Programme, Peoples Bank, Community Bank and the National Economic Reconstruction Fund. The Obasanjo-led Third Republic of 1999-2007 came up with the National Poverty Eradication Programme, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the sectoral reform agenda and mentioned the Vision 2020 (Onah, 2006a; Abdulhamid, 2008).

These development visions, policies and programmes are often paraded alongside the international goals, treaties, conventions, protocols, etc., which the political leaders merely parrot. Usually, the National Planning Commission (NPC) goes into elaborate packaging of the visions, programmes or policies. For example, the NEEDS was so well packaged to the point of having blueprints for the State level programme State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS); the local government level programme Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (LEEDS) and the community level programme Community Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (CEEDS).

The present Yar'Adua-led federal government has a 7-point agenda of power and energy, agriculture and food security, wealth creation and employment generation, qualitative and functional education, the Niger Delta, mass transportation and land reforms (Newswatch, 2008). Within 16 months, it has been white-washed or modified to: electoral reform, rule of law, the Niger Delta, power and energy sector, rebuilding human capital, accelerating economic reforms and security (Daily Times, 2008).

Yet, neither the first nor the second version can be distinguished from the NEEDS, the Phase I (2004-2007) of which has been adjudged a failure. But, they are being given flesh and articulated as fresh vision documents. Most policies in Nigeria are wonderful, but ultimate summersault, abandonment or failure awaits them. Nigeria is replete with brilliant, impeccable and well written policies. The problem is implementation. The logical and expensively produced policies often end there as policies. Weak efforts at implementation often rubbish them through corruption. Thus, NEEDS have failed to sort out our needs (Ebigbo, 2008).

Onah (2006a) opines that all development visions and programmes fail in Nigeria because of poor handling by corrupt and poor/hungry politicians/bureaucrats, leading to growing poverty symptoms, including electoral frauds; untrue and inefficient representatives; violence: religious crises, crises in Middle belt and Niger Delta regions, hostage taking and cult; food insecurity; low agricultural production; illiteracy (that also weakens democracy); crime; high mortality and morbidity rates; prostitution and poor health and national image; low GDP and GNP and high unemployment rate.

Reacting to a report, Aniekpon (2008) challenged Nigerian leaders, rulers and political heavyweights to think of where Nigeria was heading for if an individual could burn a whopping sum of N270 million and gather only the ash for a fetish deal, in a country of grinding poverty where many homes cannot solve even problems that may require just N100.

Nigeria dropped in global economic ranking to 101st position out of 125 nations studied and the economy is still burdened with double-digit inflation, estimated at 13% and deteriorating infrastructure. Nigeria was placed 159th out of 177 countries of the world examined for the human development. Nigeria also lost 34 places (falling to rank 112) in the basic requirements sub-index, which highlights the fundamentals for achieving sustainable growth, namely strong institutions, adequate infrastructure, a supportive macro-economic environment and good basic health and education (Famakinwa, 2006).

The World Bank estimated that 50% of the federal roads have deteriorated in the last 6 years to the extent that it costs more to send goods from Lagos to Maiduguri than to send them to Europe. Due to the poor conditions of the roads, 33,600 people died in road accidents from year 2001 to 2005, while 34,200 people sustained various degrees of injuries during the period. The power sector is in perpetual crisis and cannot drive meaningful development (Onah, 2006b).

Although, there is an overdose of natural water in Nigeria, citizens groan daily under the weight of lack of safe domestic water. The average urban resident, who cannot afford to sink a borehole, resort to fetching water for domestic purposes from shallow wells or from streams up to 3-hour walking distances away. At the current estimated 5.3% rate, urbanization in Nigeria is among the highest in the world, occasioning overcrowding and its attendant socio-economic problems, including environmental degradation (United Nations System in Nigeria, 2001).

Graduate unemployment has occasioned sophisticated crimes and social vices of alarming dimensions, leading to palpable security conundrum, manifested in youth restiveness, cultism in schools, unprecedented wave of armed robbery, drug addiction and the attendant mental derangement, etc. Lack of jobs is pushing increasing number of Nigerian youth into the commercial auto-byke transport business, where a regrettable number of them encounter road mishaps on daily basis (Eneh, 2008).

The incidence of street children, hazardous and exploitative child labour, child unemployment, poor nutrition and health, commercial sexual exploitation, girl prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, juvenile abortion and wastage/spilling of human lives/blood, teenage motherhood and child abandonment and dumping on the street, stunting and wasting (among under-five children), child begging, youth drug addiction, delinquency and crimes with the danger of the children becoming hardened criminals and various other vicious means of livelihood, as well as various harmful traditional practices against women remain nagging symptoms of underdevelopment and deepening poverty in Nigeria. With the Nigerian population quite young (47% under-18 and 20% under-5), it is quite worrisome that about 570,000 Nigerians were infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in 1999 (FOS and United Nations Children's Fund, 1999).

As Agbase (2008a, b) noted, Nigeria remains the most populous black nation in the world, rich in human and vast mineral, natural and agricultural resources, with great scholars and dazzling footballers and has the most vibrant, irresponsible and iconoclastic press in Africa, nay the third world. It mints more billionaires in a year than all other African countries put together can come close to in a decade. Its democracy is a government of contracts and contractors by the few and for the few while the people wallow in poverty and misery in the midst of plenty.

Abu (2008) opines that corruption is Nigeria's number one enemy. It is responsible for nearly all the pains that we now experience as a nation and as individual Nigerians. Corruption has crippled our economy, ruined our roads, health and educational institutions. It has put so much money in the pockets of a few privileged people and rendered the vast majority of the people poor. The level of impoverishment is getting more acute and the pains of the ever growing legion of the poor has become very unbearable.

Amid corruption in Nigeria, vision, policy, plan, politics, principle, conscience, wealth, commerce, pleasure, sports, knowledge, science, worship and morality are all corrupt. In its eight years of existence, the Independent Corrupt Practices (and other related offences) Commission, ICPC, has remained a toothless bulldog, having very little to show as evidence of its success in the war against corruption. It almost watches like a spectator in the war against corruption. On the other hand, the

Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, another anti-graft agency, faces enormous challenges from indicted former public office holders, who use their loots to buy their ways to freedom (Akintunde, 2008).

As the erstwhile Minister of National Planning confirmed, the circumstances are still so devastating for the vast majority of Nigerians in spite of the nation's enormous endowments, because we have no serious intention to turn things around or lack the capacity to face the challenges or are still searching for the right strategies to tackle the core issues of true development (Dagash, 2008).

Proffering a solution, Nwosu (2008), urges the policy makers and implementers in the democratic Nigeria to pay attention to the battered, dehumanized, deprived and neglected Nigerian citizenry. Democracy without improved quality of life for the generality of the citizenry is useless, nonsensical, empty, unsustainable and an unforgivable insult to the people's intelligence. More than 95% of the 140 million Nigerians (FRN, 2007) are traumatized and dying of extreme poverty and hunger, while a 5% privileged few have by fair or foul means cornered and monopolized Nigeria's economic, political, health and socio-cultural common wealth.

CONCLUSIONS

Failed development visions, abandoned development programmes and policy summersault are common problems that militate against development in Nigeria. They are products of corruption and political leadership ineptitude that characterize the country. These factors combine to mastermind underdevelopment and a failed Nigerian state, in spite of abundant natural and human resources in the country. Corruption in Nigeria rubbishes good development dreams, visions, policies and plans and keeps development crawling. Therefore, for any meaningful development to take place and root in Nigeria, corruption must first be fired by the political leadership who initiates, breeds and perpetuates it.

This has serious implications for African business and development because Nigeria accounts for one-fifth of the population of the African continent and is more endowed with human and natural resources than most African countries. Therefore, many other African countries look up to Nigeria for business and development.

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