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Interests, Preferences, and the Realization of Goals: Nigeria and Vision 20:2020 (A follow-up to Eddy Erhagbe's Position)¹

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Abstract

Nigeria has always been seen as the most populous country in Africa with abundant natural resources. There have been several works blaming those who see Nigeria as a failed state. A lot of Nigerians are deluded with the unfounded dream of Nigeria being among the largest and most stable 20 economies of the world by 2020. The purpose of this paper is counter such dreams. This paper also attempted a passing

¹ See Eddy O. Erhagbe, "Actualizing Nigeria's Vision 20:2020 Goals: Imperativeness of Arts and Social Science Education", *African Research Review*, 6(4), No. 27, October 2012: 93-109

response to a few ideas by Eddy O. Erhagbe (2012). The paper argued that the interests and preferences of a people determine their goals, and their ability to realize such goals. In the case of Nigeria, the paper argued that the root to Nigeria's myriad of problems is a predominant poverty of values: excessive attachment to short-term satisfaction and lack of transcendental values (such as honesty, integrity, efficiency, passion to contribute to the development of one's society and world, and so on). These lacks explain why ethnicism may continue to thrive in Nigeria. The type of interests and preferences that are founded on poor value-schemes never make the realization of any worthwhile vision possible. Vision 20:2020 demands huge sacrifice, mutual trust, and collaboration. But, because Nigerians are gravely divided by unproductive ethnic sentiments, they cannot sacrifice their individual and group selfish interests. This means that the level of collaboration will always be very low since the various groups cannot trust themselves enough to really work together. They cannot develop a common pool of goods from which to draw, for the good of all. That means that they cannot achieve any common vision. Therefore, the realization of Vision 20-20-20 is very slim unless we drastically change our trend in the next few years.

Key words: Vision 20:2020; Interests; Preferences; Ethnicism; Failed State; Values

Introduction

Wishes are not horses. If they were, “beggars would ride” on horses without much ado. This is a widely known English proverb. And so, the former president of Nigeria, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, wished and made it public: Nigeria would (aspire to) be one of the largest, most stable, industrialized, and consolidated twenty (20) economies in the world by the year twenty-twenty (2020). That was the vision that defined his administration which lasted from May 29th 2007 till his death on May 5th, 2010. That formal vision was replicated in some states by their governors, in different ways. In most cases, these replications were meant to make the president ‘feel’ that the Governors in question were his ‘boys’, were in his ‘camp’, and were ‘loyal’ to him. It was sheer copy-cattng, and evidence of shallowness and sycophancy. They were not real visions.

Visions imply seeing ahead – projecting into the future what an individual, an institution, or a society, intends to achieve in times to come. Visions can be short-term (planned to be achieved within a few weeks or months) or long-term (planned to be achieved within a year or more). Every vision has content: a goal aimed at by the agent who has the vision. A vision can remain personal – not publicized for objective assessment. It can also be made public. Private visions are decisions made by an individual, and aimed at without public knowledge. The intentions of agents who engage in private (unpublicized) visions could be to ensure that their pursuit of the content of their vision(s) is not distorted, disturbed, or simply affected, by the

standards and expectations from the public. On the other hand, visions can be made public, either: (a) to set-up public expectations which continuously “demand” for fulfilment, and at the same time serve as propellant for the agent who has set-up the vision, or (b) simply to appear *like* others – to announce that “Since others... we should also...”

The focus of this paper is on the vision of the unit called Nigeria, as conceived, announced, and “accepted” by Nigerians. The vision is a typical publicized vision. Hence, the subtle aim of this paper is to investigate whether this vision was made public because those involved are willing to realize it. If they are willing, the purpose of making it public is ‘to set-up public expectations which serve as propellants for the vision.’ If they have shown by their actions and level of commitment to the vision, that they are not willing, it means that they announced the vision simply because they want to appear like others. This paper wonders whether there are some ‘supplements’ in the preferences and interests of Nigerian citizens which indicate that what is more correct is that vision 20:2020 was made a public declaration not because there is a decision and willingness to realize it, but more because Nigeria needs to appear like others who set goals and visions. Nigeria needs to ‘appear like others who set worth-while goals’ so that she may continue to receive aid and supports from more organised countries, agencies and corporations who want to support individuals and countries that have worth-while goals.

To realize its aim, this paper will: (a) present the core issues and aspirations of the Vision 20-20-20 as made public by the Nigerian government during the Yar’Adua administration, and ‘continued’ ever since then; (b) consider the influence of preferences and (individual and group) interests on the realization of goals; (c) argue that the preferences of most Nigerian citizens are too biased with ethnic affiliations that they are: not objective, low in standard, very short-term in focus, excessive in individual and ethnic interests, and culminating in mutual distrust, insecurity and lack of peace; (d) conclude that adjustments in the predominant preferences (fundamentally defined by shallow short-term ethnic interests) is the basic condition for the realization of Nigeria’s vision of being among the best 20 economies of the world in the year 2020. Not to do what is involved in (d), is to have consolidated the decision not to realize the content of the Vision – no matter what Nigeria’s GDP may read. This is because the predominant ‘shallow short-term ethnic interests’ will continue to dis-stabilize whatever may be regarded as the percentage in the growth in Nigeria’s economy.

Nigeria’s Vision 20:2020

The primary issue that defines Nigeria’s Vision is that she envisages herself to be among the first 20 countries of the world in terms of industrialisation, democracy, and human resources, by the year 2020. The facts are available that this is not the first

time Nigeria is *announcing* that she is embarking on such laudable goals. The first of such post-independence plans was the First National Development Plan (1962-68); then the Second Development Plan (1970-74). The Third National Development Plan was meant to run for five years (1975-80); then the Fourth National Development Plan (1981-85), and the Fifth National Development Plan (1988-92) in the middle of which the World Bank-International Monetary Fund Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (1986-92) was launched. Towards the dawn of the millennium, there was such goal-reflecting phrases like: “health for all by the year 2000”, “food for all by the year 2000”, and “housing for all by the year 2000”. Besides, 1999 was the year when some new economic strategies were launched. These strategies were meant to run in two phases of four years each: Phase 1 (1999-early 2003) and Phase 2 (mid-2003-2007). The second phase of this strategy led to the launching of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2004. This strategy (NEEDS) was later upgraded to NEEDS II in 2007. If these strategies were successful; if the goals were pursued with commitment; if these plans were not just announced but embarked on with commitment – with the people making demands for the realization of these plans – human development in Nigeria would have improved by far than what is obtainable now. But, the fact is that these plans were merely announced. They were not pursued. The people did not demand that they be realized. So, Nigeria failed in each of them.

Based on the review of some authors on the issues at stake, Ayodele, Obafemi and Ebong (2013: 147-48) outlined several reasons why these laudable plans failed almost from the moment they were made public. Some of these are: (1) the preponderance of policy lapses; (2) high incidence of poorly implemented projects in the public sector investment programme; (3) most of these plans were simply over ambitious – with too many objectives and unrealistic targets; (4) there have continued to be conflicts in objectives between and within states in the context of federalism; (5) lack of communication in relation to the articulation and preparation of development plans; (6) structural problems which require long-term processes before they can be redressed; (7) implementation of incorrect answers to correct questions; (8) the massive expenditure of national funds, not on the citizens, but on certain groups (such as the military, businessmen, civil servants, and so on), and for securing political power; (9) large scale corruption – particularly since the oil boom – with such results as: the abuse of contract system, non-performance of contracts with the connivance of monitoring teams, supply of fake materials to government stores, non-adoption of the prescribed technology and specification in public construction, over-invoicing, and so on; (10) “planning without facts” which includes: paucity and poor quality of information/data as well as weak institutions of planning; (11) the fact that “we have had leadership which does not appreciate the importance of developing

productive structures... governments which believe in spending before saving; and rates short-term popularity above long-term benefit”

Interests, Preferences, and the Realization of Goals

Goals are defined by objects of interests. To have chosen something as a goal means to have preferred that object to others. People’s preferences are defined by their deeper interests – since where an individual’s several interests clash, he chooses the one which he considers to be deeper and of more worth. This means that the determination which makes possible the realization of any goal – no matter how long, and no matter the difficulties in the process – depends on the depth of interest and placement of values, by the agent, with regard to the goal.

Ethnicism, Selfish Interests, and social existence in Nigeria

There is a general pride that defines the owners of every culture and ethnic group. Among the Igbos, there is a common and intentionally humiliating way of referring to an Igbo person of Nsukka extract (“Nwa Nsukka”), to some others from other parts of Enugu State (as “Ndi waa-wa”), to those from Ebonyi State (simply as “Ndi Abakaliki aaa”), and to those from Western Nigeria (“Ndi ofe mmanu”). But, the question is: must we humiliate others to be useful to our society? Does our momentary feeling of superiority contribute anything to the development of our world? A close analyses reveal that the ‘best’ that results from such humiliating comments is a certain feeling of pride and superiority whereas in actual sense, the person who is trying to present himself as superior has nothing better to contribute to the society than the person he is trying to humiliate and talk-down on.

Thus, Kew and Lewis (2013) were right: Nigeria is an “unfinished State”. The mixture of the ethnic groups was not properly done by the colonial masters who amalgamated the different groups. More unfortunately, that mixture has not been smoothed by Nigerians themselves 100 years after the amalgamation, and 54 years after independence. Martin Meredith’s analyses (Meredith, 2006) of Nigeria were insightful; Chinua Achebe’s (Achebe, 2013) were jolting, but true; so too were Darren Kew and Peter Lewis’s (Kew and Lewis, 2013). These four authors would easily agree with hundreds of other minds that ethnic rivalry in Nigeria and the destructive role of ethnicism in Nigeria have been and may continue to be very determining. Ayodele, Obafemi and Ebong (2013, p. 153) were right, therefore, to have argued that in Nigeria “ethnic consciousness supersedes national consciousness”. This is why ethnicism has remained the primary factor that defines the interests and actions of the greater percentage of Nigerians – of *all* classes and walks of life. Thus, social existence in Nigeria is a battle of one major ethnic group (Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba) against the other major two (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba), two against one, but most of the time, each against the others. This battle by Nigerians on

the grounds of Ethnicism has made the greater percentage of them to define their interests and actions based on ethnic divides.

On the Possibilities of realizing Nigeria's Vision 20:2020

The possibilities are so slim. Six years away from 2020, there are little chances that Nigeria will realize her grand vision of being one of the best (most stabilized) 20 economies of the world by the year 2020. Some of the factors that make social and economic growth to be possible and stabilized are: an active citizenry with possible common aspirations; a reliable and efficient public administration; a functional educational system; and security of lives and property. The first of the above factors have a lot of influence on the second and the third, and no doubt also, on the fourth. This paper will pay a brief attention on the four factors listed above, with a special emphasis on the first. Before we continue with an explanation about how these factors are related, it is important to indicate that in the evaluation of social problems, Henry David Thoreau's position needs to be always borne in mind. In his *Walden* (written in 1854), Thoreau wrote very lucidly that in every analysis of social evil, there is (always) a thousand hacking at the branches of evil, to one who is hacking at the root. This second group of people can be referred to as "root-strikers". One interesting thing about them is that their ratio in relation to those striking at the branches is alarming and insignificant (1:1000)! Thus, while many authors would point at certain factors that are so important but not primary in addressing the trouble with Nigeria, we pay attention here on the factors outlined above because they are at the root of the problem with Nigeria. A deserving and committed attention on these primary issues would be the closest to what Thoreau meant by root-striking.

Many authors (Nigerians and non-Nigerians) have tried to 'hack' at the 'undevelopment' crisis in Nigeria. More specifically, there have been attempts to draw attention to what Nigeria needs to do most if she is to realize the MDGs and the (bogus) Vision 20:2020. For so many, the primary thing is to restructure and improve on the educational system in the country. For some, the problem is an unstable and in fact high-jacked electric power supply. For some others, it is the development of science and technology that will enable Nigeria be among the largest and most stable 20 economies of the world by the year 2020. For others, it is the expansion of the Nigerian market in such a way that there is an improved involvement of the private sector, and a consolidation of the partnership between the private and public sectors. For others, vision 20-20-20 will be realized if and only if the first of the MDGs (alleviation of poverty) is realized. The factor that is harped-on the most is what is called "political will" and improved politicking.

Chinua Achebe, as we wrote in 2012 (Agbodike and Ajah, 2012), had long argued that the trouble with Nigeria is squarely poor leadership. That is, the last of the factors indicated above. This means, therefore, that if we stretch the logic of Achebe's position, he would gladly agree that the factor that will continue to determine the success or failure of Nigeria in the realization of her Vision 20:2020 is political leadership. As interesting and convenient as that view may be, we had argued that it is a typical case of blame-pushing. It is an example of hacking at the branch, and not the root. This is because: if after 54 years of independence the Nigerian state has been crawling, despite her abundant human and natural resources; and all through those years, we have continued to point at our leaders as *the* problem with the country – whereas power has continued to shift hands from one man to another, from one region to another, and from one form of governance to another – one is drawn to look elsewhere (and deeper) for the problem. It becomes most reasonable to identify a factor that is deeper, more influential, and therefore, more determining, as the root of our tree of state failure.

One factor which needs to be given a deserving attention because of its determining influence on what is happening in Nigeria is Ethnicism. This is because: (a) it defines the interests of Nigerians from the various “regions” of the country; (b) the interests are so divided that the valuation schemes are varied and seemingly irreconcilable; (c) the divided interests make Nigerians really unable to unite against any common enemy or for any worthwhile goal – say, an unproductive political group, or improvements in the educational sector. This division saps any energy and commitment invested by any few persons against any such enemy; (d) the interests are so divided, the valuation schemes so varied and seemingly irreconcilable, and activism and possibilities of honest collaboration so sapped, that reliable and efficient public administration is almost impossible since each person in any administrative position works hard, not to improve the country from where he or she is working, but to increase the chances of people from her region getting their own share of the ‘national cake’. If any person should raise a clarion call for the citizens to jointly address a situation – say an inefficient president – the first response he will get from the majority of fellow citizens include such questions as: ‘Who is making this invitation?’ ‘Which part of the country is he from?’ (If he is from a region different from the region where the incumbent president is from, then, the next question is likely to be) ‘So, it is now that a person from region X is the president that this author will realize that “the president is inefficient”?’

Above all these, the deepest part of the ethnic root of Nigeria's problem is a materialist value system which sustains shamelessness. This is why public administrators in Nigeria never resign their positions when they are accused of having involved themselves in one scandal or the other. Why would any of them resign? After all, the words ‘scandal’, ‘disgrace’, ‘disappointment’, and their likes lack any

content in the context of Nigeria's social existence. So, one wonders what we should expect from an administrator who: (a) has low value standards, (b) is supported (and is later given traditional title as a community hero) by his ethnic group (no matter what he does at the national level), (c) cannot be challenged by the members of his ethnic group for not delivering good governance – after all, they are by no way better than him, and above all, they will be very willing to challenge any decision or group that criticizes their “own” (“Onye nke anyi”, “Onye be anyi”) who is occupying a political position, and through whom we expect some huge share of the ‘national cake’ to be brought to our place. The result is simple: lives and property are never secure since there is mutual distrust.

Let us return to Chinua Achebe. A good read of his last work, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, reveals a supplement – in fact his last position, his testament. What is revealed, which we regard as the supplement in his views is this: Achebe agrees with us that the trouble with Nigeria is not just political leadership. It is something deeper: ethnic biases and conflicting interests. But, if we go beyond Achebe's position in *The trouble with Nigeria*, we notice that while ethnic biases have remained a decisive factor in social existence in Nigeria, at the deepest level, the ultimate values of the members of each of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria (which define their interests and preferences) are simply materialistic. None of their values is transcendental, really futuristic, and universal in character.

Most times, when mention is made about the influence of social values on social cohesion, organisation, and development, some African authors raise claims that Africans – very funny enough, Nigerians too – have what they call uniquely ‘traditional African or Nigerian values’. Erhagbe (2012, p.97) asked: ‘how has the Nigerian society “continued” with leaders to jettison the old age values that formed the bedrock of the progressive development of Nigeria before now?’ [sic]. According to him, there are such ‘African and more specifically Nigerian values’. He listed them: (1) Respect for the Social Order, (2) Respect for Customs and Traditions, (3) Subscribing to Parameters for Adjudging Success, (4) Existence and Respect for Moral Codes of Conduct. Unfortunately, in the views of Erhagbe (2012), colonialism and “the attendant social phenomenon of urbanization” “distorted and dislocated” the social fabric of Nigeria. A lot of issues are up here for discussion and analysis: which human society in the world has flourished without these values outlined by Erhagbe? Which human society is not affected by changes in social organization? But, one fact that has however remained evident is that in societies where these values were deeply rooted and are parts of the cultures of the people, no matter what the experiences were, they had ways of adjusting their experiences while still keeping these values afresh, in use, paramount, and determining. Besides, which moment in Nigeria's 54 years can be described as the moment when she enjoyed what Erhagbe (2012: 97) described as “the progressive development of Nigeria before now”? On the other

hand, Nigeria has never been a single unit. All claims to “old age” Nigerian values are baseless and useless. The intention for raising such claims is myopic: ‘to prove to the other’. The pictures being painted by those who raise these claims are unfounded, and again useless and misleading. Of course, there is no doubt that nothing founded on mere sentiments and lies can serve as a foundation for any lasting project such as nation-building and development.

Discussions about development in Nigeria and in Africa generally are parts of a single human project of making human life more meaningful everywhere. Engaging in such discussions on the basis of mere sentiments and false-constructs will never yield any good fruit in the name of social development. Thus, instead of arguing about “those values that seem to have been discarded and are often ignored in the conduct of individuals, groups and institutions” in the case of Nigeria (Erhagbe, 2012: 102), we should be engaging, first of all, in deep analysis on how and why we have always got it wrong; and why and how some other human beings (like us) have improved on where we used to be with them. The attention on specific African values is useless. Good social values are universal and timeless: they apply to every group, and they are for everyone.

A set of values that Erhagbe (2012, p.103) considered peculiarly African (and may be also Nigerian) is “fear and respect for the gods and ancestors”. According to him, this set of values “contributed to cohesion and maintenance of social and cultural values in the society”. But one immediately wonders, based on human experiences in different cultures, whether fear is a value worth upholding. The case of Japan, for instance, shows that elders and company executives are respected (not feared), and honesty and integrity (not fear) are made the supreme values to the point that one is convinced that his or her existence is meaningful (and worth continuing) to the extent that he or she remains honest, duty-conscious, and respectful. These are better set of values on the basis of which social cohesion and order can be maintained and sustained, more than fear for the gods and ancestors. This is because once these gods and ancestors were ‘over-powered’ by other gods and ancestors, the market-principle of cultural engagement came into play: those gods were disregarded, they were no longer feared, social cohesion became unfounded, it became clear that the so called values were poorly founded and not reliable foundations. And, so, they collapsed.

We re-iterate that it is self-deception, fruitless, and useless, to keep arguing about ‘old age’, unique, cherished, African/Nigerian set of values. There are no such values! In very complex societies like we find in Nigeria, the only viable option is to think universal, and to define development efforts on the basis of widely tested development-enhancing values and practices. Such values and practices have nothing peculiar, unique, and specifically Nigerian or African about them. Thus, to be

ethnically or racially biased (no matter who was, or who is involved) in the 21st century of wide and unprecedented intercultural encounters – to the point of suppressing or denying the good in or from others – is to be decidedly sub-human. Real humans (super-men and super-women) are trans-cultural: what is really good is appreciated by them. They do this, not on the basis of who did what, said what, or suggested what, but, on the grounds of the worth of what is being assessed as ‘a really good thing’ which, is beneficial to the majority.

Conclusion

Since wishes are not horses, we conclude that Nigeria will not be among the largest and most stable 20 economies of the world by 2020. What we have done here is to draw attention to the root so that if we really want to change, we can jointly strike hard at it – beginning from ourselves at the individual levels. The primary conclusion of this paper is that the root to Nigeria’s myriad of problems is a predominant poverty of values – excessive attachment to short-term satisfaction, lack of transcendental values (such as honesty, integrity, efficiency, passion to contribute to the development of one’s society and world, and so on). This is why ethnicism has thrived and may continue to thrive for so long. Consequently, there is no sight of tomorrow, and no real commitment to long-term contributions to the society. Life seems to have been generally defined at the lower animal level – live, feed, be comfortable, reproduce to keep your lineage, attack whoever challenges your source of immediate satisfaction, better be “a living cock” than be “a dead lion”. These are aspirations that are materialistic, short-termed, and without any question of making any contribution to the society (for the good of others and the world). These values are simply selfish and lowly.

The type of interests and preferences that are founded on the above type of valuation scheme will never make the realization of any worthwhile vision possible. People with such short-term visions have no real need for the realization of long-term visions and goals. People whose values are defined only by selfish-survival instincts have no need to commit themselves to goals that basically demand large-scale self-sacrifices. Vision 20:2020 demands huge sacrifice, mutual trust, and collaboration. Joint self-sacrifices make collaboration possible. But, trust is a more determining value for collaboration since, even if a group of people individually sacrifice some things for their general good, their individual sacrifices would have almost insignificant effects if they lack the trust that make real collaboration possible. But, can people divided by baseless and unproductive ethnic sentiments trust themselves? The answer is “No”. That means, also, that we need not expect collaboration from such a people. That means that since Nigeria is divided on the basis of destructive ethnic sentiments, her members cannot trust enough to make collaboration possible. They cannot sacrifice their individual and group selfish interests, which is another

way of defining collaboration. They cannot develop a common pool of goods from which to draw, for the good of all. That means that they cannot really achieve any common vision. Therefore, the realization of Vision 20-20-20 is very slim unless we change our trend drastically in the next few years. However, if there is no willingness to be really human – with transcendental values – then, we should be courageous enough to break the union because the state is an unfinished one, it is a failed one, and from its inception till date – especially since the last 12 years (2002 -2014) it has proven, in a special way, to be a blood-sucking altar. Why would a group of people who claim they are reasonable insist on sustaining the existence of such an altar? How is it even possible for people who service such a dehumanizing venture to realize a stable economic growth, to the level of being among the best 20 in the world in the next 6 years?

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