

**VISION FOR A NEW NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR A  
COLLECTIVE REFRACTION  
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**Abstract**

*Nigeria is a well endowed country in terms of human and material resources. Some countries rely on one economic crop or one mineral but Nigeria lies on many. Japan has none at all but she is able to become a great economy. What counts is not what you own but what you know. Until Nigeria is able to convert what she owns to what she needs, she will continue to remain poor and a consumer of other country's manufactured products. Besides, Nigeria is not united and there are no signs that all will soon be well with her. She is plagued with ethnic, religious, cultural, political and general developmental issues. There is much insecurity, hunger, unemployment, inflation, lack of electricity, systemic failure of schools and health systems. It is suggested that Nigeria follows the example of Singapore by pulling her diverse ethnic, religious and political groups together, making all citizens feel they belong to Nigeria not their ethnic groups. Nigeria must engender social justice, social trust, equity, fairness and the common good must be sought always, not sectional good. As part of the new vision, Nigeria must tackle*

*corruption, insecurity, poor power supply, educational and health institutions, poor infrastructure and agriculture.*

### **Introduction**

Nigeria won a “trophy” not long ago as being the World Poverty Capital meaning that Nigeria is home to more people living in extreme poverty than any other country in the world. Of a truth, Nigeria has no business being poor as Adesina (2021) claimed that she has the potential to feed the whole of Africa. Nigeria is well blessed with a variety of agricultural products like cocoa, cotton, rubber, oil palm, groundnuts, animal products and aqua culture. She is equally blessed with numerous mineral resources like gold, iron ore, limestone, natural gas, petroleum, just to mention a few. Obasanjo (2019) says that studies have revealed that all states in Nigeria are richly blessed with abundant mineral resources and, similarly, all states in Nigeria can grow either economic crops or subsistence ones. In the pre-oil era, agricultural pursuits sustained Nigeria and its economy. She was a nation self-reliant in food production and was able to export food and agricultural products to other countries. In 1957, agriculture formed 86% of our export earning but by 1977 it had fallen to 6% and today the figure is less than 3% (Abubakar, 2020).

In 1960 when Nigeria became politically independent, there were high hopes in its ability to develop to greater heights and possibly lead the way for other sub-Saharan African countries. Infact, some thought that Nigeria will lead the way for the Black race. These hopes were based on its immense natural resources, the presence of a competent civil service and one of Africa’s most educated elite (Bello-Imam, 2010). When oil was discovered in huge commercial quantities, it gave further hope that Nigeria would grow into a very prosperous and well developed country. These hopes were dashed and remain dashed till today. Nigeria remains the only major oil producing nation classified among the world’s poorest nation. Wide gap exists between the rich and the poor. One agrees with Akpochafo (2018) when she argued that by the sheer magnitude of Nigeria’s human and natural resources,

she has no business being poor let alone being classified among the very poor of the world, hence, this study.

### **Nigeria's Woes**

Nigeria has other demeaning records that make patriotic Nigerians sad. Here are some discussed in Akpochafo (2018): While the advanced countries of Europe and those of Asia like India, China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore have modernized and are moving significant number of their citizens out of poverty more and more Nigerians are retrogressing and becoming poorer. Now Nigeria has the singular honour of being the World Poverty Capital with the largest number of the very poor living within her borders.

Nigeria has the largest out-of-school children in the world and the figure is put at 13.2 million. This number must have risen as a result of the deadly activities of Boko Haram and the bandits in the Northwest of Nigeria that now invade schools to kidnap children. Parents are withdrawing children from schools to avoid the harrowing experiences of having the kids in captivity. Illiteracy has grave consequences for the individual, the society and for the socio-economic development of the nation.

On the Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria ranks third after Iraq and Afghanistan and ahead of Pakistan and Syria. Nigeria is among the countries notorious for kidnapping especially of innocent school children, women and girls. Nigeria faces huge challenges of insecurity from various fronts: Boko Haram in the Northeast, banditry in the Northwest, Pro-Biafra activists, the farmers-herders clashes, the armed killers all over Southern Nigeria claiming to be cattle rearers, the mindless killings in Benue, Plateau and Kaduna States. One can add the threats by the Niger-Delta militants. There is much insecurity in the land. One must add the increasing unemployment, increasing inflation and threats to safety arising from COVID-19 and its new Delta variant.

The consequences of these is that life has become “nasty, short and brutish” to use Thomas Hobbes term. Nigerians are far from being happy and life expectancy in Nigeria is only 60 years (2020), as against 70 years in India, 81 years in the United Kingdom, 80

years in the United States of America, 82 years in Norway and 86 years in Singapore (Adesina, 2021). It is crystal clear to many Nigerians that Nigeria is not working. “Our political system is jaundiced, unfair, exploitative and unsustainable” (Abdullahi, 2017).

### **Nigeria in Dire Straits**

Why is Nigeria not working? Why are Nigerians living in penury instead of prosperity? Were there clear-cut plans to move Nigeria to the pinnacle of prosperity instead of living in squalor? What went wrong? What can be done to move Nigeria back to the track of prosperity and happiness? These are some of the issues that this paper shall tackle.

Bello-Imam (2010) agreed that Nigeria is blessed with numerous natural resources but these have not, in any way, transmuted into visible socio-economic growth and development. Instead huge oil earnings were mismanaged and stolen. The world has moved away from the joy of owning natural resources to the reality of what you do with them. Onokerhoraye (2010) says world classification has moved from who “owns” what to who “knows” what. To him knowledge is the key to the new global economy. The point is made that Japan, the third most powerful economy in the world, has no raw materials but Africa has large abundance of raw materials, but has remained poor (Igwe, 2010). The lesson to be drawn from this is that we have the raw materials but no knowledge to “transmute” them to prosperity. This may not even happen so soon as illiteracy and out-of-school children figures are rising and no concrete plans to stem the tide. Today, Nigeria’s population is about 211 million whereas it was 45 million at independence in 1960. It is believed that Nigeria’s population will further rise and become the third largest in the world in 2050 and overtake China to become the second largest by 2100 (Fasan, 2021). A large population can only be an asset if it is educated, skilled and has high purchasing power (Ewherido, 2021). Definitely, we have too many poor people who are uneducated and unskilled. We seem to be celebrating ignorance and poverty while the civilized world is celebrating prosperity and

happiness. Adesina (2021) says 38.5% of Nigeria's youths are unemployed, lack skills and economic opportunities. For as long as Nigeria continues with unproductive and low human index, not much development will come her way and will remain at the bottom while other nations are dinning and winning at the table of prosperity (Lagarde, 2012).

Is it that Nigeria's leaders are not planning for their teeming population? Obasanjo (2019) answered this question in his detailed and well researched keynote address delivered at the 2019 Synod of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) Oleh Diocese, Isoko, Delta State. He said Nigeria is blessed with brilliant people who have "churned out" fine plans for the nation's socio-economic development. Such development plans include those of 1946-1956, 1955-1960, 1962-1968, 1970-1974, 1975-1980, 1981-1985, 1986-1990, 1990-1992, 1993-1995, 1996-1998, Vision 2010, NEEDS, Vision 20:2020, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017-2020, the Vision 2030 and lately Agenda 2050. What became of these development plans? Obasanjo concluded that as at today, "instead of improvement, the equality of lives of Nigerians has degenerated more in all aspects of human development". Another question that can be asked is, why did the development plans not succeed? Why did they fail? Ake (2001) the renowned Nigerian political economist argued thus: that it is misleading to say that there has been failure of development. It is not that development failed; "it was never really on the agenda" in the first place. Igbuzor (2009) believes that the Nigerian state is deceitful; for me, the Nigerian leaders use lies, deceits, fake promises to govern the populace. They say one thing and do the opposite; it is deceit and any party in power is ready to convince the populace that what they are seeing is white when, in actual fact, it is black. So where is Nigeria now? Simple, Nigeria is still at the "starting block" sixty-one years after independence. As at today, Nigeria is unable to feed her citizens, unable to give proper and useful education to her children, unable to protect and defend her citizens, unable to provide adequate healthcare to the populace (even the presidents seek medicare outside Nigerian

shores), unable to provide safe and reliable infrastructures – unable to guarantee 24-hour continuous electricity, 100% access to safe water, many still subscribe to open defecation and sanitation generally is at its lowest ebb. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of society and has become a way of life in Nigeria. Nigeria is among the most corrupt in the world. Anya (2021) says Nigeria is “mired in underdevelopment when our peers with less conducive circumstances” like South Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia have marched on to become developed and are now regional powers. Nigeria is moving towards a “failed state,” can it be re-directed towards progress and how?

### **New Vision for Nigeria and the Need for a Collective Refraction**

To start with, some words need to be defined. What is a Vision? And what is Collective refraction? The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (New 8<sup>th</sup> Edition) (2015) defined vision in six ways, but two are relevant to us. First, it says, vision is “an idea or a picture in your imagination.” Second, “the ability to think about or plan the future with great imagination or intelligence.” Igbuzor (2009) says vision is “the ability to see further than your physical eyes can look; it is seeing the future before it comes into being.” It is his belief that vision “brings new hope and purpose, energy and passion, motivation and influence the way things are done.” It is having a mental picture of the future you desire; it is the totality of our hopes and dreams in a particular area. To have a vision is to have a clear sense of purpose. An authority says a vision comes not from the head but from the heart. It is beyond doubt that what we have now is not the Nigeria majority desire hence there are various outcries to opt out of it; some cry for restructuring, some for resource control and some are pursuing a clandestine agenda whose aims are thinly veiled.

What, then, should be the new vision? Where should Nigeria be heading now? Many concerned Nigerians have given their opinion as to what should be done to give Nigeria new lease of life; many opinion leaders are against the breaking-up of the country

and suggested other ways of marching forward. Obasanjo (2019), for instance, talked of tackling corruption, developing the human capital and urged leadership to “ensure good governance and collective goodwill for a better Nigeria.” Anya (2021) after x-raying “what went wrong with Nigeria and why?” counselled that there must be “trust and confidence” in the leadership which is the foundation for credibility. Anya argued that the 1914 amalgamation was purely a British idea for their own benefit; there was not mutual consent for a united Nigeria on the part of Northern and Southern leaders and therefore no incentive for a Pan-Nigerian consciousness. Under such condition, “the seed of a viable national consciousness could not germinate (Anya, 2021). Of course, it is well known that Nigerians and their leaders saw themselves as members of their ethnic groups and not as Nigerians and therefore fought only for their ethnic groups. There is the belief that unless their “own men” are in government, not much would get to them in terms of socio-economic amenities (Nnoli, 1999) and appointments. This inter-ethnic rivalry raises much doubt about the sincerity of leaders. It is therefore crucial for social trust to be engendered if Nigeria must advance.

Adesina (2021) strongly advised that Nigerian leaders “must rebuild trust” and ensure equity and social justice. Finally, he urged Nigerian leaders to ‘build bridges that connect, not walls that separate.’

### **My Vision**

What, in my own view, should be done? Adesina (2021) in the lecture he delivered to the class of 2020 and 2021 of American University of Nigeria on the 10th of July, 2021 spoke my mind and that of many Nigerians. He demonstrated how Singapore managed its “diversity for prosperity.” Let us look at the table I created from his lecture and my own little additions showing the Nigerian narrative.

**Table 1: Singapore and Nigeria: A Comparison**

SN	Singapore	Nigeria
1	It is an Asian country.	It is an African country.
2	The population is 5.7 million (2020).	Nigeria's population is 211 million (2021).
3	Singapore is diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious.	Nigeria is equally diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious.
4	The population is made up of Chinese, Malay, Indians and Eurasians.	Nigeria is made up of about 374 ethnic groups (Otite, 1990) and include Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa / Fulani, Kanuri, Tiv, Urhobo to mention a few.
5	Religious diversity – there is Buddhism, Taoism and folk religion, Christianity, Islam (Muslims) and Hinduism.	Nigeria has religious diversity as well – Muslims, Christians, African Traditional Religion and few other ones – though not as patronized.
6	There is religious harmony, not religious supremacy or polarization	In Nigeria, there is religious disharmony, religious intolerance leading to religious crises. There is an attempt to achieve religious supremacy especially of Islam over others.
7	The people see themselves first as Singaporeans.	Nigerians see themselves as belonging to their ethnic groups first before considering being Nigerians.
8	The per capita income of Singapore is now \$60,000. There is massive wealth and prosperity for its people.	For Nigeria, it is \$2,250. There is massive poverty and she is now the World Poverty Capital.
9	Singapore managed its diversity to create wealth – shared wealth	Nigeria mismanaged its diversity and the result is ever-increasing poverty.
10	Singaporeans have 100% access to electricity and 98% access to water.	About 47% of its citizens lack access to power supply. Many lack access to good water.
11	Their schools rank among the best in the world.	Nigerian schools rank among the poorest in the world.
12	Singapore's economy is a AAA – rated.	Nigeria's economy is poorly rated especially with the population outpacing the economic growth rate.



13.	In spite of their initial challenges, Singapore focused on fusion of national purpose and identity.	Nigeria is working for sectional supremacy and there is the clandestine goal of Islamisation and Fulanisation.
14	There are policies that ensure no one ethnic group dominates, assimilates others.	As noted above, there is a hidden plan to ensure the supremacy of Fulanis.
15	Article 12 of their Constitution forbids discrimination based on race, place of birth, language and religion.	Nigeria discriminates on the basis on religion, state on origin, ethnicity, culture to mention a few.
16	They are building democratic society based on justice and equality.	Nigeria is a democratic state without democrats; “Equity and justice have taken flight” thus encouraging sectionalism, parochialism and nepotism (Ladelokun, 2021).
17	The Singaporean society is based on meritocracy.	Nigeria’s society is based on ethnocracy, religiocracy, and encourages mediocrity.

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**A Collective Refraction**

Refraction simply means having a change in the speed or direction of something e.g change of direction of a ray of light, sound, heat or the like, (<https://www.britannica.com>science>). For the purpose of this article, it implies having a change in the direction that Nigeria is moving which many say might lead to collapse of the Nigerian project. It becomes a collective refraction as the change must involve all-both the rulers and the ruled. All hands must be on deck for success to be achieved. All citizens must key into the new agenda as seen in Singapore or demonstrated by Rwanda after the genocide of 1994.

What to do is to adopt the steps taken by Singapore resulting in prosperity, happiness and wealth for all her citizens. Our leaders should resort to building bridges that connect not walls that divide. There is enough for all to share and be happy like the Singaporeans. Let us have sound educational systems that will produce human beings that are imaginative, innovative, reasonable, critical thinkers, visionary humane and imbued with core national values. With a more purposeful education, we can

begin to reduce poverty and lift more and more into prosperity. The health system must be revamped and made more responsive to health challenges. When the leaders go for medicare abroad, it amounts to abandoning the masses to their fate. Health is wealth, they say. Instead of paying bandits, spending heavily on weapons and allowing corruption to walk on all four, more money can be harnessed to provide good health system for Nigerians.

Nigeria does not need to pay lip service to agriculture as the time for diversification of the economy is now. Wiser countries are already diversifying. If agriculture is given proper attention, Nigeria will feed her population, have much left for export and local processing industries and provide more employment.

Corruption is one of the biggest problems facing African nations including Nigeria. It has become a way of life. All hands must be on deck to check its proportion. It denies Nigeria much revenue needed to provide good services, infrastructure, good life for the generality of the people. Too many big men and women steal too much money. It must be stamped out.

Insecurity must be tackled from all angles. People have said insecurity thrives because the leaders give the perpetrators tacit approval. If they pick up the big stick today, insecurity will reduce drastically. Those involved in insecurity know who dictates the tune and will cease action if they see the appropriate signal.

Equally important is increasing Nigeria's power supply; Nigeria now ranks bottom 171 out of 190 surveyed countries in the access of its citizens to public power supply. We barely can go beyond 4,000 megawatts of power. Buhari is said to have launched Vision 30:30:30 – the attainment of 30giga watts of power with 30 percent renewable by 2030. Electricity can help many small and medium-sized enterprises to spring up and stay afloat let alone the giant industries. The increase will help generate employment, income and raise the standard of living of Nigerians.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Nigeria is well endowed and has no business being a poor country let alone being the World Poverty Capital. What she lacks is the right constitutional provisions and right policies and attitude. The Singaporean examples should show the way to go. Nigeria must embrace social justice, social trust, equity and ethnic, religious and political tolerance for a harmonious co-existence. There is more than enough for Nigerians to achieve higher standard of living and lead more fulfilling lives. The choice is ours.

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