

Vision for Change in Nigeria based on Lessons from South Korea

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Change was a slogan used as an election winner in the 2015 Presidential Election. For changes to happen, there has to be an appropriate vision which will be translated by means of projects into the changed condition that has been envisaged. So far in the post-election Nigeria, some two months after the swearing in of President Buhari, no perceptible change is happening. This is so obvious that an All Progressives Congress (APC) chieftain, Senator Bola Tinubu on Tuesday, July 28, advised Nigerians to regard this time as a “honeymoon” period for the new administration [1].

This current environment of the absence of a statement of vision, a set of objectives and goals that should constitute the driving force for the achievement of the envisaged changes in the socio-economic environment has motivated the writing of this paper. The message is simply that the vision of the new government has to be presented with the accompanying objectives which should constitute the motive force to drive the changes.

It is also the case that this paper presents the example of vision to action in South Korea as a real-life example that could be emulated. The transformation instigated by a vision and implemented by means of projects resulted in the miracle that is South Korea.

This paper consists of the following sections:

1. A brief review of South Korea’s vision and its implementation which led to the transformation of South Korea to a modern knowledge economy. This is aimed at presenting the case study as an object lesson to us in Nigeria in our new Buhari-led administration.
2. In addition to any other vision being presented by the administration, the paper recommends the adoption or inclusion of a vision to transform the country into a knowledge economy.
3. The paper will conclude with a call for action.

1. South Korea’s Vision and Its Implementation

Brilliant visions need the vehicle of projects to transform them into the welcome changes which are desired. In other words, for the required changes to be achieved in any country, there are at least two actions that need to be carried out as follows:

- A clear statement of the vision for the nation
- Planned program of actions for transforming the visions into realities.

In case of South Korea, the processes of transforming visions into actions were as follows:

- Vision and plan
- Execution
 - Resources
 - Top-level support
 - Funding
- Monitoring and Control
- Achievements

Vision and plan: In January 2000, President Kim Dae-jung announced his intention for Korea to become an advanced, knowledge-based economy [2].

Vision: The vision of the government was “To transform Korea into an advanced knowledge-based nation”.

Goals included the following [3]:

- making Korea into one of the world's top-ten information and knowledge superpowers;
- developing the next generation Internet and the information superhighway by 2005;
- promoting the use of computers by students, teachers, and the military;
- conducting radical reforms in education to prepare the country for its drive to transform into a knowledge-based economy;
- envisioning the dawning of an Internet society, where people will participate in the governance process through ICT, in a democracy based on human rights; and
- closing the development divide through productive welfare and balanced regional development

Execution

Three months later, the country put into effect a three-year action plan for implementing the knowledge economy strategy. It consisted of 83 associated action plans in the 5 main areas consisting of:

- information infrastructure,
- human resource development,
- development of knowledge-based industry,
- science and technology, and
- elimination of the digital divide.

Some other aspects of the planning and implementation are as listed here:

- **Think-tanks:** The government created a special task force of 10 think-tanks, headed by the Korean Development Institute (KDI).

- The **Ministry of Finance** and Economy obtained the assistance of the World Bank (WB). Carl Dahlman, the first manager of the K4D (Knowledge for Development) Program, led the team of international experts, in collaboration with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The WB team focused on providing continuous input into strategy being developed by KDI-led task force.
- **Working groups:** The planning and implementation team consisted of five working groups that involved 19 ministries and 17 research institutes.
- **Top-level support:** The programs received unflinching support from Korea's highest leadership and a strong buy-in from the business elite.
- **Resources:** The knowledge economy strategy attracted vast resources from both public and private sectors. It is widely acknowledged that companies are the engine of a knowledge-driven economy, their participation in these efforts was absolutely essential. The scale and structured pace of programs were tremendous. For example, Maeil Business Newspaper (MBN), offered a million of free Internet connections.

Finance

- **Proper financing mechanisms and coordination:** The Ministry of Finance and Economy was responsible for the overall coordination of Knowledge Economy program implementation. In 2000, for example, the total budget growth rate was 4.7 percent, but growth rates in the information, and research and development sectors were 12.9 percent and 13.4 percent respectively.
- **Funding** included a special Informationization Promotion Fund that supported ICT training classes for housewives, elderly, farmers, etc. These were mainly conducted in stadiums.

Monitoring and control of the implementation of the strategy

It was conducted by the National Economic Advisory Council that included representatives of the private sector.

Results: During the four decades after the Korean War, which ended in July 1953, the Republic of Korea successfully transformed itself from a poor agrarian economy with a per capita income of less than US\$100 into a highly industrialized country with a per capita income of US\$12,000. It also has produced internationally recognized brands and technologies such as Samsung and LG. It did this through a systematic economic and trade development policy, including heavy investment in capacity building, human resource development, incentives for technological innovation and the development of domestic intellectual property assets. According to a study by the Korea Development Institute, technological progress was one of the most important sources of national income growth between 1963 and 2000.

Korea's Achievements: Korea achieved one of the fastest rates of economic development of any country in the world. Between 1966 and 1996, its per capita income grew by an average of 6.8% per annum, and it became an OECD Member in 1996. Towards the end of 1997, however, Korea experienced its worst economic crisis since the Korean War. Nonetheless, Korea made a remarkable recovery from the crisis, and grew at 10.7% in 1999.

2. An Analysis of the current Nigeria's visions, and recommendation of a knowledge economy

It may be correct to state that the Buhari-led Federal Government of Nigeria is yet to announce its vision for the country. For the avoidance of doubt, in the next paragraphs, a vision statement will be defined. Its importance will also be discussed.

A Vision Statement for a nation: This could be described as a statement that helps to define the optimal desired future state of what the nation wants to achieve over time. Its importance includes the following:

- It provides guidance and inspiration as to what the nation is focused on achieving in five, ten, or more years;
- It functions as the target to which the country's business entrepreneurs, professionals and workers believe their work every day ultimately contributes towards accomplishing over the long term; and,
- It is observed that leaders may change but a well-articulated and accepted vision should not because a clearly established vision encourages people to focus on what should enhance the development of their country on the long term.

Nigeria's Current Vision

Nigerians have to wait for the vision statement of the new government. In view of the poor press that has been given to the Jonathan-led government, it is unclear whether their Vision 20-20 is still alive or whether or not it will be discarded by the new government. Whatever will be the case, the new administration needs to present a vision for the nation. In the meantime, as already stated, this paper would recommend a vision of building a knowledge economy in Nigeria. The benefits of such a vision will be discussed in this write up. The paper will be concluded with the recommendations on the need of stating a vision and making efforts to actualise it.

Necessity of a knowledge economy

The necessity of knowledge economy in today's world is an inescapable economic reality for reasons which include the following:

- The products we buy, and the methods with which they are made rely increasingly on knowledge and technology, and less on manual labour.

- Knowledge Economy has been described as the new premium fuel for economic growth in the 21st century. It fuels new ideas and innovations to boost productivity, and to create new products, new firms, new jobs, and new wealth.
- It is an environment where knowledge is created, acquired, transmitted, and used more effectively by enterprises, organizations, individuals, and communities for greater economic and social development of the country.
- It has become an engine of progress in every country. If a country is developed, it has a developed knowledge economy, if a country is lagging behind; a knowledge economy constitutes just a small fraction of its economy.

A suggested framework for the achievement of knowledge economy in a developing country

It could be instructive to start by discussing the challenges in developing countries for the achievement of knowledge economy. The United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development report (UNCSTD, 1997) concluded that for developing countries to integrate successfully information and communication technology (ICT) and sustainable development in order to participate in the knowledge economy, they need to intervene collectively and strategically. Such collective intervention would be in the development of effective national ICT policies that support the new regulatory framework, promote the selected knowledge production, and use of ICTs and harness their organizational changes to be in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

Framework: A knowledge economy is one which it is effectively utilising the potential of the growing stock of knowledge and advances in ICT for the nation's overall development. As a result a framework for a knowledge economy could consist of:

- an economic and institutional organisation that provides incentives for the efficient use of existing knowledge, for the creation of new knowledge, and for the dismantling of obsolete activities and the start-up of more efficient new ones;
- an educated and entrepreneurial population that can both create and use new knowledge;
- a dynamic information infrastructure that can facilitate effective communication, dissemination, and processing of information; and
- an efficient innovation system comprising firms, science and research centres, universities, think tanks, consultants, and other organizations that can interact and tap into the growing stock of global knowledge; assimilate and adapt it to local needs; and use it to create new knowledge and technology.

These four components of the framework are consistent with the prescription of the World Bank in its pillars of knowledge economy as discussed below.

Four Pillars of Knowledge Economy: As published in the knowledge zone in the website of the World Bank Knowledge, the following pillars are four critical requisites for a country to be able to fully participate in the knowledge economy:

- **Education & Training:** An educated and skilled population is needed to create, share and use knowledge. There should be established a national education system generating a pool of knowledge specialists and a technology literate work force.
- **Information Infrastructure:** A dynamic information infrastructure, ranging from radio to the Internet is required to facilitate the effective communication, dissemination and processing of information.
- **Economic Incentive and Institutional Regime:** A regulatory and economic environment that enables the free flow of knowledge, supports investment in Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and encourages entrepreneurship is central to the knowledge economy.
- **Innovation Systems:** A network of research centres, universities, think tanks, private enterprises and community groups is necessary to tap into the growing stock of global knowledge, assimilate and adapt it to local needs, and create new knowledge. The systems should also include innovation policies, institutions, and incentives necessary for the development and commercialization of domestic and foreign innovations for the creation of a national innovation system.

Procedure: In view of the foregoing, to achieve a knowledge economy, a country should define their vision and the goals to achieve it. The starting point should be a vision statement.

3. A Call for Actions

Need for a Vision Statement: That a nation requires a vision is incontrovertible as it provides a guiding light and a focus to its citizens. All its businesses and their projections should try to align their activities towards the achievement of the vision and its objectives. For example, a vision statement could be to build a knowledge economy with sustained economic growth and annually decreasing unemployment within a specified number of years as the Koreans stated in their vision statement. This prosperity should be anchored on sustained growth in knowledge economy.

As already stated, a nation's vision should be planned for a long duration. It should not be changing with changing administration otherwise its goals cannot be realised. The resources of the nation are invested in developing and implementing a vision. If therefore it is changed every four years when there is a change of government, then the resources so invested could be lost. The country will be the loser as "the baby is being thrown away with the bath water".

For example, if Nigeria's Vision 2020 looks attractive, the new administration could modify and retain it to avoid losing all that has been invested in it. However, the final

decision rests with the new government. They have to decide on the merits and demerits of retaining or discarding it.

Goals: The vision has to be implemented with goals. A country could plan to achieve their goals by building on the framework suggested in the preceding section that comply with World Bank Four Pillars of Knowledge Economy.

Transformation of vision into actions: Projects could be described as vehicles for transforming visions into products or services. Irrespective of how brilliant a national vision could be, it has to be transformed into actions to produce infrastructure or services for the benefits of the nation. In the absence of such physical actions, a vision is just as unhelpful as an empty dream which does no good to anyone.

Timely actions: The customer will not wait indefinitely to receive the product or service deliverable requested for. The same is true for a government. It is certainly the case that the Buhari administration is yet to present a vision statement, its objectives and program for their implementation. As alluded to in the introduction, an All Progressives Congress (APC) chieftain, Senator Bola Tinubu, has urged Nigerians to give President Muhammadu Buhari the benefit of 100 days honeymoon to enable him to take stock of what he inherited and plan for concrete action rather than trying to rush him.

He says: "There is a honeymoon period, at least minimum of 100 days honeymoon. And won't you allow honeymoon at all? You said change is not coming. Change is not by magic. It is driven by the people, the spirit, the character and the planning. The time it takes you to plan, examine, rejig, re-evaluate is more important than the time you just rush into taking action because you are either being sentimental, being emotional and being driven by other forces that are not expected."

He continues: "It's not fair to jump into those conclusions. There must be time to plan, to review and even listen to people. There is a separation between a campaign period, articulating your vision, expressing the promises to Nigerians. "There is a time to look at holistically what you inherited, analyse it, distil and then take action. Even in 100 metre race, there is a time to say on your mark, set, ready, go! So, you don't even want a time to be on your mark, set and go? No no no. You are not being fair [1]."

A government has just four or five years to deliver on their promises. It therefore has to appreciate that to effect changes, it needs time for their vision and goals to be planned and implemented. Each action to be taken will take its definite time, therefore in order to effect the changes it has planned to effect in government, it has to start presenting its vision, goals and their implementation because it does not have an open ended time to start delivering on its commitment to the nation.

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