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# **Role of Nigerian Politicians and Political Communicators in the Implementation of Vision 20:2020**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nigeria's economic potential is well recognised. It is the biggest economy in the West African sub region. Given the country's considerable resource endowment and coastal location, there is potential for strong growth. Yet, Nigeria has realised very little of this potential. Previous efforts at planning and visioning were not sustained. The history of economic stagnation, declining welfare and social instability has undermined development for most of the past years of the nation's existence. The question is: to what extent would the present politicians and political communicators work against traditional problems of poor planning, implementation and monitoring which militate against developmental goals in Nigeria? This question guides the study. Analytical discussion method is used in examining the role which politicians and political communicators should play in the implementation of vision 20:2020. The study concludes that politics and political communication has an inseparable connection and that vision 20:2020 can only be achieved if politicians and political communicators in the country, live up to their various responsibilities and expectations.

**KEY WORDS:** Politics; political communication; vision 20:2020; economic development.

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## Introduction

Nigeria articulated its vision 20:2020 during the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo between 1999 and 2007. The vision captures among other things, the road map and blue print to achieving national economic growth and becoming one of the twenty largest economies in the world by 2020. On assumption of office in May, 2007, the Yar' Adua's administration set up the National Council on vision 2020 to develop a blue print for the vision 20:2020 in collaboration with National Planning Commission. In November 2007, it presented the vision 20:2020 – Economic Transformation Blueprint to the larger populace, because, as Itua (2011) describes, an average Nigerian had little or no idea about it. The populace is more conversant with Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which is yet to be achieved. It must be pointed out that the eight MDGs form part of vision 20:2020. This is because the eight MDGs target policies that eradicate extreme poverty, achieving universal basic education, promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. Others include: reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, controlling HIV/AIDS, malaria and other deadly diseases. It also seeks to develop global partnership with other countries and ensuring environmental sustainability.

The present administration of President Goodluck Jonathan seems to be battling the security challenges in the country. This is to the detriment of the pursuance of the 7 – point agenda which he inherited from the previous administration. The 7-point agenda include: power and energy, food, wealth, security, and agriculture; wealth creation and employment; mass transportation; land reform, security, qualitative functional education. The 7-point agenda again, is contained in the thematic area for the National Technical Working Group (NTWG) created for the implementation of vision 20:2020 in Nigeria.

The issue therefore is: which one are our political leaders pursuing? Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)? 7-Point Agenda? or vision 20:2020? Politicians in Nigeria tend to be good policy makers, but poor implementers. Itua (2011) observes that Thailand is the largest 20<sup>th</sup> economy in the world with an annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of over 115 and 400 billion US dollars. The irony is that Thailand is still developing and has the potentials to surpass this position in eight years. But Nigeria is yet to have half of this GDP. Nigeria no doubt, is blessed with enormous material and human resources, but one wonders what the problem is. Why are Nigerian politicians not implementing policies that will boost the economy? And why are Nigerian political communicators not communicating well? This study sets to unravel these pertinent questions. Through an analytical discussion method, these questions will be answered.

## Understanding Vision 20:2020

Vision 20:2020 policy was a 10-year blue print articulated during the Olusegun Obasanjo administration (1999-2007) to make Nigeria one of the twenty largest economies in the world by the year 2020. The process of developing the vision include the formation of the National Council in vision 2020, input from ministries, agencies, state and local government as well as the private sector with the National Panning Commission playing a coordinating role. It also involved the analysis of 29 thematic areas (see appendix), and the participation of 12 interest groups, including the legislature, judiciary, media, women, youths, traditional rulers, religions groups, security, Nigerians in Diaspora, persons with disability, labour and the civil service.

Thus, the vision 20:2020 is Nigeria's long term development goal designed to propel the country to the league of the top 20 economies of the world by 2020. Attainment of the vision is expected to enable the country achieve a high standard of living for its citizens. The vision has a social dimension of a peaceful, equitable, harmonious and just society; and economic dimension of a resilient, diversified and industrialised economy; an institutional dimension of a stable and functional democracy in a market friendly and globally competitive business environment and an environmental consciousness of sustainable management (Igbuzor, 2009; Ake, 2001).

### **Development Communication, Political Communication and Policy Communication**

Development communication is the application of the processes of communication to development process. In other words, development communication is the use of the principles and practices of exchange of ideas to fulfill development objectives; it is an element of the management process in the overall planning and implementation of development programmes. In a very broad sense, Embu (2000), cited in Asemah (2011a) sees development communication as the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people, through what Rosario-Braid describes as the identification and utilisation of appropriate expertise in the development that will assist in increasing participation of intended beneficiaries at the grassroot level. To Wilson (1997), development communication is relating media practice to the needs of development through news, features, cartoons, deliberate campaigns like mass literacy, health, public health, public enlightenment, electoral processes, agriculture, rural banking, national security and other rural or national development goals. This view situates development communication within the purview of the needs and aspirations of the rural people. It involves the deliberate well desired and articulated communication codes aimed at bringing development messages to the knowledge of the people. Development communication helps people to move to a higher critical state of awareness where they learn to think for themselves, analyse their situations and take decisions on how to improve their situations.

The foregoing implies that development is central to man's survival on earth. Plausibly, communication is needed to bring about meaningful development in any social setting. It is this need that gave rise to the study of development communication. Development communication involves deliberate well- desired and articulated communication codes aimed at bringing development messages to the knowledge of the targets; it entails recognising the power of communication as a catalyst for social development. Development communication is heavily oriented toward the human aspects of development. This is applicable to rural development, as well as, urban or sub-urban problems. It plays two broad roles: transformation role through which it seeks social change in the direction of higher quality of life and social justice and socialisation role through which it strives to maintain some of the established values of society and economic advancement between physical output and human relationships.

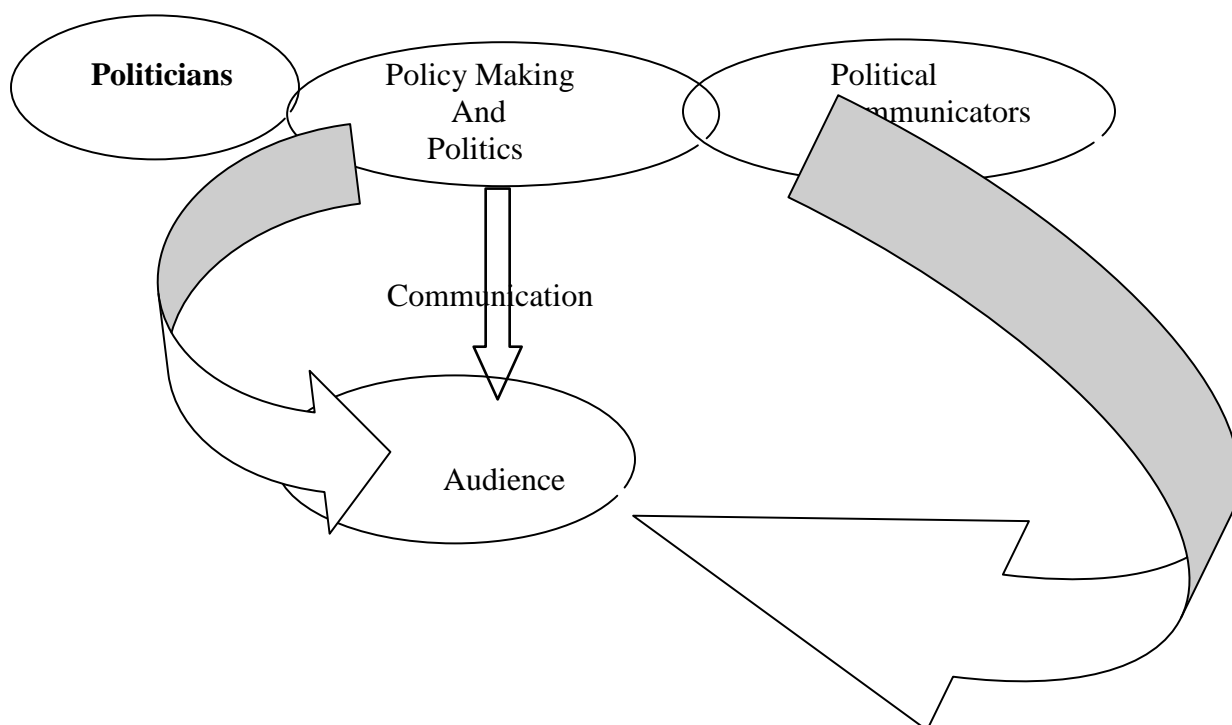
Political communication on the hand is the exchange of symbols and messages between political actors, institutions and the general public with the aim of influencing the political system in operation at any given time. It is the process by which politically relevant information is transmitted from one part of the political system to another and between the social and the political systems (Gurevitch & Blumer, 1997). Political communication is a process that touches all aspects of society's life and therefore takes place in a communication system that produces

messages at the boundary between politics and the media. Robinson (1973, p. 66) avers that if a government is responsible to an electorate, it has to communicate with the electorate whether by deceiving it, debauching it, pandering to it or striving to make political sense with it.

Political communication as noted by Udoaka (1998, p. 3) is a big business in a political system; it is an investment, as both the government and political parties trade on political information. Thus, Udoaka (1998, p. 3) notes that political communication is the process through which political information is passed on to whom it may concern, by those who are assigned or who assume such responsibility. Political communication may be carried out within political parties or between political parties, and it may take place between different political structures within a bureaucracy, within interest groups, between the government and the citizenry. The foregoing implies that political communication is aimed at creating awareness about a political party or a candidate, so as to make the electorate better understand the political terrains, like the different political candidates and parties in place. Through political communication, the electorates are better to take informed decision that will help them in the electioneering process.

In everyday usage, policy is a set of plans or guides that is used as a basis for making decisions; it is a purposive course of action, followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a matter or problem of concern. It is a written or unwritten statement or understanding, which guides the management of an organisation or employees' actions in achieving a set goal. Thus, policy communication entails the communication of plans and actions, either of an organisation or that of the government; but in this study we are more concerned with the actions and plans of the government. George Gerbner in Hanson (2005, p. 2) provides a simple definition of communication as "a social interaction through messages". Communication revolves around how we interact with our entire world, whether it is by spoken words, written words, gestures, music, paintings, photographs or dance. Communication presently is seen as the sharing of commonness

### **The Link between Politicians, Political Communicators and Policy Making**



or idea between or among individuals. McQuail (2005), cited in Idiong (2008) suggests that the various level of communication can be viewed as a pyramid with a large base in which many people are sharing messages, building up to a peak of mass communication at which a relatively small number of organisations or individuals are actually engaging in the communication.

Communication is therefore a social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meanings in their environment. This means that communication is not only a social process, but an interaction as well. As a process, it is on-going, unending and cyclical in nature. It is not linear or one-way. As a social process, it involves people (senders and receivers) who play integral roles in the process. This also makes it an interaction process because individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meanings in their environments. Communication, no matter how it is used remains dynamic, complex and continually changing. It is at its most basic level, intra-personal, interpersonal, group and mass, (Okunna, 1999; Okunna, 2002). But for the purpose of this study, communication is placed on how it is used in politics to establish commonness between the people who govern and the governed.

Politics is a process concerning power – who has it, how he/she keeps it and how it is used. Politics aims at organised actions that can shape the destinies of nations, set national and corporate agenda as well as re-ordering national, corporate and individual priorities. As the circumstances dictate, it is through policy making that politics is given a human face. Policy as Uchendu (1992) describes, is utilised by scholars in four different ways; namely:

- ❖ As a philosophical concept or doctrine that justifies the action of a community, organisation, political agencies or the state in their respective efforts to set the frame work for solutions to common problems.
- ❖ As an end-product consisting of either documents or conclusions drawn by responsible authorities which clearly expresses their views on problems demanding action and how they plan to deal with the available resources.
- ❖ As a process through which an organisation provides stability and orderly change while planning to capture future desired goals.
- ❖ As a framework for action. In this sense, it is a guide to action or for the achievement of defined goals.

Policy ideas help politicians and political authorities to think about those human conditions which can be changed or redirected through organised action. Programmes and activities of change do not happen by chance. They are the products of policy. They are thought about, planned for and put into action by human beings, working for organisations and for particular reasons.

As depicted in the model shown above (Authors' communication and policy model), policy and politics are at the centre of any political system. Politicians or political authorities formulate policies because policies cannot make themselves. Using effective communication strategies, these policies are brought to the attention of audience by not only politicians, but

through the activities of journalists, who now pose as political communicators. Whether the policy will be accepted or rejected, depends on how communication is used to water the ground or to make the ground too hard for the policy to germinate and grow.

The foregoing implies that politicians make policies and these policies need to be communicated to the audience members. When policies are formulated and they are not effectively communicated to the members of the society, the members of the society will not understand such policies. That is why it is imperative for politicians to effectively communicate their plans and actions to the members of the society. This explains why Asemah (2011b) avers that communication is an essential aspect of human life which can be said to be the basic essence of life that it revolves around. Communication apart from being essential is also the central fact of human existence and social process. Nobody can be an Island without communicating with others in one way or the other, and existence would be impossible without it. Thus, communication process itself involves action, reaction and interaction which can also be linked to “cause and effect” relationship. Several channels can be used to communicate the policies to the audience-members; these channels include, but not limited to television, newspapers, magazines, radio, indigenous communication system and social media.

### **Vision 20:2020 as a Product of Policy Making in Nigeria**

Vision 20:2020 could rightly be described as a policy in Nigeria because it fits into the ten characteristics of public policy. These characteristics as enumerated by Uchendu (1992) include the following:

- It must have a public interest assertion.
- It must be goal oriented.
- It should have an apparatus for controlling political struggle inherent in every political setting.
- Policies should be made at every level of government and managed by a formal organisation called a bureaucracy.
- Policies are value-laden and are constrained by powerful sets of facts and norms.
- All policies are conflict-oriented.
- Policies are mixed-bags of public interest and private interests.
- No matter its honest intentions, a policy always generates manifest and latent consequences. Attempts to achieve change never turn out the way they were planned. Partisan optimality does not exist in politics.

- In a mature, stable policy, in which fundamental political and social issues have been resolved, public policy is generally remedial and incremental.
- Policy is a major factor in political alienation. Political systems are mandated to produce and distribute public goods and services. The alienation in Nigeria today is that the country is richly endowed, but its resources are not distributed or seem to be distributed with fairness, justice and equity (Agha, 2012).

Vision 20:2020 is not the first policy in Nigeria and will not be the last. As governments come and go policies, are bound to be formulated. Whether a policy will be successful or not, remains another issue. Some notable policies in the history of Nigeria include; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRFRI), War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Better Life for Rural Women, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Vision 2010, Transformation Agenda, National Policy on Productivity and so many others.

The pertinent question is: what have all these policies done to the quality of life of an average rural Nigerian? Were they well communicated to the people at the grassroots? Were they well implementation by the people who formulated them? These questions led to the topic of the study which aims at ascertaining the role which politicians and political communicators should play in the implementation of Vision 20:2020. This is necessary so that this vision, just like others in the past will not die without impacting on the lives of Nigerians.

### **Understanding the place of Political Communication in Politics**

Politics involves power; a relationship between people in which some get others to obey them, even if they would rather not do so, by means of subtle or overt pressure and even by use of force. Politics also involves influence, which is the ability of getting others to do what one wants them to do (Pious, 1986). However, Ekeli (2008) and Galadima (2008) maintain that politics is concerned with more than power, influence or problem solving. Politics to these scholars deals with the culture and values of the community and becomes the secular equivalent of religion in nations in which states are formally separated.

A better approach, as Hahn (1998) stresses, is to see politics as a process through communication, from identifying a problem in society, through proposing a solution, debating the need for a solution, arguing the relative merits of this solution over others proposed, explaining the resulting law to the citizens and to those in the government whose job it is to enforce it, and so forth. It could therefore be said that at every step in politics, communication is involved. More analytic sophistication can only be achieved in politics by focusing on communication rather than on power or influence. Communication as has been described in this study is paramount to the growth and sustenance of politics in any country. This is because, all of the functions performed in the political system – political socialisation, and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, rule-making, policy making, etc, are performed by means of communication (Olayinola, 1991). In performing their duties, political spokespersons, politicians and journalists do interact and act in any political communication system within the specific rules and norms that govern and stabilise their functions. Politicians, as persons whose job is

concerned with politics and especially as elected members of the parliament, do engage in political communication on daily basis.

Politicians and political communicators who work in media organisations involve in horizontal relationship with one another. They also involve in vertical relationship with the audience (Nord, 2001). This is due to the nature of politics in any given society. Political communication, just like communication itself, has undergone many changes. Modern technology and fundamental social changes, as well as the global progress of liberalism and market – driven perspectives on media scene, have generally influenced political communication and the way it is being used by politicians and communicators.

### **Politicians and Political Communicators: What Role in the Implementation of Vision 20:2020**

Implementation of policies according to Matland (1995) refers to the accomplishment of the policy objectives through planning and programming of operations and projects so that agreed upon outcomes and desired impacts are achieved. This means that policy implementation basically aims at the achievement of the objectives or goal set forth in prior policy decisions. Matland (1985, p. 7) prescribes two methods of implementing policies; they include:

- Top-down method
- Bottom-up method

Top-down method refers to the process of manipulating some political factors at the national level while bottom-up method refers to the process of dealing with target groups and service deliverers. He prescribes the use of the two methods simultaneously. Using these two methods, politicians will perform the following roles in the implementation of Vision 20:2020:

#### **❖ Formulating Strategies and Designs for Vision 20:2020**

Many policies failed at the implementation stage because they lacked clear strategies on how they will be achieved and implemented. Ahmed (2012) notes that politicians in Nigeria fail due to lack of formulation of right policies and implementation designs. For example, NAPEP, DFRRI, Better Life for Rural Women, Vision 2010, etc., lacked set out and laid down implementation strategies and designs. So, they all failed. For instance, the blue-print vision for 20:2020 part one identified power, transport, oil and gas and housing and water resources as major challenges confronting economic growth and development in Nigeria. For electricity, inadequate transmission and distribution networks, ageing infrastructure, weak and radial network configuration and overloaded transformers, all pose as problems that resulted to poor electricity supply in Nigeria. But Nigeria's Vision 20:2020 blue-print lack strategies on how these problems will be solved. The goal of Vision 20:2020 is to generate, transmit and distribute 35,000MW of electricity by the year 2020. But ways on how the dams will be rebuilt, how the power plants will be maintained and how vandalisation of facilities will be stopped were not spelled out. It is the responsibility of the politicians elected into offices at various levels to do this.



❖ **Basing Plans on Concrete Facts and Figures**

Nigerian politicians should adopt the method of basing plans on concrete facts, rather than on mere values. Quantitative methods should be used in making concrete plans that will foster economic development. For instance on Housing, the actual number of Nigerians who are in need of housing facilities is not known.

❖ **Using effective Communication Strategies in informing Nigerians about Vision 20:2020**

An average Nigerian living in a typical rural area seems to lack knowledge of Vision 20:2020. Politicians need to communicate the objectives and goals of the vision to the people whose lives the vision is meant to change for the better. This will enhance acceptance and cooperation, especially among the rural dwellers.

❖ **Nigerian Politicians should join hands with the present Administration to:**

- a. Build a solid foundation for the vision. Specific target should be set for each year and framework and guidelines for the vision redefined.
- b. Aim at achieving the MDG by the year 2015

❖ **Removing of Partisan Politics from the Implementation Plans.**

Policy implementation plans in Nigeria, as noted by Itua (2011) has become so politicised to the level that the entire phenomenon is no longer accorded any seriousness by majority of the citizens. This is principally because of the geo-ethnic character of politics of development planning whereby certain sections of the country are the beneficiaries of the out come of such planning and plans. For Vision 20:2020 to survive and succeed, such “politics” must not be allowed. Moreover, change in government should not affect the implementation plans. Whether the present administration remains in power or not, the vision should not be allowed to die. Present and future politicians should ensure that.

**Roles of Political Communicators**

These groups of persons refer to journalists and all political spokespersons. Their roles in the implementation of Vision 20:2020 include the following:

- ❖ Using an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, news media and the public. Specifically, the information about Vision 20:2020 should be tailored to flow in at least three different directions; namely:
- a. downwards from governing institutions towards citizens;

- b. horizontally, through linkages between political actors; and
- c. upwards, in terms of public opinion towards authorities.

This classification of information flow is important since it gives an insight into the prevailing patterns of all political communication systems. It is also important because it gives an idea of how to go about addressing problems which may be encountered in the implementation stages of the plan (Norris, 2004).

- Use of new media forms in communicating or disseminating information about Vision 20:2020. Enlightenment programmes can be made known through digital phones, Facebook, Twitter, etc., and Websites where information can be posted or received about the vision need to be created.
- Communication media, both print and electronic can be used to dispel any form of misinformation about the vision. They should also be used in making the implementation plans transparent to avoid bias.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Vision 20:2020 has a social dimension of a peaceful, equitable, harmonious and a just society. It also has an economic dimension of a resilient, diversified and industrialised economy, with an institutional dimension of a stable and functional democracy. Its realisation is hinged on creating a platform that will address the country's most debilitating constraints to growth and development. If politics is all about identifying a problem in the society, debating the need for a solution, explaining the resulting law to the citizens and to those in government, whose job it is to enforce, it therefore follows that politicians and political communicators have a role to play in the implementation of any policy that will bring a change for the better. This is what this study has achieved. It has established that communication is inevitable to the full implementation of Vision 20:2020. Politicians should build a solid plan for the vision based on concrete facts and figures while political communicators should use effective communication strategies in watering the ground for the implementation of the plan.

It remains to be added that greater access to political information and opinion tends to strengthen democratic traditions. Nations that wish to strengthen their democratic culture are expected to allow citizens more access to information and information repositories. Implementation of policies only shows the strength of a nation's democracy. It is a proof that a nation has fully consolidated its democratic ideals.

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## **Appendix I**

Vision 20:2020 Thematic Areas.

1. Agriculture and Food Security
2. Business Environment and Competitiveness
3. Corporative Governance
4. Culture, Tourism and National Re-orientation
5. Education
6. Employment
7. Energy
8. Environment and Sustainable Development
9. Finance
10. Foreign Policy

11. Governance
12. Health
13. Housing
14. Human Development
15. ICT
16. Judiciary and the Rule of Law
17. Manufacturing
18. Media and Communications
19. Mining and Steel Development
20. Niger Delta and Regional Development
21. Political System
22. Science, Technology and Innovation
23. Security
24. SMES
25. Sports Development
26. Trade and Commerce
27. Transport
28. Urban and Rural Development
29. Water and Sanitation.