



IMAGINE
NIGERIA

Key messages



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Imagine Nigeria

Imagine Nigeria was designed as an independent exercise to facilitate collective reflections on the future of Nigeria. It was conceived as multi-stakeholder framework will enable all Nigerians to co-create a bold and desirable vision for Nigeria, collectively. The resulting report explores the challenges and opportunities as well as alternative scenarios of the future. It also proposes a series of recommendations to shape a sustainable and prosperous future for all. The report is accompanied by a series of resources, such as videos, action toolkits, infographics and templates that Nigerians everywhere can use to design and plan their own actions to start jointly building today a better future for their communities and for the country.

TOPLINE MESSAGES

- Nigeria is at a turning point. The challenges from COVID-19, the impact of climate change and socio-economic difficulties call for new thinking and a national conversation on how to build a desired future for all.
- Considering there is no better time to think about the future of Nigeria than now, constructive consultations involving 300 people from all over the country and abroad were held at various levels to reflect on Nigeria's future, imagine new possibilities, and propose a portfolio of big ideas that could lead to a sustainable and prosperous nation for all.
- These consultations resulted in the Imagine Nigeria report which suggests that, to achieve its potential, Nigeria must make big decisions and act now. The report argues that three main policy interventions are required to push Nigeria towards a brighter future which can be summarized in three words: innovation, green economy and regional leadership while two additional recommendations, building trust and articulating the national narrative, are the foundations on which these policy interventions must be built to ensure success.
- Its findings suggest that an economic, social and political revolution built on the culture of innovation would enable Nigeria to leap into the 21st century, transforming human capital and underpinning a fast-growing economy. Building on this, the report argues that a push to go green is the right option for Nigeria, resulting in faster growth and better outcomes across the board, for businesses and communities alike. As well, strong regional leadership, particularly in trade, is the key to Nigeria's growth.
- In exploring the future, the Imagine Nigeria report highlights the critical importance of the nation's need to domesticate and democratize technology as well as govern itself in a way that prioritizes the population at large. Critical issues include the need for trust and dynamic government as well as the need to forge an 'Africa narrative' led by Nigeria through strategic use of its soft and hard power to foster collaboration across the continent and the emergence at the global level.
- The Imagine Nigeria report, therefore, is not the end of the process but the beginning of a national conversation on the future. This exercise is not about predicting the future of Nigeria; rather it is about initiating a process of national reflection and facilitating the engagement of all Nigerians, especially those with the power to act, in building the future we desire.

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IN DEPTH MESSAGES

Key Recommendations

In light of the challenges and opportunities, as well as the emerging global trends, the report explores alternative futures for Nigeria. It proposes five recommendations/pillars of intervention, that includes (i) building a culture of innovation, (ii) catalysing the green economy, (iii) leading Africa, (iv) building trust, and (v) articulating a national narrative, that Nigerians should prioritize and jointly act upon to start building today a better future for all.

1. Build a Culture of Innovation

- For Nigeria to be competitive in the global marketplace, its economy will have to increasingly become innovation-based.
- The government must set up development agendas that are innovation-driven, based on a well-funded National System of Innovation (NSI) while working in close partnership with key sector/industry stakeholders to define the strategic goals and investment in areas with the most potential to drive innovation.
- Nigeria should also pursue an aggressive policy of a facilitative regulatory framework to immediately eliminate the constraints to innovation and digitalisation.

2. Catalyse the Green Economy

- Nigeria has what it takes to transition to a green economy and become Africa's green powerhouse.
- For green growth to work for Nigerians, green economy must be embedded within Nigeria's innovation-driven development agenda, with the goals of diversifying the economy as well as positioning the country as an investment destination for disruptive green innovation and as an industry leader, creating solutions to both local and global challenges.

3. Lead Africa

- Nigeria needs to build a smart power strategy that combines both hard and soft power to become the kind of leader that creates opportunities for itself and its partners.
- This will require Nigeria to rethink its economy as creative driven and service-based, leading the African agenda on trade and economic development; focusing its military might on conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts in the continent; investing in diplomacy, generating goodwill, and gaining greater influence in the regional and global multilateral arenas, among other interventions.

4. Build Trust

- Building trust in society can be done by substantially increasing citizen engagement, ensuring inclusion and participation, and building institutions capable of delivering public goods and social services.
- Decentralising government, investing in a national peacebuilding infrastructure and ending impunity, as well as adopting a Government as a Platform (GaaP) approach can also bring rapid and enduring transformation.

5. Articulate a National Narrative

- All successful nations have grand narratives that define the terms of belonging and meaning. The Imagine Nigeria report suggests that the country should embark on a sustainable transformative national mobilisation that will involve the retelling and reframing of the country's circumstances

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- and that will situate the past and the present within an evolutionary arc that bends towards progress.
- By means of national engagement, Nigerians can build a renewed social compact that will guide priorities and reflect a common vision and values, while defining what it means to be Nigerian.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING IMPLICATIONS

The Imagine Nigeria report explores the future of Nigeria and shows that building a prosperous, safe, cohesive, and dynamic country that provides wealth and opportunities for all its citizens is within the grasp of Nigerians. It highlights the important ‘seeds of change’ that are present or emerging which could lead Nigeria to its desired future. Through analysis, two critical trends/issues—governance and technology—were identified as the biggest factors that are likely to shape the world and Nigeria over the next 30 years. The key questions are:

- Will we have an “us” governance that is inclusive and negotiated or a “me first” governance that is self-serving, atomistic and insular?
- Will technology be open, inclusive and trusted, or closed and monopolistic?

How we answer these questions as a nation will determine what type of a future we have. In fact, in a fast changing and more complex world than ever, the challenge before Nigerians is how to proactively seize the opportunities provided as well as to be prepared to mitigate the threats. The report indicates that Nigeria holds great opportunities related to its people, its diversity as well as the creativity of its people, and the simple fact of its geography.

Expanding opportunities for Nigerians so that the people can fulfill their aspirations is possible. However, this will require change:

- *We need unity of purpose and to move together as a collective:* The people and their leadership must build a national consensus and find ways to unite around some key national ideals to drive progress. This will however require building trust, dynamic government, and national narratives that tell the story of who we are as a people, our values and our priorities while allowing for unity of purpose.
- *We need speed and ability to move fast:* Time is of the essence. Climate change which is driving changing consumer habits and movement for sustainability as well as the other numerous challenges facing our nation call for Nigeria to embark on a green agenda to facilitate structural change, economic diversification and national transformation. Nigeria must lead by seizing the emerging developments in the green space to build a new, highly competitive and productive economy with opportunities for all.
- *We need to make innovation the way of life:* Given where we are as a nation and what is happening around the world, if we are to create a prosperous nation for all, Nigeria must become an innovation driven country. It is not that the people are not innovative; it is the fact that the ecosystem for innovation remains stagnant and at its infancy. We must therefore invest in building a national innovation system that is robust and effective. It is also about building our technological capacity and capabilities as well as ensuring that innovation and creativity becomes a way of life. It calls for new approaches to the way we govern ourselves as a nation, educate our people, and address our development challenges.
- *We need to lead:* Nigeria must not be afraid to lead despite our challenges. Africa needs a united leadership and Nigeria, as the country with the biggest population and largest economy, can help to

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drive a new collaborative African agenda to provide Africa a voice in the global arena whether it is in trade, climate negotiations, and to lead in new areas such as the green economy to facilitate transformation. However, this will require a strategic marriage of its soft and hard power as well as the wherewithal to make the necessary investment.

- *We need to build a new approach for implementation:* transformation is not a government only exercise. All Nigerians will be needed to drive the necessary change. As such, the people must be involved in defining the way forward and five key principles must guide implementation of the resulting national agenda, including co-design and coopt the whole nation in the transformation process, prioritise actions, systematise and sequence actions, operationalise by ensuring all stakeholders know their roles, and measure and monitor progress as well as challenges with the aim of learning and correcting course as needed.

ABOUT THE REPORT

Methodology and Process:

- As the Imagine Nigeria Report is a foresight exercise, the process included a review of Nigeria's past and present, identification and analysis of trends that will impact the country, as well as the key uncertainties that will drive the outcomes of the future, the development of the various stories on how the future could unfold, and the formulation of recommendations that could lead to the desired future for the nation.
- The foresight approach was combined with a participatory process which included the engagement of stakeholders and experts both nationally and internationally. It involved stakeholders in a series of consultations with about 300 people in interviews, future-oriented workshops, as well as in policy dialogues by the Imagine Nigeria team.
- The exercise was led by the High Level Panel, set up to provide guidance and oversight, as well as ensure that the process is inclusive. Supporting the Advisory Board was a Steering Committee that provided technical guidance, and a Secretariat that proposed strategies and managed the day-to-day activities of the exercise, including the research and consultations as well as the drafting of the report. The project was supported by the United Nations Development Programme UNDP with funding and administrative assistance.
- In implementing the exercise, various methods and tools were employed, all with the the goal of fostering participants from all over the country to imagine their desired future for Nigeria and to devise the best pathways for the nation to get there. Based on foresight research and systems thinking, the team coordinated a series of consultations and reflections over a 9-month period starting from October 2020. Notable among the activities were:
 - **Interviews** with national, Nigerian diaspora, and international experts from academia, civil society, government, and the private sector.
 - **Futures-oriented workshops** that gathered participants from all over to explore Nigeria's issues, opportunities, and desired futures.
 - **Thematic focus groups with** stakeholder groups to discuss ideas and recommendations regarding the main policy interventions identified by the participants of previous futures-oriented workshops (culture of innovation, green economy, regional leadership) and the reforms (trust and dynamic government, based on a renewed social compact).

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- **Regional focus groups** that encompassed people from the private sector, civil society, and state civil service representatives to explore specific regional issues, demands, and desired futures.
- **Thematic workshops** with various participants, that delve into the proposed future scenarios and to explore the synergies among the identified policy intervention areas.
- In addition, a **scenarios team** was set up which included international experts as well as the secretariat. The team worked together over several months to develop the scenarios and a team of experts were also brought on board to take deep dives on the transformative ideas which emerged by consensus to build forward. The outcomes of the various engagements with stakeholders and experts, the desk research, targeted brainstorming sessions, as well as the analysis provided the basis for drafting the Imagine Nigeria report.

FAQ

1. Why undertake the Imagine Nigeria exercise?

- Exploring the future, as done with Imagine Nigeria, in the world of today that is filled with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) is a necessity.
- Nations that want to successfully build a desired future for their population are obliged to have foresight and to be strategic in their approach.
- This exercise, Imagine Nigeria, is an effort to organize a reflection on the future of our nation. It is not a plan or a visioning effort. But a process to reflect and engage the nation in a conversation about the future so we can be better prepare to build a prosperous future for all.

2. Why now?

- The world is in a state of flux with many challenges and opportunities. The usual challenges facing Nigeria from the impacts of climate change, high levels of unemployment and poverty, conflicts and terrorism, have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected the entire world and exacerbated health and economic challenges facing most countries.
- At the same time, there are important opportunities within the global environment and emerging seeds of change within Nigeria which could provide the ladder for successful transformation.
- It is therefore an opportune time to reflect and explore the future so that all Nigerian stakeholders, especially those with the power to act, can make better decisions today and enhance the prospects of building a better future for all.

3. Why this process?

- The process adopted for preparing the Imagine Nigeria report is informed by the foresight and systems thinking methodologies. In simple terms, the exercise explores the answers to four critical questions: where are we? Where are we headed? Where do we want to go, and how should we get there? As such, the approach adopted facilitated exploration of the past, present and future.
- The approach also allowed for participation and engagement of thinkers, experts and stakeholders across the country, Africa and the world. This participatory process allowed access to a global collective intelligence.
- These elements are key to futures exercises such as Imagine Nigeria and are used by the various institutions and countries in exploring their futures or the future of a specific issue.

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4. Why these recommendations?

- The Imagine Nigeria exercise is neither a plan nor a visioning exercise. The goal is to reflect on the future and with the outputs serving as a base for a national conversation on the future and mobilization of stakeholders for action.
- The goal is to find imaginative and creative ideas that can be the basis of Nigeria's transformation.
- These recommendations at this time are what could facilitate the nation's transformation in a sustained manner over the long term. They are the foundation and the building blocks for national transformation for Nigeria today.
- The first three recommendations (culture of innovation, green economy and lead Africa) are the policy proposals while the remaining two (building trust and articulating national narrative) are the foundations on which the policy interventions must be built to ensure success.

5. Does the current international crisis have impacts on the results of the exercise?

- Foresight is not a one-time exercise. It should, by nature, be ongoing and an integral element of the decision-making processes whether at the national, corporate or even individual levels. This is important for the continuous update of the scenarios and a review of the impacts on national or corporate strategy.
- For the Imagine Nigeria exercise, a critical examination of emerging global trends and their implications for Nigeria were undertaken in developing the scenarios. While the exercise did not foresee the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis specifically, the recommendations were developed taking into account the potential for a negative international environment.
- As such, the proposed recommendations for Nigeria's transformation were designed taking into account the potential for a favorable or unfavorable international environment.
- The recommendations are systemic and focused on building the critical base for Nigeria's transformation no matter what is happening around the world. Even so, the current crisis has confirmed both the need and the opportunities for green economy and innovation-based economic diversification, discussed in the Imagine Nigeria report.
- As the report suggests, the "challenge before Nigerians is how to proactively seize the opportunities provided by the rapidly changing world as well as to be prepared to mitigate the threats".

6. How can the outputs of Imagine Nigeria be used?

- Imagine Nigeria is a Presidential initiative to explore the future and provide recommendations for transformation in light of the emerging challenges and realities of the world.
- The output of the exercise is neither a vision document or a national plan.
- The exercise is meant, however, to incite national conversations on the future, what can be done to realize our national aspirations, and to help mobilize all stakeholders for collective actions.
- As such, the Imagine Nigeria report is for all Nigerians and friends of Nigeria; all should engage with it, and all should challenge themselves, their organizations as well as local, civic, business, political, religious and national leaders on how they can engage and contribute to building a culture of innovation, catalyzing the green economy, leading Africa, building trust and facilitating a national narrative.

7. What are the implications of the emerging acceptance of natural gas as transition fuel?

- With the current global crisis, there is a growing realization that in the journey towards a green future, natural gas (a low-carbon fuel) can serve as substitute for higher content fossil fuels (coal and oil) to reduce CO2 emissions.

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- While Nigeria must seize the opportunity this provides, it should not become a “wall”. Essentially, this should buy the nation some time, but it should not hinder or delay the effort to push towards economic diversification by going green.
- Even if oil and gas prices have now risen to their highest levels in nearly a decade, experts understand that the oil economy is on a path of long-term decline. As such, the search for energy security will only accelerate the clean energy transition.
- Many countries, especially in the advanced economies, are speeding-up plans to diversify their energy sources. Therefore, catalyzing and building the green economy is critical for Nigeria’s long-term growth and development.