

**FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE AND ADMINISTRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, 1999-2012**

Daniel Eseme Gberevbie and Jide Ibietan

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria

**ABSTRACT**

Studies have shown that no nation can attain sustainable development for the enhancement of the living standard of the people without a properly organized public service to implement government policies. In this regard, the paper examines the application of the federal character principle in the Nigerian public service for sustainable development. With the adoption and analysis of secondary data, the paper observes that the implementation of the federal character principle in Nigerian public service tends to encourage unethical behaviour amongst public officials and circumscribe merit in the area of manpower procurement and promotion. It therefore concludes that for the Nigerian public service to achieve its mandate of facilitating sustainable development there is need for the government to reappraise the implementation of the federal character principle through the enforcement of merit anchored on public service reform initiatives that can galvanize human capacity and governmental institutions for sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Federal Character Principle, Administrative Effectiveness, Sustainable Development, Public Service, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Plural and sharply divided societies all over the world attempt to manage their diversities and divisive tendencies through one or combination of policy alternatives in the organization and management of their public services for performance; and Nigeria is not an exception (Bodunrin, 1989:303-324; Ayoade, 2000:101-120; Abdullah, 2007:363-378). Often times, these policy alternatives turn out to be delicate arrangements; but when carefully conceived, crafted and practiced, it provides opportunity for centre-seeking and centre-fleeing forces to interact peacefully and co-habit on agreed terms. One of such policy alternatives adopted for the management of the public service in Nigeria for even representation is the federal character principle, which “was borne out of the need to ensure...even spread of government appointments...in all the regions, states and local government councils in the country” (Nzeshi, 2012:97).

Nigeria is a federal society comprising 36 states structure with a population of more than 150 million people and has more than 250 ethnic groups, which necessitate an arrangement that could accommodate people from the different segments of the country in the public bureaucracy (Gberevbie, 2012:187-210). The notion of federal character presupposes the existence of a federal society. However, as a federal state, Nigeria was faced with the challenge of how to imbibe the principle of federalism in practice. As a result, the quota system was introduced into the Nigerian public service in 1958 by the government “to ensure equitable representation of the various groups in the country” (Tonwe and Oghator, 2009:235). To further consolidate on the gains of the quota system, the Federal Military Government of Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo in the drafting and approval of the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria during the transition to civilian rule (1976-79) introduced into the Nigerian political and administrative landscapes the principle of federal character (Ekeh, 1989:19). Federal character principle sought to give “opportunities in education and employment, usually at the point of entry, to disadvantaged groups and areas to enable them compete and catch up with more advanced areas and sectors of the nation” (Ekeh, 1989:38).

In comparing the practice of quota system with that of the federal character principle, Ekeh (1989:38) posits that the latter “demands far more” than the former in the sense that “it switches emphasis from opportunities to privileges and benefits.” He argues that federal character principle is a legal weapon put in place to regulate appointments, promotions, security of tenure and severance in every government department. The reference to the phrase “disadvantaged groups” in the area of educational opportunities means that “special consideration should be given to candidates from the Northern provinces and other areas where educational facilities were more backward than elsewhere” (Gboyega, 1989:166). The awkward application of the federal character principle tends to pose challenges to administrative effectiveness in the Nigerian public service through the circumscription of merit. Such practice of the principle of federal character in personnel procurement without due regard for merit is more likely to mire efforts at sustainable development in a society.

The formal adoption of the federal system in Nigeria, which came into existence with the introduction of the Lyttleton constitution of 1954, signaled the need for representative bureaucracy that could address the problem in the composition of the federal public service anchored on effective service delivery (Adamolekun, 1989:41-60; Ayoade, 2000:101-120;

Ikelegbe, 2004). Public service or administrative effectiveness requires a blend of theory with practice. Accordingly, Max Weber (1864-1920) showed the way forward on how to achieve organizational effectiveness through the theory of ideal bureaucracy; and it is doubtful if any modern human organization, whether in public and private sector can function adequately without adhering to the principle of rationality in employee procurement and rewards as postulated by Max Weber (Edigin and Otohile, 1994; Anyebe, 2004:15-27).

The features of the Weberian (legal-rational) model are: hierarchy which implies structure; promotion based on professional merit; skills as guide for recruitment; the development of career service; reliance on and use of rules and regulations that are scientific; impersonality of relationships among career professionals and their clientele in the bureaucracy, specialization along functional lines; authority and responsibility; and proper documentation or record-keeping in a formal organizational or nation (Anyebe, 2004:15-27; Henry, 2007:52).

Arising from the above, the questions that come to mind are: how has the public service adapted to the Weber's bureaucratic model of rational legal authority for administrative effectiveness in Nigeria? As a federal state, how has the principle of federal character in the procurement and promotion of employees helped to bring into the public service the required competent workforce for enhanced performance? What are the merits and demerits of the introduction and the current implementation of the federal character principle in the Nigerian public service for sustainable development? These questions underline the authors attempt at interrogating the utility and viability of the application of federal character principle in the nation's quest for achieving administrative effectiveness for sustainable development.

## **MAIN ARGUMENT, METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE**

The main argument in this paper is that the introduction of the federal character principle and its implementation has failed to bring into the Nigerian public service competent and motivated workforce that could support administrative effectiveness for enhanced performance in the implementation of government policies for sustainable development. Secondary data obtained from relevant books, journals, internet resource, magazines and newspapers were adopted and analyzed to accomplish the work. The paper is structured into six parts. Part one serves as the introduction, part two examines the origin and meaning of federal character principle in Nigeria, part three looks at the concept of administrative effectiveness, part four examines the concept of sustainable development, part five discusses the principle of federal character, administrative effectiveness and sustainable development in Nigeria, and part six concludes the paper.

## **THE ORIGIN AND MEANING OF FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE IN NIGERIA**

The account of scholars like Afigbo (1989:3-18), Ekeh (1989:19-44), Gboyega (1989:164-185) and Uroh (2000:191-200) on the origin of federal character principle in Nigeria seem to be similar. Afigbo (1989:3) was however more specific, when he posits that "the term federal character is one of the inventions of the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC) inaugurated by the late General Murtala Mohamed on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1975." Other scholars merely traced the origin of federal character to the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Afigbo (1989) corroborated the view, when he argues that "it was

in the course of the debate on that section of the report of the sub-committee on the executive and the legislature which dealt with how to promote national loyalty in a multi-ethnic society that the phrase – federal character was coined.” The CDC (1977:x) conceptualized federal character as:

*refers to the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the environment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.*

The above definition of federal character by the CDC appears very inadequate and suffers on many counts. Just as Afigbo (1989:5) documented, federal character cannot be a desire. In addition “the desire to nourish” in the definition appear very ambiguous. What is the desire? If the desire is known, then what is the desire attempting to nourish? It seems logical to say that the CDC only tried to highlight some issues agitating the mind of Nigerians on how to make every segment of the society to be represented in the formulation and implementation of government policies known in Nigeria as “the National Question.” While canvassing for support of the adoption of the federal character principle in the 1979 Nigerian Constitution as strategy for peace, equity and stability, the CDC (1977:ix) argued thus:

*There had in the past been inter-ethnic rivalry to secure the domination of government by one ethnic group or combination of ethnic groups to the exclusion of others. It is therefore essential to have some provisions to ensure that the predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups is avoided in the composition of government or the appointment or election of persons to high offices in the state.*

The phrase “desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity” in the earlier definition by the CDC (1977) is an indication that there is the need to reappraise the Nigerian federal system, in order to achieve enduring unity and sustainable development. In this regard, Afigbo (1989:6) submitted that “federal character of Nigeria must be taken to mean...the character of the Nigerian federation.” According to him, to understand and define the character of the Nigerian federation, the following factors must be noted: the innate or primordial characteristics of Nigeria’s federal society going back to the days of yore; the quality and performance of the statesmanship which has sought to harness the inborn characteristics of Nigeria’s federal society to a federal constitution; the degree of harmony existing between the primordial features and usages of Nigerian society; the structure and usages of the constitution; and the fact that the character of the Nigerian federation has been rather dynamic in response to the changing perceptions of statesmanship and other relevant forces.

The import of the above exposition is that the term federal character becomes lucid mainly in the light of history, because the problems which federal character encapsulates has existed in Nigeria in different forms and with varying degree since the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates in 1914. Ekeh (1989:20) however argues, “the problems that the doctrine of Nigerian federal character deals with are...partially federal in nature. The issues associated with federal character relate as much to unitary systems of government” As documented in the 1979 constitution, federal character purports to deal

with distribution of privileges and benefits among the primordial components of any state organization. It is this preoccupation with sharing privileges and benefits that come with participation in government (and not in resource generation or “cake-baking”) that is the major albatross of the implementation or application of the federal character principle in Nigeria. The need therefore to tinker with this practice with a view to ensuring administrative effectiveness for sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Gboyega (1989:177) posits that the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy in the 1979 constitution explains federal character to mean that:

*The composition of the Federal Government or any of its agencies and the conduct of their affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to recognize the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and to command national loyalty. Accordingly, the predominance in that government or its agencies of persons from a few ethnic or other sectional groups shall be avoided.*

The above constitutional mandate was made with a view to enhance participation of people from different segments of the Nigerian society in the process of governance. However, Onyeoziri (2002:17) observes that “the implementation of the federal character has caused a lot of tension among the different federating units in the country.” The reasons for the tension are as follow: the fuzziness that pervades its application in certain areas; the arbitrariness that seems to accompany its application even in areas where the application seems straight, especially during the military regimes; lack of political will from the leading elite to employ sanctions when the rules are breached; and lack of definite guideline in achieving balance between equity and efficiency in the application of the principle. These factors tend to highlight the liabilities to the judicious practice of the principle and poses serious encumbrances to the realization of sustainable development in Nigeria (Onyeoziri, 2002:18).

It has been observed from the application of the federal character principle that rather than ameliorate, it provokes ethno-regional division; furthermore, it suffers from a fundamental contradiction as a policy option for managing the national question in Nigeria (Onyeoziri, 2002:18). This is so because rather than the principle to treat the Nigerian citizen as an individual in his/her own rights, it considers the individual as a member of an ethno-linguistic group within the state, thus reinforcing the integrity of those sub-structures instead of the general structure (nation), and make them attractive to the individual. It is logically inconsistent that a policy directed at strengthening loyalty to the nation-state is anchored on primordial sentiment and cleavages as basis for recognition.

## **THE CONCEPT OF ADMINISTRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS**

An age-old argument which has also underlined the divergence between public administration and business administration is that public sector administrative output is not easy to measure. Support for this argument hinges on the notion that public (sector) administration embarks on provision of social services (law and order, security, flood protection, foreign policy, currency and coinage, naturalization and citizenship), its output/activities are unquantifiable. Ekong (1980:19) stretched this argument further thus “since bureaucracies intrinsically lack objective criteria for measuring efficiency or a feedback mechanism in the sense of immediate profit or loss from daily operations, they tend to become rigid and to cling to their

ineffectiveness until there is a crisis.” It has however been argued by some scholars that effectiveness in the public service can be measured using administrative/management, policy and service criteria (Tampieri, 2005:59-80). In this regard therefore, what is effectiveness?

Effectiveness can be defined “as the extent to which an organization realizes its goals or objectives” (Ekong, 1980:20). In the same vein, Soyode (1980:33) posits that effectiveness refers “...to the capacity to provide or accomplish the correct end...it emphasizes the efforts to secure the relevant outcome.” Effectiveness in administration translates not just to the quantity and quality of service/output, but also its correspondence to meet desired needs. This means that effectiveness relates directly to organizational goals and objectives or ends. In analyzing the above definitions, one can start with the following question: what are the goals and objectives of public sector organizations? The goals and objectives of public sector organizations are as varied and all encompassing to include law and order, security of lives and properties, provision of social amenities and flood protection, which are geared towards the enhancement of the living standard of the people in a society. When these conditions or goals are achieved by a nation-state and exists over a fairly long period of time, it can be reasonably asserted that the march towards sustainable development is on course.

In the private sector organizations for instance, the measures or determinants of effectiveness of an organization include productivity, stability, morale, integration of formal and informal aspects of the organization, maximization of employees’ potentials and values contributed to the society. On the other hand, administrative or public service effectiveness can in a way be measured by the extent to which it satisfies the yearnings and aspirations of the society in which it exist and functions to serve. It does appear therefore that for public service values to be effective, they must approximate societal values and be pursued to achieve the overall goals of enhancing the standard of living of the people. This implies that for the goals and objectives of the public sector organization to be realized, its activities must be subjected to routine reforms in order to continuously justify its existence and relevance. This realization seems to underline the various attempts at reforming the Nigerian public service from the Hunt Committee of 1934 to the recent Oronsaye committee of 2012. These reform initiatives were targeted at improving managerial capacity as well as institutional developments geared toward achieving administrative effectiveness for sustainable development. Organizational ineffectiveness can result from managerial inefficiency and it is important to note that effectiveness subsumes efficiency because the latter is the means to achieving the former.

Heinrich (2007:27) exemplified administrative effectiveness via performance management which translates into “working to infuse quality management principles and moving toward a focus on results or value for money” This assertion does not seem to approximate or explain the Nigerian public service situation when it comes to the issue of performance in terms of social service delivery. Deliberate and well-focused strategies are therefore required to achieve this, in order to attain sustainable development.

According to Tampieri (2005:62), “effectiveness refers to the extent to which the objectives have been achieved and the relationship between the intended and actual effect of outputs in objectives achievement.” This definition captures

administrative effectiveness from the point of goals and objectives attainment and converges with the view expressed by Ekong (1980). The central issue here is on how administrative process contributes to organizational goals and objectives. It must be noted that with reference to public organizations in Nigeria, the focus which ought to be on the “true public” in meeting the interests of the people in the area of qualitative service delivery is lacking. What this implies is that quality; cost and service delivery should be part of the irreducible criteria underlining administrative effectiveness in a society. The public sector would require mechanisms to know if qualitative services are provided, the impact of public policy on citizens, and if results or outputs translate to real value in terms of expenditure or costs and how it has improved quality of lives in the country. It is through these ingredients that sustainable development can be measured and achieved in real terms.

Administrative effectiveness seems to be finding expression under President Jonathan’s transformation agenda through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The KPIs is an initiative of the National Planning Commission of the Nigerian Federal Government. The performance system initiative is premised on three basic principles namely: “what gets measured gets done; if you cannot measure success, you cannot reward it; if you cannot measure failure, you cannot correct it” (Obia, 2012:91). Based on the above criteria, Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of government at the federal level are required to develop detailed documents to guide implementation of KPIs up to 2015, and on each of the KPIs, there would be half yearly reports to the president and the public; the scorecards will be correspondingly published. This looks like an attempt to make the public sector organizations in Nigeria to be accountable and ultimately effective (Obia, 2012).

## **THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Contemporary studies seem to be broadening the meaning or doing a total overhaul or redefinition of the concept of development. The concept of development tends to be moving away from economic indicators (increase in GDP, GNP, PCI and others) to non-economic analysis such as the democratic imperatives of political governance and social indicators (Jhingan, 2007:5-12). This also explains why Sen (1999) visualized development from the ends and means of freedom. He conceives freedom as a primary end and principal means of development. Egonmwan and Ibodje (2001:10-12) characterized development in terms of condition of life; as a goal; and as the capacity to grow, change and finally develop. Development as a condition of life is not an absolute but relative condition comparative to every change. It fluctuates with needs, what is possible and feasible at a particular time. Predicated on these, the authors averred that any country which is not satisfying the yearnings and expectations of its populace is not developed.

On the other hand, sustainable development refers to the continuous and sustained qualitative improvement in the overall standard of living of people in a society or nation and the structural transformation/changes in the productive and distributive input and output systems of the economy (Ollawa, 1977; Ojobo, 2005:26-47). Springett and Foster (2005) argue that sustainable development has to do with the well-being of all people in a particular society or community. A nation or community could be said to have attained or be on the part of sustainable development when members of that community or society could boast of improved condition of living on a continuous basis over a reasonable period of time. In this regard, Sampson (2013:26-34) posits that “sustainable development advocates focus mostly on how nations, organizations,

communities, individuals and other global stakeholders could meet their developmental needs in ways that will not conflict with the needs or well-being of others.”

Sustainable development as a goal therefore entails the eradication of poverty in terms of physical and non-physical needs; and quality of life beyond mere sustenance which implies human dignity and liberty. Development as capacity combines private and public sectors of the economy in implementing developmental policies, projects and programmes. It implies methods, systems and activities oriented towards development are executed in order to achieve specific goals of development. Therefore, organizations, agencies and institutions in the private and public sectors are involved and are required to sustain and support developmental processes (Egonmwan and Ibodje, 2001). It is important to note that the availability of competent managerial capability and delivery system in the social, economic and political institutions cannot be overemphasized in achieving sustainable development in a society. This is the interface between the need for proper application of the federal character principle and administrative effectiveness for sustainable development.

The object of development is people, any development initiative and process that is not people-centered misses the point. According to Claude Ake “development is the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values” (cited in Obi and Nwanegbo, 2006:5-6). Building on Todaro and Smith (2003), Obi and Nwanegbo further operationalized development thus:

*A multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty. It must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.*

The comprehensive nature of the above definition and issues involved in development is not in doubt and bears testimony to the fact that development must be people-centered and sustained for it to be meaningful. Onuoha (2010:120) conceptualized national development by building on the works of Rodney (1972) and Nnoli (1981) thus:

*The unending process of qualitative and quantitative transformation in the capacity of a state to organize the process of production and distribution of the material benefits of society in a manner that sustains improvement in the well being of its individual members in order to enhance their capacity to realize their full potentials, in furtherance of the positive transformation and sustenance of their society and humanity at large (Onuoha, 2010:120).*

It is deductible from the above definition that national development entails sustained improvement in the political, social, economic, health, technological and environmental aspects of any organized or well ordered society. A further explication of the above definition imply that the political ingredients of national development comprises political stability, free and fair electoral process, representativeness in political institutions and sanctity of the rule of law. The economic indicators include GNP, nature of income distribution and pattern of resource management. The social aspects encapsulate gender equality, social justice, living standard of citizens as measured by Human development Indicators like access to social services (potable water, education, health, security, electricity and motorable roads). The environmental dimension reflects the character of resource exploitation, nature of environmental degradation, and environmental friendly practices among citizens. Going by the above indicators of development, it may not be far from the truth to conclude that Nigeria is yet to attain development in administrative, social, political, economic, technological and environmental spheres.

### **FEDERAL CHARACTER AND ADMINISTRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The federal character principle which made its debut into the Nigerian political and public administrative landscape through the drafting and adoption of the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria appeared to be a normative expression of the historical belief of Nigerians in equal access to and participation in the political and administrative affairs of the country in the area of policy formulation and implementation. To support the above view, Alubo (2003:54-66) points out that the lack of representation in policy making and implementation by some segments of the Nigerian society in the past has denied them the opportunities for education and economic advancement.

In order to drive the implementation of the federal character principle, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) was established by decree 34 of 1996, and the powers of the commission was summarized by Mustapha (2007) to include: working out formula for sharing posts and services; compliance monitoring; enforcement of compliance through legal actions; demanding and reviewing data on staffing; and institutional investigations. The FCC is a commission under the presidency; its members are appointed by the president, but subject to the ratification of the Nigerian Senate. To ensure equity in representation, the law establishing the commission states that the executive chairman and secretary are to be appointed in such a way that if the chairman comes from the North, the secretary must be chosen from the South and vice versa. However, Nzeshi (2012:98) argues that “since its establishment, the Federal Character Commission has been headed mostly by Northerners.”

To properly implement the federal character principle, a bill is currently before the Nigerian National Assembly for amendment to enable FCC “to effectively enforce the principles of equity and fairness ... also enable public officers to comply with rules and regulations issued by the commission” (Nzeshi, 2012:97). The implication of the request to amend the FCC act shows that the principle and the structure put in place to enforce its implementation is not totally effective as envisaged by the government, and this is amply corroborated by Nzeshi (2012:97) submission that “the inefficiency of the

FCC to effectively enforce its mandate as a government watchdog in identifying and addressing inequality is increasingly worrisome.”

In emphasizing the shortcomings of the application of the FC principle in Nigeria Gboyega (1989:178) points out that “...the issues of making public institutions reflect the federal character was taken up haphazardly giving rise to arbitrariness and victimization of some unfortunate public servants.” In the same vein, Ekeh (1989:34) contends that “its most radical and damaging application has been in the bureaucracies and public services of the federation...permanent secretaries have been kicked around, removed and sometimes dismissed.” He argues further that the application of the FC principle “has invaded the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and...other governmental bodies that normally require safeguards from the ravages of politics.” Furthermore, the negative effects of federal character on the public sector performance in Nigeria can be gleaned from the work of Forrest (1993:76), where he argues that the implementation of the principle of federal character in the public service “not only led to poor appointments but also enhanced mediocrity rather than merit.” To promote administrative effectiveness for performance in the Nigerian public service, Utomi (2002:48) argues that “we need to engage on the issues of competence, commitment, corruption and conflict of interest and career certainty. From there come both threats to the effectiveness of the civil service and opportunities for the service to be the anchor of a Nigerian renaissance.”

The contributions of a foremost scholar and practitioner in Nigerian public administration, Adamolekun (2008:17) to this discourse were more probing thus: “Has the federal character (FC) principle promoted or retarded national loyalty and stability? Or has the area or ethnic region of a person become the key factor in determining his quality as an individual?” He argues further that “only a critical assessment of ...years of implementing the FC principle...would help determine the desirable way forward.” It is quite relieving that he answered the above questions in a related discussion thus:

*The “federal character” principle that was introduced as Nigeria’s path to achieving “representative bureaucracy” was morphed into the bad practice of politicization. Capacity development programmes for public servants that were a major concern during the immediate pre and post-independence years was progressively neglected notwithstanding the strong case made for it in the Udoji report 1974 (Adamolekun, 2007:17).*

It is very clear from the above submission why administrative effectiveness in the Nigerian public service for sustainable development may continue to be a mirage. Contributing to the debate on public sector ineffectiveness, Suleiman (2009:33) contends that “poor capacity of the majority of civil servants, sometimes to the point of illiteracy” arising from the application of the FC is one of the reasons for poor performance of the Nigerian public service. The views of Suleiman (2009) and Adamolekun (2009) goes to support the argument that the neglect of capacity development programmes for public servants and the implementation of the FC offer a credible explanation on the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian public bureaucracy for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Also, Tonwe and Oghator (2009:237) submit that “federal character allows ethno-regional patrons and their clients to exploit and mismanage state resources without contributing to any meaningful development.” As noted by Ojo (2009:167), “there is

no greater inequality than the equal treatment of unequals.” The FC policy as practised in Nigeria is elitist and class biased, additionally, it leads to a blurring of the boundary between the pursuits of meritocracy and ethnic balancing, thereby creating inadvertently a multiple system of citizenship in the polity. In addition, the principle and its application have brought about the unintended effect of creating situations of ‘elimination by substitution’ which makes it counter-productive. This it does through discrimination in appointment and promotion. The principle attempts to achieve equality of all states, whereas states are not equal in population, and size of the pool of candidates for appointment (Ojo, 2009; Tonwe and Oghator, 2009).

According to Ayoade (2009), equality of states in the implementation of the FC principle as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution means “that the North was represented in the ratio 19:17 (52.8 percent) of public posts.” He posits that “this situation is further complicated by the fact that arithmetical justice does not necessarily translate to socio-political justice. A representative bureaucracy does not necessarily translate into power equality for the members” (cited in Ojo, 2009:v). Viewed from the foregoing submissions, the FC principle presents an ambiguous and deceitful recipe for equity and unity in a federal society like Nigeria.

Supporting the importance of merit as strategy for manpower procurement in the nation’s quest for administrative effectiveness and enhanced performance for sustainable development, Soludo (2012:7) argues that the emergence of a merit driven culture is, therefore, a key outcome of Vision 20:20:20 and an area of immediate policy focus. To this end, a comprehensive review of ethnic balancing measures and diversity management related laws such as the implementation of the federal character principle will be undertaken with a view to ensuring greater promotion of merit for sustainable development in Nigeria. According to The Transformation Agenda (2011-2015:10), Nigeria’s inability to attain sustainable development in the past has been attributed to the nation’s inability to tackle development challenges such as poverty, unemployment, corruption and security hinged on bad governance and ineffective institutions/agencies of government. The poor implementation of the principle of federal character in the Nigerian public service is therefore capable of bringing into the service incompetent workforce that lacks the ability to implement the policies of government for sustainable development. Gberevbie (2010:116-117) however argues that:

*Predicating employee recruitment on federal character does not mean that such an employee cannot contribute meaningfully towards the enhancement of the goals of the organization. This is particularly so where appropriate recruitment strategies involving the screening of potential employees based on relevant skills, experience and educational qualifications are adopted. What is important therefore is the ability of the individual employed and his/her willingness to work for the organization. In addition, through proper staff training and development by organizations of their workforce, organizational productivity is enhanced even where incompetent employees would have been employed through inappropriate recruitment strategies.*

In the same vein, Olaopa (2012:56) commends the federal character principle as one of the “effective nation-building strategies invented for managing the combustive diversity in Nigeria.” He however argues that “this principle has badly

eroded professional and competency capacity of the public service.” With this state of affairs, how can Nigeria attain sustainable development? Olaopa (2012) responded to this poser by alluding to the declining content of the nation’s tertiary education without the right skill to fill in the capacity gap in the public service. He concluded that “the nation unfortunately, could also no longer benefit from a “town and gown” networking that harnesses and deploys the full weight of the available academic capital and capacities to the task of national development” (Olaopa, 2012:56).

In this regard, the application of the FC principle has failed to offer credible solutions to administrative ineffectiveness in the Nigerian public service and has actually become a drag on sustainable development. The implication of the foregoing is that unethical behaviour among public officials and low productivity in the Nigerian public service can be explained by the appointment of incompetent personnel through the application the FC principle that makes it possible for people from the different segments of the Nigerian society to be represented in government without due consideration for merit and quality training to enhance productivity.

### **SOME INSTANCES OF POOR PERFORMANCE OF OFFICIALS IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE**

One of the manifestations of the implementation of the federal character principle is the poor employee procurement practice, which results in unethical behaviour among public sector workers in Nigeria. Below are some of the instances:

The audit investigation ordered by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources towards the end of 2011, with the involvement of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and was carried out by an internationally recognized audit firm – KPMG, revealed that the cost of subsidy payment on petroleum products not consumed by end users due to losses from theft and even those not supplied for use in Nigeria between 2007 and 2009 amounted to NGN11.8 billion or USD76.13 million (Agbo, 2012:56-58).

In the month of March 2012, the Nigerian Senate set up an Adhoc Committee to investigate unethical behaviour amongst public officials in the Nigerian Police Pension Fund Administration. While testifying on the pension fund management to the Senate Adhoc Committee, the former Head of Service of the Nigerian Civil Service and Chairman of the Nigerian Public Service Reform Committee of 2012, Stephen Oronsaye revealed that “top government officials were known to have falsified documents in order to siphon money from the pension fund” (Onwukwe, 2012:19). He disclosed that during his tenure as Head of the Nigerian Civil Service, it was discovered that the fraud was perpetrated from the office of the Accountant-General of the Nigerian Federation. According to him, “The Federal Government of Nigeria spent NGN5 billion or USD32.26 million monthly as pension when in the actual sense, pension expenses ought to be NGN1 billion or USD6.5 million only (Onwukwe, 2012:19). Furthermore, the Director, Pension Administration in the Office of the Head of Service of the Nigerian Federation, Dr. Sani Shuaibu and 31 other top officials were arrested by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) for theft of NGN4.5 billion or USD29.03 million belonging to the Nigerian Police Pension Fund (Abuh, & Musari, 2012:1-2; Adewole, 2012:1&4).

The Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) is a governmental agency established to oversee all port matters in Nigeria as it relates to international trade. However, appointment of public officials based on federal character principle/political patronage led to the appointment of Chief Bode George, a former National Vice-Chairman (West) of the ruling party in Nigeria – People’s Democratic Party (PDP) as Chairman, board of the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) in 2009. Chief Bode George and four other board members were charged by the EFCC before a Lagos High Court and were eventually jailed for contract inflation and mismanagement of NGN100 billion or USD645.16 million belonging to the NPA. (Fanoro, 2012:3). This is a case of unethical behaviour amongst public officials to rob the nation of the benefits of international trade and development. It is unfortunate that the funds that would have gone into developmental drive of the government are being mismanaged by incompetent workforce arising from the application of federal character principle in Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper examines the challenge and prospects of the federal character (FC) principle and administrative effectiveness for sustainable development in Nigeria. It observed that the FC principle as practiced in Nigeria diverts emphasis from merit (based on hard work and achievement) to sharing privileges and benefits accruable from representative bureaucracy, it thus limits effectiveness in public bureaucracy and ultimately national development. The application of FC principle runs counter some features of the Weberian bureaucratic model of rationality in the procurement and promotion of employees as cardinal planks upon which formal organizations should be built. This state of affairs impinges on administrative effectiveness and the expected role of public bureaucracies in policy implementation for sustainable development.

The paper observes that the practice of the FC principle in Nigeria suffers from a major contradiction, because it brings about division amongst Nigerians rather than foster unity as was originally intended by its proponents as a policy option for managing the challenge of equal representation of people from different segments of the society in a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria. It submitted that where appropriate recruitment strategies involving the screening of potential employees based on relevant skills, experience and educational qualifications are adopted and the proper staff training and development of the workforce, organizational productivity could be enhanced even where incompetent employees would have been employed through (in some instances), the poor application of federal character principle in the Nigerian public service.

To overcome the shortcomings of the FC principle application for sustainable development, there is the need to tinker with the current practice of federalism in Nigeria, with an eye on restructuring for progress. Merit should constitute a weighty consideration, even in seeking to achieve geo-political balancing on recruitment and promotion in the Nigerian public sector. Also, the reform initiatives of the Federal Government should emphasize human capacity and institutional development and governance devoid of sentiments and unethical behaviour in government business. In addition, Efforts at building national consciousness through the generation of complete sense of loyalty to the nation-state should be pursued by the Federal Government. Furthermore, the nature and character of the leading elites of the country and the policy products of the

Nigerian state, which is based on particularistic tendencies and interests, must change fundamentally for the public sector to be managed for effectiveness in the nation's quest for sustainable development.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Daniel Esemé Gberevbíe and Jide Ibietan, Lecturers in Public Administration, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.