

RESTRUCTURING NIGERIA AND ETHNIC CONTENDING INTERESTS:

THE SEARCH FOR NATIONAL CONSENSUS

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria, a nation state, as we know it today came into being in the colonial Period. The British, in their bid to have a big empire in order to accumulate large volume of resources decided on a policy of integrating the numerous distinct ethnic groups around the major ethnic groups with the Hausa/Fulani occupying large area in the North, the Yoruba to the West and the Igbo the East. These groups were loomed together forcefully. This created fragile peace and coercive unity among them, as each group regard itself as distinct nationality. The desires to assert this distinctiveness collides with each other in the struggle for power. This, has led to terror and violent, one burning issue that threaten the unity of Nigeria. Many observers attributed the multidimensional social problems confronting Nigeria to the Faulty nature of the existing structure, and lack of sustainable development, therefore call for restructuring. This paper examines critically some challenges that might marr such efforts. The study adopted historical and descriptive research methodology and rely on secondary data for its analysis. Major finding show that incompatible ethnic demands would make efforts to restructure Nigeria unrealistic. The study concluded that to achieve the desire structure national consensus should first be established through the recurring decimal of national conference since the Jonathan Confab reports have been consigned to the dustbin of history by the current administration. Devolution of power to the components groups on the basis of ethnic nationalities in the true spirit of federalism. This will help to reduce the source of tension and terrorism and also the struggle for state power among the various ethnic groups.

Keywords: Nigeria, Ethic groups, Federalism, Restructuring, Sustainability, Development.

INTRODUCTION

One grim reality that confronts Nigeria today is the resurgence of ethnic demands. These demands have come to deepen insecurity in the country. In fact, the grip of insecurity has compelled more and more Nigerians to dismiss the legitimacy and authority of the Nigerian state. To this end, the fear of uncertainty has increased to the extent that citizens now resort to self-help, seeking security and solidarity in their own ethnic religions or regional affiliation and identity. Poverty and ineffective governance in Nigeria have further sharpened the ethnic division leading to misunderstanding between ethnic and religion groups who see themselves as rivals that must be surpassed by any mean. Matters are not even helped by the increasing inability of the political class to halt the decay in the polity.

It has now become clear that the current Nigerian state does not and cannot work as it is presently structured. The need to restructure the Nigerian state has gained populist currency, especially, since the beginning of 2017. It has become a consensus call coming from almost all the ethnics, political and geographical sections that make up the corporate Nigeria state. The Yoruba nation held rally in favour of restructuring Nigeria at Ibadan in September, 2017, and declared that “Restructuring was being proposed because we love ourselves, without restructuring, we are only paying lip services to national change. The south-south zone held similar meeting in Yenegoa, Bayelsa state and also established their position on restructuring Nigeria in march, 2018. The South-East Famous Awka Declaration on the Ndigbo’s position on restructure as well as the 19 states Northern governors meetings, have clearly shown that the call for a new and different Nigeria have gained an overwhelming numerical strength. The argument to restructure Nigeria becomes more compelling and can simply not be ignored or wished away any longer. Particularly if the desire sustainable development is to be achieved. Sustainable development in this context mean balance development initiative between the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Theoretical framework.

The call for restructuring Nigeria cannot actually be justifiably said to be a random act. This is why it is pertinent to search for, and adduce theoretical explanation to it. In this study, we employed two theoretical frameworks:

Basic human needs theory:

This is used in order to unravel the reason for multidimensional social problem in Nigeria: the basic idea of this theory is that certain basic needs are necessary for the survival of human being, and that lack of these basic needs prone human being into conflict.

Burton (1997) and Dexit (2004) agreed to this fact. They averred that, when individual or group is denied its basic need for identify, security, recognition or equal participation within the society, protracted conflict becomes inevitable. This is because basic human needs influence once belief, and values place on them. As rightly observed by Burton (1997), basic needs are so fundamental, that individual or groups are prepared to go to extreme, including defying known norms and system in order to pursue deeply felt needs. In Nigeria, the long years of neglect by government of the citizens have engendered a loss of faith in the state, thus, primordial identities now take centre stage as evidenced by the presence of various ethnic associations. This gives way for the adoption of the second theory: social identity theory.

The social identity theory:

This theory highlights the fact that the perception of difference between one's group and another often leads to discrimination. Sheriff (1966)'s explanation that ethnic mutually in compatible goals give vent to inter group conflict. The awareness of the differences between the various ethnic groups one belongs to and another group (out-group) propagate Prejudice and hatred, among Nigerians before the actual independence in 1960, the ethnic differentiation had gone far.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Federalism is adapted from the word feuds which means a treaty or agreement. Though it has a Latin root it was first practiced widely by the creek city states and operated as autonomous communities though not quiet independent. Like other concepts, federalism does not have a universally acceptable definition. A lot of scholars have tried to define the term but in the final analysis, they find it to be very fluid. The problem is compounded by associated terms like quasi federalism and confederalism, that are sometime carelessly used in a manner that overlap with federation. The difficulty in defining federalism has been acknowledged by scholars. Akpan (2003) asserts that there are several verities of political arrangement to which the term has properly been applied. The meaning of the word has been thorough confused by dynamic changes in the institution to which it refers. Regardless of the confusion with regards to the meaning of federalism, the paper agrees with Zabadt (1996) who had written:

Federalism is an act of compromise between competing, seemingly irreconcilable interests and values in a society where the need to coexist as political unit is also imperative. As a result, public policies generally tend to be acts of compromise which sometimes reflects itself in the country concerned not being able to speak clearly with one voice.

Federalism;

Is a system of central and Local Government combined under a common authority, both the central and the Local Government organization being supreme with definite sphere, worked out for them cry the general constitution or by the act of parliament which creates the system... Federal Government is not, as is often loosely said, the central Local Government alone, but it is a system of composed of the central and Local Government combined. The Local Government are as such part of the federal system as the central Government is, although they are not the creation of or subject to the control of the central Government.

However, Federalism is conceived, it is a thorough and convenient political structures that represent a decentralized arrangement to accommodate heterogeneity in the administration and organization of a nation that practices it. This is why Elaigwu (2000) asserts that a federal system of government arises from desires of a people to form a unity without losing their identity. It is a compromise in a multi-national state between two types of self-determination –the determination to maintain supra-national frame work of government which quarantines security for all in the state, nation or the nation-state on the one hand and the self determination of component groups to return their individual on the other hand.

Scholars have argued that the influence of the ruling class on the economy (Robbert6, 1992), the corporatists, looked at the situation from Labour and capital and its challenge to hegemony (Julius, 1992), while the absolute model focus on the

increasing control of the state over the people and its territory (Jean-claude,1989). In the same view, the patrimonial prosupporters argued that state increase its power through mobilization and controlling of resources, not for national unity or survival, but for personal gains or benefit (Daniel, 2001).

Views explore above convincingly revealed how over centralization of political life in a federal structural arrangement, made the state more of extractive venture, than power distribution. Rather than giving to the people, the state extracted from the citizens, which, today, encourage ethnic divisions. The people had expected, in the contractual. Federal structure, that state would provide good governance, provide basic essential of life, and development- driven policy to guarantees' good life for all. However, all these hopes and aspirations unrealistic and not achievable, because, those who took over governance are full of themselves, self- centre, lack of vision and very autocratic with little or no disposition toward common good.

The expectation gap gave rise to ethnic competition for the control over state resources. Burchant's explanation on this fact is very clear. In a careful analysis, he observed that, Nigeria's federal structure, as it is, has fail to solve problem of citizen's exploitation and repression, a problem constitutionally design to address based on this:

The Nigerian state manipulates the ethnic and religious sentiments of the people of the people to remain in power. Thus, political competition for the control of the state and its political power is now a bloody warfare as the state holds the key to wealth.

The understanding here is that, centralization of political life in Nigeria, has pave way for politics of exclusion with the propelling effect of more loyalties to primordial identities at the expense of national unity. This is evidenced by the prominence of various ethnic associations making various demands, on the state, particularly the call to replace or exchange the current centralization of political life with prefer hegemony over the masses. Whatever had been achieved as development over the last fifty-eight years have not continued over the years(sustainability).Sustainable development has remained elusive in Nigeria.This accounts for the increasing poverty,unemployment,inequality and less self reliance.These are indications that the current structure no longer feasible .

THE STUDY METHOD:

The study adopted survey method and generated data from both primary and secondary source. Primary data come through a set of questionnaire distributed to respondents sampled from the northern region especially Bornu state, Kano, Sokoto, Federal Capital Territory; Benue state, Plateau and Kaduna sate. Other respondents were sampled from south-south zone of Nigeria particularly, Rivers state, Bayelsa, Akwa-ibom state, Delta and Cross River. Those from the West zone were sampled from Lagos, Ogun state, Oyo state and Ekiti state. In South East, respondents were selected from Imo State, Abia State, Ebony ,Enugu and Amanbra states. Purposive sampling procedure was adopted. To this end, only those that have knowledge of the subject under investigation were included in the study. In this way, university lecturers, political leaders, businessmen, and Post graduate students were purposively sampled. The adoption of purposive sampling technique was to avoid the inclusion of those with little or no knowledge on the subject matter of study. The questionnaire was a self developed questionnaire tagged; Restructuring of Nigeria questionnaire (RNQ). It consists of two parts. Part A contains items on respondents' bio-data and part B elicits information on proposed item on restructuring: item on regional government, judicial and internal security, resource control and revenue sharing and form of government. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire instrument was achieved based on the input of experts drawn from measurement units of

university particularly political and administrative study department of institutes. The used of survey research method is to give credibility to the findings of the study.

The secondary source of data for the study includes news paper, internet and magazine. It is interesting to note, that national youth corps members, post graduate students, four research assistants helped in the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaires. Questionnaire was also administrated outline for those who could not be reached due to some constraints, especially security and geographical challenges. However, a total of four thousand (4000) questionnaires were grouped and distributed. Group A- Northern Nigeria 1000. Group B- South- West Nigeria 1000. Group C- South- East Nigeria 1000. Group D- South- South Nigeria 1000. The data were analyzed quantitatively using simple percentage

Analysis of Data

As stated in the preceding pages of this work, the essence of restructuring, is to balance the interests of all stakeholders in the Nigeria state. The process seeks for dialogue, bargains and compromise among the diverse ethnic groups. Practical experience has shown clearly that federalism in its current form is not working for the country. Therefore, the majority have finally accepted that the existing Nigeria state structure is not viable and cannot be sustained any much longer. Many genuine patriotic Nigerians are seeking real solutions and a considerable majority tends to believe that what is needed is a Nigeria that works on a structure where the diverse ethnic, political, religious and social units form a confederating union. Yet, majority do not look at it from that perspective. Hence, the problem is how to achieve national consensus and solidarity in the midst of conflicting ethnic demands in the proposed restructured. Some of the diverse ethnic demands to contend with in the proposed restructure form the basis of the study analysis. These include

1. Resource control

2. Form of Government and Internal Security.

Resource Control

The result of the analysis of data on resource control and revenue sharing revealed that, the northern rejected idea of abrogation of laws that empower Central government to control financial resources derived from resources exploited an where in Nigeria. This is evident by the 800 or 20% that disagreed with this view. Only an insignificant 200 or 4.2% that agreed with the view. On the other hand, the South East (900 or 23%), South South (1000 or 25%) and South West (1000 or 25%) are of the views that such laws should be abrogated. On the issues of state management and control of resources found within its territories, and of course taking the greater percentage (80%) of revenue from the minerals or resources, the northern respondents (3,800 or) disagreed while overwhelming majority of the respondents for the South East (3,000 or 64.17) South South (3000, 64.1) and South West (3000 or 64.1) respectively agreed to the on the item examined under resource control and revenue sharing. It is interesting to note that all the respondents (4,000 or 100%) agreed to the last items, that special fund for the development of the mineral resources found in each region should be provided through regional commission.

2. Form of Government and Internal Security

Analysis on the above item revealed that all the respondents agreed on a six year single tenure for the president and Governors. All the respondents further agreed on rotation of presidency and additional six Vice presidents on the basis of six geo political zones. On judiciary the North (1000-25%), South East (1000 or 25) South South (1000 or 25%) and South West (1000 or 25) agreed that region should have appellate court. This is replicated on the second item: that state

should have high court and court of Appeal. This is known when North (1000 or 25%), South East (1000 or), South South (1000 or 25%) and South West (1000 Or 25%) answered in affirmative. In item three: regional police for regional government the North (400 or 8 %) agreed, while 600 or 6% disagreed. The South East (800 or -20%) agreed, while 200 or 4.2 % disagreed. South – South (700 or 20%) agreed, while 300 or 5 disagreed. South west (600 - %) agreed, . On item 4- state police for state government all the respondents, despite cultural differences, answer in alternative. The North (1000 or 25%) agree with the view expressed in this item. However, respondents express divergence views an item 5 and 6. On item 5: concept of state of origin to be replaced with state of residence, the North (1000 or 25%) agreed, South East (1000 or 25%) agreed, but South-South (500 or-) agreed, while 500 or -% disagreed and, South West (800 or -) agreed, and 200 or – disagreed. Then item 6: that any Nigerian citizen who has resided in any part of Nigeria for a period of 5-10 years should acquire the indigeneship right of the area, the North (1000 or 25%) agreed. The South East (1000 or 25%) agreed, South-South (500 or-%) agreed, while 500 or 12% disagreed. In the South West (850 or 20 %) agreed, while 150 or 1% disagreed.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the analysis the study discovered that resource control is one area of disagreement between the Northern and Southern regions. According to the text of a world press conference organized by delegates from the south-south geo-political zone to the national political reform conference, 28th April, 2005, Resource control simply means the right of the states and communities most directly concerned with oil and gas as well as other mineral to manage as resources within their respective territories including the right for the exploitation and disposal fo the harvested resources.

Before now, the southern states demanded for more constructive formula for disbursing the money accruing to the federation Account from crude oil sales. This position changed, as mere increase in revenue without control and management is term short sighted and deadly as it condemns the host communities to perpetual servitude .The region consider that the revenue allocation system is fraught with deformity and contradiction. This explains the prevailing uncertainties in the polity that yielded agitation for resource control. The dialectic of revenue allocation in the country reveal that while oil has overdeveloped the allocative capacities of the federal state in Nigeria, it is possible to discern a corresponding underdevelopment of its productive base.

The current position is that they be allowed to totally control the oil exploration, exploitation and exportation activities, then pay tax or royalty to the federal government. The argument here is that, the geographical terrain of the region is expensive to develop and the only way to guarantee adequate fund for rapid development is to institutionalize resource control.

Besides the South-South, the South East and West supported this position. The South East position on resource control was made known in the Famous Awka Declaration, which among other thing insist that there should be a truly federal system that gives control of resources to the component units. Fiscal federalism, the group demanded presupposes the revocation of the land use Act of 1978, the solid mineral Acts as well as the various petroleum Acts and amendment since 1969. The right of ownership, control and exploitation for these and other assets should be returned to the states and or federating units. The taxation power of the various tiers of government should be reviewed to give the federating units greater flexibility and scope to generate revenue internally. The position of the South East and West, on resource control is purely from economic perspective. Advocates from these zones have implicitly conceived it within the context of comparative advantage of states. Thus it embodies not just natural resources but region's endowment factors of

production, level of technological development and other variables around which trade and economic relations with other component units should revolve.

The South-South, South East and South West stand on resource control as the best option for the formation of a new Nigeria appears not only unacceptable to the northern zone, but had already pitched the South against the North who consider such proposal as economic secession". For instance, the meeting of Southern Governors in Lagos, October 10, 2000, Enugu 9th and 10 January, 2001, Benin Edo state, march 26th and 27th 2001 provoked strong reactions from their Northern Counterparts who saw the conferences on resource control as a gang-up against the north. The rigid determination of the north not to be compromised on the issue of resource control led to a stalemate in the preceding of the Political Reform Conference of 2014. Needless to reiterate, that one basic thorny issue in the proposed restructure of the Nigeria state is the incompatible ethnic position on resource control. On judiciary and internal security the study reveals national consensus All respondents from the various regions agree to all the variables examine under this context. This finding is not a surprise as the nation is currently experiencing insecurity in all parts of the country. The igbo

separatist ideology cannot be dismissed by mere wave of hands. The Sharia legal system proposed in the northern part of the country also constitutes another pressure on the state. It has been observed that the emergence of sharia legal system in the north is a means of constructing an alternative political platform for mobilizing the people in order to present a project of one north. This is why Mohammed (2005) argued that sharia is the outcome of a convergence between politicians and religious fundamentalists , each with a different agenda, one secular and the other profane at a certain historical juncture in Nigeria's history. Today the Boko Haram which translates to western education is sin, is traced to the activities of those groups charged with the responsibility of enforcing sharia legal system in some part of the North. To this end, political sharia had created the objective condition for growth of Boko Haran with incompatible demands on the Nigeria state. Therefore the agreement on this variables aptly suggests the desire for security in the nation by all the respondents . core values of sustainable development require that the primary pre occupation of leaders to drive sustainable development in manner that give every citizens a stake in the country and its future is virtually neglected. Sustainable development, social justice and dialogue are policies that get people of diverse culture to live peacefully together. The essence of sustainable development is to have all round development continually that would left the human standard of living. However lack of it gravitates the country towards disintegration.

CONCLUSION

It has been established through this work that the centralized control of resources and political power is no longer viable for the country hence the call for something new. The advocates want much of the powers for day-to-day running of the grassroots components of Nigeria to be vested in the state/ local governments of the different contiguous regions. They also want the central or federal government powers to be limited. However the various demands analyzed above are issues to contend with in the proposed restructured. For this paper, the solution revolves around the political will of leaders to fine a more sustainable solution to ethnic divisive tendencies plaguing the country. In this case sustainable development can meet the needs of the people to the extent that issues that generate threats to internal security of the country solved.

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