



FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE AS A RECIPE FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract: *The Nigerian federation has been enmeshed in contradictions, paradoxes, controversies and crises. These are subsumed in the national question, and social groups of varying ideological leanings cohere on the central issues. The paper observes that the present application of the federal character principle as all bourgeois oriented and does very little to relieve the plight of the masses in Nigeria. The paper argues that the federal character principle has proved inadequate for effective national integration because it discriminates against one group and favours another. It recommends that the National Assembly should as a matter of urgency should amend the constitution and remove all references to indigeneity from the constitution. Also, there is need for all sections of the country to be consulted and be involved in the implementation of this policy. The paper concludes that it is a known fact that the principle has gone a long way to reduce various factors of mutual mistrust and rivalries among the different ethnic groups that make up the geographical entity called Nigeria.*

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a plural society with different cleavages – ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic, as well as geo-political, social and economic challenges – but ethnic heterogeneity is inarguably, the most pervasive of them all. The problem ethnicity poses is that political competition and access to power is overtly drawn along ethnic lines. Since Nigerian federalism is based on ethnic and not geographical diversities, it has tended to exacerbate centrifugal forces in the country. Therefore, the struggle for acquisition and access to power in Nigeria has been patterned largely along ethnic lines (Vande, 2012). This becomes more problematic because the State is not a neutral force in mediating political conflict as it can be captured and used to further the interests of the leadership of an ethnic group or a combination of such groups.

The problem of acrimonious existence among the diverse groups and interests in the federation of Nigeria leading to mutual distrust and inter-community conflicts has become perennial and endemic in the nation's body politics and has militated against the political stability of the country since independence (Agbodike, 2004). The fear of domination of one ethnic group or section of the country by another and the national question of who gets what and how the national cake should be shared constitute a major factor of this problem. As a result of mutual suspicion existing among the various social groups, whatever the issue at hand in Nigeria, the patterns of reaction to it will be determined by geo-political as well as religious considerations. This situation seriously hampers efforts at national unity as it applies to the building of a united Nigeria out of the disparate ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements or groups in the country (Gamberi, 1994; Kurfi 1998). These problems have resulted in mutual distrust and inter-community conflicts which have hampered efforts at national integration.

The problem of national integration in Nigeria is not remarkably different from that of most of Nations that were colonised in Africa. As a result, the Nigerian state, like many other African States, has often been compelled to deal with the issue of national integration. Efforts at achieving national integration in Nigeria therefore have remained largely unrealized. The integration crisis facing the country is manifested in the minority question, religious conflicts, ethnic politics, resource control, youth restiveness and call for a sovereign national conference. As a result, achieving a united and stable political system is



still a serious challenge to the Nigerian state. As a divided society with multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, the task of nation-building and forging of a system perceived by the varied nationalities as justice-able has been difficult (Ifenacho and Nwagwu, 2009; Ajayi, 2006).

The principle of federal character was formulated and put into use by the government to address and hopefully mitigate this problem so as to ensure a peaceful, stable and integrated Nigeria. This paper is set out to examine critically the expediency of the federal character principle as an integrative mechanism with a view to pointing out whether or not it is succeeding in integrating Nigeria or widening the dichotomy among Nigerians.

FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE: THE ORIGIN, MEANING AND RAISON D'ETRE

The phrase Federal Character was first used by the late General Murtala Ramat Muhammed in his address to the opening session of the Constitution Drafting Committee on Saturday the 18th of October 1975. Federal character of Nigeria, according to the Constitution Drafting Committee's report of 1977, 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 enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Anyadike, 2013).

The federal character principle essentially refers to the recognition of the plural nature of the country in recruitment, distribution of administrative and political offices and power as well as the resources of the country. The essence federal character principle is to allow the composition and conduct of public institutions and affairs reflect the country's diversity. It is premised on the ground that when national institutions and affairs are reflective, in composition and conduct, of the pluralism of the country then, a sense of belonging is likely to be evoked from the citizenry. It is also designed to mitigate, if not obviate, the bellicose political struggle that characterised previous Nigeria's democratic systems (Obiyan and Akindele, 2001). Federal character principle is, in part, designed to deal with the problem of imbalance, marginalisation and discrimination. The question then arises as to whether the principle can be rightly used to address the problem of discrimination in the composition and conduct of public institutions and affairs and ensure effective integration of various sections of the Nigerian society.



THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Integration is the process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious. From this presupposition, the success of integration depends on the perception by the federating units of how equitably cordial the binding order is, at least, in terms of harmonious federal-state relations and interethnic relations (Ojo, 2002). Akinbade (2004) views integration as the process of maintaining the territorial integrity of a state. What this means is that, in a deeply divided society with 'babel' of voices like Nigeria, integration becomes a necessary task that must be implemented for the purpose of securing stability and adaptability within the state.

National integration is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept. This thinking according to Fatile and Adejuwon (2012) arises from the plurality that seems to attend attempts at conceptual explication of the term. From the conception of national integration, two things stand out. The first has to do with the geographical or territorial mass of a country. In the light of this thinking, national integration could be achieved if the different parts that make a country are lumped together as a monolithic whole. This implies the unification of different parts of a state which will serve as a forum co-operation and interdependence. The second perspective sees national integration as a process together the various interest groups in a territorial entity to the pursuit of common goals or objectives (Okafor and Okeke, 2008; Iwokwagh, 2008). This second perspective is more relevant to this study.

National integration was firstly used to refer to specific problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality which eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. In this sense, it is generally presumed that there exists an ethnically plural society in which each group is characterized by its own language or other self-conscious cultural qualities. This integration is used to refer to the tensions and discontinuities on the horizontal plane in the process of creating a homogeneous progressive reduction of cultural and regional territorial political community (Bamiseye, 2003).

National integration can also be seen as the process whereby several desperate groups within a given territorial are united together or cooperate under conditions which do not appear to permit satisfaction of their system needs in any other way (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2012). According to Elaigwu (1987), national integration is determined by the degree to



which members and groups in a plural society adapt to the demands of national existence while co-existing harmoniously. On the practical note, national integration is a process, not an end in itself and it is usually affected by contending social forces.

National integration is a process leading to political cohesion and sentiments of loyalty toward a central political authority and institutions by individuals belonging to different social groups or political units. National integration is a process whereby political actors in distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing nation-states (Ogunojemite, 1987; Oyeleye, 1987). As noted by Mazrui (1972), the five major aspects of national integration include; the fusion of norms and culture; the promotion of social interdependence; the narrowing of the gap between the elites and the masses, the urban and the rural areas, rich or poor etc; the resolution of emergent conflicts; and the sharing of mutual experiences so that people can discover that they had undergone some important experiences together.

For there to be national integration, Ibogje and Dode (2007) stated that there must be a central authority to serve as a common central authority to serve as a rallying point. In the quest for national integration, citizens are expected to respect the overriding supremacy of the national government. 'This entails subordination of institutions and cultural values to the demands of the central authority. Often, intra- and inter-ethnic crises result in tasking the state's security apparatus. The ability of the state to resolve or regulate the recurring crises and to create an enabling environment where the people's respect and love for their nation is enhanced would definitely affect the tempo of the nation's integration positively.

National integration, thus, covers a vast range of human relationships and attitudes, the integration of diverse and discrete cultural loyalties and the development of a sense of nationality; the integration of the rulers and the ruled and the integration of the citizens into a common political process. As diverse as these definitions are, they have a common link in that they all point to the fact that integration is what holds a society and a political system together.

FEDERALISM AND THE QUESTION OF INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is one of the states that owe their existence to the imperialistic activities of Britain, which by virtue of a superior technology and economy subjugated people from diverse



nationalities and organized them to construct Nigeria in 1914, with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates. By the time Nigeria won her independence from Britain in 1960, its artificial origin, coupled with other factors, had bequeathed it a number of fundamental problems, one of which is the challenge of integrating, into a cohesive socio-political whole, the various entities and strange bed fellows that were lump together by the colonialists (Ayodeji, 1997).

The Nigerian federation has been enmeshed in contradictions, paradoxes, controversies and crises. These are subsumed in the national question, and social groups of varying ideological leanings cohere on the central issues. These are linked to national unity, local autonomy and self-determination, equitable distribution of revenue, rewards, opportunities and power. They also include the observation and implementation of fundamental human rights, among which are the rights of franchise and empowerment, and socio-economic rights to basic needs' satisfaction, sustainable environment and life (Anifowose and Seteolu, 2004). The Nigerian federal principle has been struggling against the forces of social cohesion.

The problem of ethnic minority has been receiving attention of scholars and practitioners of governance and development. This is because ethnic minority is usually sidelined and ignored by the majority in decision making and resources distribution. The consequence of such politics of exclusion has been agitation and demand for social inclusion, which at times by violent actions. Since society is a system of human cooperation, the question of how society can mainstream the minority groups in decision making on welfare matters requires adequate policy consideration (Akinola and Adesopo, 2011). One of the three factors that is important in understanding how a society functions, as identifies by Tocqueville (1966), is the peculiar and accidental situation, which providence places people.

It is no longer plausible to account for the rivalry and disunity among ethnic nationalities in Nigeria strictly in terms of cultural divergence or irrational loyalty to primordial groups. Although there might have existed some traditional differences and hostilities among some of these groups, these are not necessarily absolute or incompatible differences and need not generate the kind of rivalry witnessed in the colonial days and that, sadly, has remained in the relationship among these ethnic groups until today. At least, prior to the institution of the colonial regime, some of these ethnic nationalities engaged in productive relationships. Besides, many of them have claims of common ancestry and basic similarities in their



cultures. For instance, the Yoruba and the Benin peoples trace their origins back to a common ancestry in the Oduduwa and Oranmiyan legends. Similarly, the Kisra myth traced the ruling dynasties of a good number of the tribes in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria to the Eastern region.

In Nigeria, ethnic balancing has been pursued via different strategies: the creation of more states, the adoption a uniform system of local government in the country, the multiplication of local government units in the federation and finally the constitutionalization of a system of quotas for political appointments in the form of the federal character principle as well as the provision for revenue allocation. However, as the author just quoted pointed out in the work under reference, ethnic and regional balancing does not only aggravate the problems it was designed to resolve, it also subverts the very essence of federalism. While it is possible to accept the theoretical soundness of Nnoli's position above on the grounds of scientific and objective analysis, the recommendation for the need to forego all attempts at regional balancing in Nigeria will be difficult to put into practice for the important reason that politics is not all objective and rational. There are also strong subjective, emotional and irrational forces that propel the political process (Ikeji, 2011).

The problem with national integration in Nigeria is that people are made to feel like strangers in their fatherland; whereas, chapter II paragraph 15(2) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended states that:

Accordingly, national integration shall be actively encouraged, while discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.

The problems of national integration in Nigeria stare us in the face all the time and no one can argue that we ignore them. But they are problems which require long term solutions and yet we deal with them on an ad hoc basis without a consistent or coherent policy or ideology (Ajayi, 1984).

FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE AS INTEGRATIVE MECHANISM IN NIGERIA

Since the 1970s, Nigeria's constitution-making experiences have taken special interest in developing the consociational model for plural societies. The result is the adoption of the 'federal character' principle in the constitution, and agreements by the political class on zoning and rotation of offices among ethnic groups (Ebojowah 2000; Nmoma 1995; Osaghae



2001). Federal character is one of the policies of gaining integration of diverse ethnic groups in the country. The introduction of federal character policies in Nigerian state is to foster unity, peace, equal ability to equal access to state resources and promote the integration of the less advantage states for better improvement and good conditions of living in the country (Bamidele and Ikulege, 2004 cited in Ugoh and Ukpere, 2012). Afigbo (1989) observed that the principle of federal character touches on array of problems in the political process which includes ethnicity, the national question, minority problem, discrimination based on a indignity, resources allocation, power sharing employment and placement in institution, etcetera. It provides a formula for participation in the governance of the country in such a way that a single section of the country will not dominate another or a segment dominating the rest (Ojo, 1999). The basic assumption, as noted by Ojo (1999) is that, if every segment of the Federation participates in governance, there would be almost equality in the country in the scheme of things and expectedly, it will engender a sense of belonging and national integration. At the heart of federal character principle, is the attempt to eschew group imbalance in public institutions and affairs (Obiyan and Akindele, 2002). The federal character principle was adopted in the 1979 Nigerian Constitution as a directive principle of state policy. Accordingly, therefore, section 14(3) of the Constitution provided that:

The composition of the government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few state or from a few ethnic or sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies.

Section 153 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution established the Federal Character Commission, as a federal executive body, empowered in section 8(1) of the Third Schedule of the Constitution to oversee and monitor the implementation of the federal character clauses, as follows:

- 1) work out an equitable formula subject to the approval of the National Assembly for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the public service of the Federation and of



- the States, the armed forces of the Federation, the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies, government-owned companies and parastatals of the States;
- 2) promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principle of proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all levels of government;
 - 3) take such legal measures, including prosecution of the head or staff of any ministry or government body or agency which fails to comply with any federal character principle or formula prescribed by the Commission, and as provided for in section 8(3) of the Schedule,
 - 4) Notwithstanding any provisions in any other law or enactment, the Commission shall ensure that every public company or corporation reflects the federal character in the appointment of its directors and senior management staff.

Going by the wordings of the constitution, the expectation on the federal character principle was that it would pave way for a federal government that would be all-inclusive of all segments of the federation thereby assuring a stable federal polity. However, lofty as the federal character provision is, there was no executive agency charged with the responsibility of implementing it until July 2002 when the Federal Character Commission (FCC) was inaugurated. Thus, its implementation before this period by various government ministries and agencies was more or less haphazard with the consequence of a declining confidence of citizens in the principle as a means of achieving relative equity in the federation. Even till date and with the establishment of a Commission to oversee its application, there seem not to be too much hope in the whole process (Muhammad, 2007).

The implication of the provisions of the 1979 and 1999 constitutions for federal bureaucracy in Nigeria are interesting. Following these provisions, the composition of the federal public services for instance and the conduct of its affairs must reflect the federal character of Nigeria. And this can only be seem to have been done if it does not contain a predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups. In practice this means that in the appointment, promotion and postings of the federal public servants, every state, ethnic group religions or any other sectional group should be represented (Bello, 2012).

Federal character principle has spawned a vast repertoire of formal and informal consociational practices that seek to distribute, balance and rotate the federal presidency



and other major public offices among the country's diverse ethnic, religious, regional and geo-political zones or constituencies. The most elaborate and formal power-sharing arrangement contained in the Nigerian Constitution is the federal character principle. The purpose of the federal character principle is laudable. According to Afigbo (1989), the federal character principle is anchored on 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 enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The principle of federal character was formulated and put into use by successive governments in Nigeria to address and hopefully mitigate the problem of diversity so as to ensure a peaceful, stable and united Nigeria. Federal character principle as an integrative mechanism is defined as fair and effective representation of the various components of the Federation in the country's position of power, status and influence.

As practiced during the tumultuous period of the second republic (1979-1983) under Shagari's leadership, Abacha's military junta and even under the present 'democratic dispensation', the principle essentially focused on enhancing the dominance of the ruling class through patronage. The constitutional provision of federal character and zoning system within the political parties is for appointing trusted prebends, clients and hangers-on in strategic offices who in turn manipulated their powers by allocation of contracts, import licences, access to bank loans, fertilizers etc. Thus through the control of state power at the centre, the ruling class not only enhanced her leverage through patron-client alliances that cut across ethno-regional and religious cleavages, but also appropriated federal character principle to ensure its hegemony at all levels (Abubakar, 1998; Ogunojemite, 1987).

As a strategy for national cohesion, Ofigbo (1997) remarked that the federal character is expected to ensure fair play in the appointment of persons to high ranking government establishments and parastatals without discrimination of any kind. It is to ensure a broad public participation in the country's affair as well as fostering even development. While the principle of federal character has been fully entrenched in the constitution, the application of the principle remained problematic because of the disparity in the standard of western



education attained among the states in the federation (Mohammed, 1998). Often a times, appointments are given to mediocre under the umbrella of belonging to less-privileged and educationally backward areas and this is the major drawback of the principle which does not help Nigeria to progress as a nation. As observed by Suberu (2001) and Dagaci (2009), to those from the Northern parts of the country federal character is synonymous with quota system and means therefore a proportional absorption into federal institutions. To those from the southern parts of the country, it means an attempt by the “North” to infiltrate into areas which they hitherto regarded as “theirs” by right. The federal character principle carried an inherent tug-of war between the claims of belonging to the nation and the claims of locally recognized diversity. It is the insisting on equal representation and individual rights that will rock the boat of national integration. If we are to accept the intent of the concept that it carries an unambiguous and unchallengeable mandate for national integration, then the present provision has to be completely re-examined (Okoli, 1990).

The most controversial contemporary political problem and contending issue in Nigeria’s federal political structure is the asymmetric unequal power relationship as far as the fundamental imbalance of the country’s structure is concerned. As a matter of fact, this issue is one of the seemingly intractable and insurmountable perennial problems which have not only defiled all past solutions but also have a tendency to evoke high tensions and emotions on the part of all and sundry whenever it is raised. This is the contending issue of who becomes the president of Nigeria and for how long. Osondu (2010) reveals which zone(s) of the country has upper hand in terms of wielding executive powers.

The Table below is a graphic representation of the time period used by each zone of the country holding executive position in percentages from 1960 to date.

S/N	NAMES	DATE	STATE	REGION
1	Tafawa Balewa	Oct 1, 1960- Jan 15 1966	Bauchi	North-East
2	J.T.U. Ironsi	Jan 15 1966-July 29 1966	Abia	South-East
3	Yakubu Gowon	July 29, 1966-july 29, 1975	Plateau	North-Central
4	Murtala Mohammed	July 29,1975-Feb 13, 1976	Kano	North-West
5	Olusegun Obasanjo	Feb13, 1976-Oct 1,1979	Ogun	South-West
6	Alh. Shehu Shagari	Oct 1,1979-Dec 31,1983	Sokoto	North-West
7	Muhammadu Buhari	Dec 31, 1983-Aug 27, 1985	Katsina	North-West
8	Ibrahim Babangida	Aug 27, 1985- Aug26,1993	Niger	North-Central
9	Ernest Shonekan	Aug 26,1993- Nov.17,1993	Ogun	South-West
10	Sani Abacha	Nov.17,1993-June.8,1998	Kano	North-West
11	Abdulsalam Abubakar	June.8,1998-May 29,1999	Niger	North-Central



12	Olusegun Obasanjo	May 29,1999-May 29,2007	Ogun	South-West
13	Umaru-Musa Yar'Adua	May 29, 2007-May 5,2010	Katsina	North-West
14	Goodluck Jonathan	May 5, 2010 to date	Bayelsa	South-South

Source: Sunday Tribune, 7th August, 1994, Ibadan, pp-7-9 and Olayiwola, 2012

From the above table, we could see that the ruler ship of this country is dominated by the Northern section of the country. The appearance of some southerners as heads-of state was accidental. The Northern part of the country taken together had been in power for 441.5 months translating to 73.6%, while the Southern part had been in power for some 158.5 number of months also translating to 28.4% of the total time period since independence.

The domination of number one seat, from independence to date also revealed the domination of the ministries by the Northerners. As rightly observed by Olopoenia (1998) that the greatest manifestation of this tendency is the implicit policy of reserving the political and top bureaucratic management positions in certain key ministries at the federal for people from certain parts of the country.

THE TRAVAILS OF FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE IN NIGERIA

The application of the federal character principle in Nigeria has encountered several difficulties. The federal character principle has led the political elites to place too much emphasis on inter-state relationships without a corresponding attention to tensions among ethnic groups within the states. The federal character principle strives to give equal treatment to unequal; many people perceive the policy as being discriminatory. The interpretation of federal character, which is based on state and ethnicity, is seen by many as inadequate. Of course, social divisions in Nigeria are not limited to ethnic and state; there are also class, confessional, temporal and ideological divisions. The operation of the federal character principle in Nigeria tends to give more powers to the politically dominant groups; creating wider power disparity between the stronger and weaker groups, and thereby, subjecting the politically weaker groups to what Ayoade (1998) calls 'double jeopardy' (Ikime, 2002; Ayoade 1998).

The 'federal character' principle equally affects the electoral process. According to Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, to win the presidential election in the first round, a candidate must secure a majority of the votes and not less than a third (against 25 per cent in the 1979 Constitution) of the votes cast at the election in each of at least two-thirds of all the states. Comparable dispositions rule the state governors' elections. The 'federal character' principle



also applies to the composition of the presidential cabinet which must include at least one minister from each of the states. The numerous appointments which are made by the chief of the Executive must equally reflect the 'federal character' of Nigeria. Since the 1979 Constitution, it is also explicitly stipulated that the composition of the officer corps and other ranks of the armed forces, recruitment to the public service and federal institutions must reflect the 'federal character' of the Nigerian state. At the level of the states, the 'federal character' principle is paralleled by the 'State character' principle which implies taking into account similarly the local government units for appointments and promotions, allocation of resources, etc.

The principle of federal character tended to differentiate rather than integrate is not by accident, it is by design. This position is supported by Olugbemi (1987) and Suberu and Diamond (2004) when they implied that federal character as defined and pursued by the 1979 and the 1999 constitutions cannot succeed in integrating the people because it was an ideology of the minority ruling class aimed at protecting their interest. The operation of the federal character in Nigeria has given more powers to the politically superior groups thus creating a wider power disparity between the strong and the weak. The politically weak are subjected to double jeopardy, a situation that is patently antithetical to national integration (Bello, 2012). Thus, as long as the application of the federal character principle discriminates against one group and favours another no unity can result from such an exercise. The application is also falsifiable because distributive justice which it aims to achieve is of two types viz: Arithmetical equality and proportional equality.

The federal character principle has been manipulated by, and channelled to serve the overall interest of the petty bourgeois ruling class. It is the members of this class who formulated and operates the principle. Even the debate on the principle, as carried in the Nigerian press has been mainly an elite preoccupation. Under the guise of the federal character principle, the members of the bourgeois class get themselves entrenched in power and exercise control over the machinery of state. Through the application of this principle too, they strive to reconcile their class differences through the operation of acceptable formulae for the allocation, distribution and sharing of national resources and benefits among themselves. While they do this, they capitalize on, and fan the embers of the ethnic differences among the various Nigerian peoples to win the support of the masses



in their areas. And in the course of this elite game, members of this class climb to positions, amass wealth and enrich themselves illegally. Thus, the federal character principle is merely an elite ploy, which would not materially improve the lot of the downtrodden in whose name it is raised (Awa 1972, Agbaje 1989, Gboyega, 1989).

The federal character principle is a necessary evil that Nigerians, have to endure because it is a sacrifice work making for the emergence of the just and egalitarian society we all aspire to have (Amanni, 2011). The federal character clauses guarantee the representation of major ethnic groups in specified political positions, in public service appointments, and in the allocation of national resources and projects at the federal level to each of the state and local governments.

WAY FORWARD AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present Federal structure in the country is unitarist. Nigeria runs a system of government that grants near absolute power to the Federal Executive. We therefore recommend a Constitutional amendment and efforts that will ensure true Federalism, rather than creating unviable and dependent States. Again, the States should be allowed to control up to 50% of their resources.

The issue of federal balancing in Nigeria simply confirms the existence of imbalance. All the attempts made so far to change the status quo have not yielded satisfactory results since there are still allegations of marginalization from one section or the other. The idea of sharing power and revenue without cries of marginalization and neglect may not be possible because of the type federalism being practiced in Nigeria. The type of federal balancing that will lead to sustainable democracy has to be put in place. This type is the one that will give the states autonomy in everything, the centre will only be guiding and overlooking the states.

What is needed in Nigeria is the practice of federalism in a new form of federalism arising from some political restructuring in which each of the states should have a constitution which must be consistent with the national constitution and legal order. This will resolve the national question which still persists because federalism has been operated essentially as a unitary system where central government dominates.

The “Federal Character” provision as entrenched in the Federal Constitution should be applied at the national level, and this would ensure that no group would have a feeling of



alienation and marginalisation. In addition, at other tiers of government, a deliberate effort should be made to be equitable in appointments and distribution of amenities. It is also imperative that national integrative policies, such as the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), federal character clause, in terms of admission into federal Unity Schools and universities should be consolidated and expanded, instead of the current retrogressive policy of reducing the “Catchment area” for Federal institutions. While some have tended to criticize the issue of “quota” in the body politic of Nigeria, the fact remains that the policy is akin to the US policy of “affirmative Action” which is targeted at addressing the imbalances among groups, especially those identified as marginalized in the society.

For federal character to approximate to the equal weighting that the framers of the constitution envisaged the problem of measurement must be addressed. This will be a tortuous process and Nigeria is not known for handling matters of delicate political details. The solution is the responsibility of the political class which, up till now, appears unprepared and unwilling (Ayoade, 2010). According to him, the application of the principle of federal character must be revised. It must give succour to the weak and marginalized, and limit the power of the strong. The principle should be applied such that 70% of appointments are on merit, 20% on the equality of State, and 10% on ecological grounds. Secondly, the quality of appointments must be weighted because quantity is not a sufficient guarantee of fairness. In a real sense, there is the possibility of a functionality of quantity. The present system creates widespread citizen alienation, and those who rob Peter to pay Paul can only rely on the support of Paul.

For Nigeria’s stability and the achievement of national unity and reconciliation, it is imperative for Nigerians to see themselves as belonging to one indivisible country, where “thou tribes and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand”. The reign of justice, equity, fairness and respect for the rule of law and the rights of all citizens will go a long way in guaranteeing true national reconciliation in Nigeria. Nigerians have shown for the most part that they can accommodate themselves and co-exist, what is therefore required is a conscious pursuit of the relevant policies and programmes that will foster the bonds of unity in the “country and help to bring down the barriers to reconciliation often created by ethnicity”.



The principle of federal character was introduced to ensure unity, national integration and loyalty in the Nigerian state. But alas rather than) fostering national unity; it has heightened mutual suspicions and acrimonies among Nigerians. Although, the federal character principle was designed in such a manner to contain the fear of ethnic marginalization. It has generated disagreement on the strategies and practice of the principle. One of the many ways to strengthen the country's already watered-down federation of diverse ethnic groupings is to promote the discourse of extending federal character to manpower preparation. No doubt, the federal government has so far done a good job to increase opportunities for all regions of the federation in the area of universal basic education; however more needs to be done in the area of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence (Odeh, 2010). For the survival of Nigerian state and the integration of its diverse people, the practice of true federalism that gives autonomy to different states and a reduction in the powers of the central government become imperatives.

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