

## **Restructuring Nigerian Federalism: A Prognosis for Nation-Building and Socio-Political Stability**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper assesses the Nigeria's Federalism in its present context and the necessity for its restructuring. The paper proposes that the Nigeria's federal structure is built on faulty foundation that was bequeathed by the colonial masters, hence the persistent calls for a national sovereign conference, zoning of key political offices in the country, including the Presidency and currently the restructuring of the federal structure for socio-political stability. This paper, which is essentially historical and descriptive in nature, utilizes data drawn mainly from secondary sources and analyzed using content analysis. The paper discovers that Nigeria's federalism has failed to meet the requirements as prescribed by K. C. Wheare as so much power are concentrated at the federal level while other levels of governments continue to exist as appendages. This runs ultra-vires to federal principle and poses a serious threat to the Nigerian State and its federal practice. Moreover, the paper observes that the lop-sided and imbalance nature of Nigeria's federal practice have degenerated into national challenges symptomized by perpetual domination of minority by the majority ethnic groups, ineffective leadership, ethnic rivalry, unequal distribution of national wealth, as well as long term military incursion into the nation's politics among others. The paper therefore recommends, among others, that for the sake of realizing socio-political stability and proper nation-building, there is need for constitutional re-engineering and structural realignment of present federal political arrangement in the country.*

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**Keywords:** *Restructuring, federalism, peaceful co-existence, nation-building, federal character*

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### **Introduction**

In praxis, federalism is a political arrangement wherein powers within a multi-ethnic country are shared between the central government and sub-component governments in such a way that each unit, including the central government exists as a government separately and independently from the others. As enunciated by Wheare (1963), the fundamental and distinguishing characteristics of a federal system is that neither the central nor the regional governments are subordinate to each other, but rather the two are coordinate and independent. Each government exist, not as an appendage of another government but as an autonomous entity in the sense of being able to exercise its own will on the conduct of its affairs free from direction by any government. Put differently, a true federal system has features such that the

power sharing arrangement should not place a preponderance of power in the hands of either the national or regional government, to make it so powerful that it is able to bend the will of the others to its own. The national and regional governments each must have powers and resources sufficient to support the structure of a functioning government, able to stand on its own against the other.

Nigeria's practice of federalism has been antithetical to growth and development, breeding tensions and further deepening the fault lines inherent in the political system. Federalism in Nigeria is characterised by 'unitary tendencies', where almost all powers are concentrated at the centre whereas the federating units, the states and local governments, are reduced to mere appendages (McGarry, 2005). So also is the disabling structure of the economy that the federal government collects a disproportionate amount of the revenue accruing to the nation while the law prescribes an allocation formula designed more to encourage laziness instead of productivity, equity, fairness and justice. The system also allows for little or no accountability with waste and needless duplications at practically all levels. The federal government at some point even recruits teachers for primary schools that are under the control of local governments (Aboro, 2005). The overbearing power of the central government makes the contest for political power by Nigerians a "do-or-die-affair", breeding corruption of political power and a spoilt reward system in the country. Those in control of power at the centre use this position to dispense favours or ill-will to whoever it pleases them.

Observably, given the nature of Nigeria's federal structure and the constitution in place, the federating units are far from being independent and coordinate. In Nigeria's federal system, there is a hierarchy of authority, with the central government sitting on top of the others. In reality, Nigeria as the country is run as a unitary state, in which the component units are legally subordinate to the central government with authority flowing from above. Instances abound where the independence of the states are trampled upon by the federal government. For example, the federal government makes laws concerning education, security and finance for and on behalf of the federating units. The federal government owns all the resources and allocates what it deems appropriate to federating units as against the norms. The recent killings of innocent citizens across some Northern states by suspected Fulani herdsmen has exposed the inanity of the nation's federal practice given that state governors who are chief executive officers of their respective states cannot give orders to the security agencies in their territories under the pretext that it is the exclusive function of the central government.

Again, attempts by the state governments to reassert their autonomy during the Second Republic were aborted by the return of military rule. Some state governments that were controlled by parties other than the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) took the NPN-controlled federal government to court on many occasions over matters of jurisdiction competence. This trend also reoccurred in the Fourth Republic when the Lagos State governor, Bola Ahmed Tinubu (1999-2007) took the federal government to court over the issue of local government creation in Lagos State. This act, where the federal government sees itself as superior to the state governments does not make federalism work perfectly. The autonomy of component units has been limited in Nigeria's federalism, which has continued to hamper the political stability in the country. Federal-State-Local government relations in Nigeria is characterized by the increasing dependence of the States and Local Governments on the Federal Government in areas considered an exclusive preserve of States and Local Governments such as primary and post-primary education thus breeding a master-servant relationship against that of independent and coordinate.

The afore-mentioned abnormalities in Nigeria's federal practice have cumulatively necessitated the recent and persistent calls from well-meaning Nigerians for restructuring of Nigeria's political system vis-à-vis its practice of federalism. While some of the calls have primordial colouration, others are anchored on well-established premise of ensuring the survival of the country. The paper however intends to examine the problems associated with Nigeria's federalism as well as proposing solutions for socio-political stability through restructuring.

### **Conceptualizing Federalism and Nation-Building**

Etymologically, the term 'federal' or 'federalism' is derived from the Latin words '*foedus*' and '*fides*' which when translated to English, the former means an agreement, treaty, compact or covenant while the latter means trust (Dosenrode, 2010; Ogunnoiki, 2017). It is most commonly employed to denote an organizational principle of a political system emphasizing power-sharing across different levels of government such as centre/federal and regions/states or even local governments as the case may be; and at the same time, the integration of different territorial and socio-economic units, cultural and ethnic groups in one polity. Federal political systems are thus often viewed as combining unity with diversity (Elazar, 1987). Elazar (1987) further looked at federalism as a political principle that has to do with the constitutional diffusion of power so that the constituting elements in a federal arrangement share in the processes of common policy-making and administration by right, while the activities of the common government are conducted in such a way as to maintain their respective integrities.

Federalism in its classical sense, as stated by Wheare (1963), denote a method of dividing governmental legislative powers so that that general and regional (central and component) governments are each, within a sphere, coordinate and independent. It is a political arrangement which allow for equal sharing of legislative power between the centre and component units, in such a way that each units of government are independent and coordinated to an extent that no arm of government holds another to ransom. Similarly, Apparodai (1975) defined federalism as a system built on the principle that the government must be structured on the basis of the existence of multiple levels of governments each of which exercises some governmental legislative powers allotted to them by a constitution, which is supreme, and the source of life of all governments in the country. The formal division of power between the levels of government which is usually claimed to be the essence of federalism is thus to be seen as an attempt to prevent a single group defined in racial, class or linguistic terms, from dominating the others and monopolizing the consumption of public goods.

For Nwabueze (1983), federalism is an arrangement whereby powers of government within a country are shared between a national, country-wide government and a number of regionalized government in a way that each exist as a government separately and independently from the others operating directly on persons and property within its territorial area, with a will of its own and its own apparatus for the conduct of its affairs, and with an authority in some matters exclusive of all the others.

On the other hand, nation-building, according to Atanda (1993), refers to the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. This process aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically viable and stable over the long term. It can also be seen as the process whereby a society of the people with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religion come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation, a national public

education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols and values, as equals, to work towards eradicating the division and injustices of the past; to foster unity; and promote a countrywide conscious sense of being proudly Africans, committed to the country and open to the continent and the world. Dode (2015) conceptualized nation building as a process of creating a country that functions out of a non-functioning one either because the old one has been destroyed in a war, has been fallen apart or never really worked properly. The author added that nation building also refers to the people's sense of national identity.

Technically speaking, Akpan (2003:140) conceived nation-building as “a process of creating an integrated society inhabited by a contented people”. This, it is believed is not only possible but a necessity in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. Here, the people transfer a portion of their commitment and loyalty from smaller tribes, villages, or petty principalities to the larger political system. Instructively, this study is about building a nation out of a state, as it is the case in most developing countries of the world. The nineteenth century Europe and other developed countries of the world appear to be in the opposite direction. That is, creating states out of nations and vice-versa respectively. However, Eboh and Ukpong (1993:100) had rightly noted that the usual difficulties in nation-building could be up-turned: (i) if a country is blessed with truly committed, self-less, dedicated, patriotic, nationalistic leadership; a leadership with a clear sense of vision and dynamism, devoid of ethnic or tribal sentiments, and (ii) if there is desire by the diverse groups to live together in the spirit of oneness, patriotism, mutuality and reciprocity.

For the past 58 years since independence (1960-2018), Nigerian leaders have tried to make Nigeria a proper nation, but to no avail. The country's polity is rather getting much more endangered with acts of terrorism by Boko Haram sect; secession by the Biafran and other social vices like kidnapping-in-persons orchestrated by various militant groups. In fact, the committee on national conference constituted by President Jonathan not only lent credence to the above national issues but as an imperative which must among other issues treat the desire by the diverse groups to live together in the spirit of oneness, patriotism, mutuality and reciprocity with utmost sense of sincerity and responsibility.

It is within the context of the above conceptualization of nation-building that this paper attempts an analysis of the implications of restructuring of Nigeria's federal structure to make for socio-political stability and accommodation of diverse ethnic nationalities in the country.

### **Nigerian Federalism: A Brief Historical Sketch**

The Nigerian federalism evolved out of series of historical accidents engineered by British government. In ruling Nigeria, the British amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 and perpetrated their distinct entities and diverse ethnic and cultural groups. The Nigerian federalism is traceable to the Richards constitution of 1946 which divided the country into three groups of North, West and East. However, Nigeria became a political federal entity on 1 October 1954 by the Lyttleton Constitution. With the approach of independence in 1960, power over the regions was given to Nigerian-born citizens, and regional legislatures were established. By the time Nigeria declared itself a Republic in 1963 and replaced the post of Governor-General with that of President, a national bicameral parliament was established and the country was considered a federation of three regions. The mid-western region was created from the western region in June 1963, and Lagos, the capital was effectively governed as an unofficial fourth region outside the boundaries of the western region (Nwabueze, 1983).

The Nigerian federalism exhibits a geo-political structural imbalance since 1954 and ethnic composition estimated to be between 250 and over 400. This imbalance was reduced in 1967, 1976, 1987 and 1996 with the creation of 12 States by the Yakubu Gowon regime, 19 States by Murtala Muhammed, 21 States by Ibrahim Babangida and 36 States by Sani Abacha regime respectively. Nigerian federalism therefore evolved through a process of segregation/devolution. The long period of military control of the nation's political system was incompatible with federal principle. The present Nigerian federation of 36 States and a Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, is divided into six (6) geo-political zones. The basic objective is to strengthen geographical spread and balance in the distribution of political offices and socio-economic amenities and allay the fears of marginalization of the minorities (Ajero, 2005).

### **Factors Militating Against Successful Practice of Federalism in Nigeria**

The major reasons for the introduction of federalism in Nigeria were cultural diversity, fear of domination by minorities, geographical factor, economic factor, effective administration, and bringing government nearer to the people. Instead of federalism bringing the needed peace, development and administrative ease, it has brought backwardness, conflicts and political turmoil. In present day Nigeria, multi-various factors militate against the successful practice of federalism, hence the continued outcry and need for restructuring to nip these challenges in the bud. These factors include:

**(i) Multi-Ethnic Accommodation:** A constraint to Nigeria's federation is that it is anchored on a precarious grudging multi-ethnic accommodation, thriving on unabated uncertainty and tensed expectation. The dilemma of the Nigerian state lies in the pretentious and faulty federal system. As argued by Suberu (2001), at the heart of Nigeria's predicament is the development of an intensely dysfunctional system of centralized ethno-distributive federalism. Federalism has not been a particularly workable option in Nigeria. This is not as a result of federalism as an integrative mechanism, but because of its acts that are antithetical to federal principles. The call for political restructuring of Nigerian federalism is not new. It is highly rooted in the past military dictatorships. Notably, Decree No. 34 of 1966 transformed Nigerian federal system into a unitary state oversight under the Ironsi regime. Even with the abrogation of the Decree 34 by the Gowon administration which returned the country to a federal state, the appellation "Federal Republic of Nigeria" only remained on paper as virtually all subsequent military regimes ruled the country as if it was a unitary state (Sagay, 2004).

Nigerian federalism has come under severe criticisms by some scholars and concerned citizens who see it as the potential source of the various problems facing the country today. Such problems as ethnicity, political, and even economic instability, possibility and threat of secession, among others are closely associated with the political system. The political system that Britain bequeathed to Nigeria at her independence in 1960 was full of too many pitfalls and contradictions to be able to stand the test of time. As argued by Amuwo *et al.* (2000), Sir Lord Laggard's 1914 amalgamation gave birth to a more or less unitary form of government in Nigeria. The Clifford Constitution of 1923 set the tone for elective representation in the country, although Nigeria's first experiment with a unitary constitution did not come until 1946, with the operation of the Richards constitution. The origin of the federal structure in Nigeria created certain problems of permanent dimensions. First, the division of the South into two turned Nigeria into an asymmetric territorial association in which one part was equal to the sum of the other two parts. The division of Nigeria into three regions and the granting of the North 50% of the total seats of the central legislature in 1950 made the north a near absolute decider of joint deliberations. This arrangement violated the principle of equality of states in a

federation, such that the north became the pillar around which the other regions revolved. This situation proved the validity of Mill's law of Federal Instability, which asserts that no federation can be stable when one part of the federation constitutes a permanent majority in joint deliberations (Saliu, 2006).

**(ii) Issue of Federal Character Principle and its Application:** Another major source of tension in the Nigerian federalism is the issue of federal character and its application. The 1979 Constitution formally recognized the application of the principle of federal character in section 14. It describes the purpose of federal character rather than the substance when it states that it refers to the distinctive desire of the people. This is a controversial and retrogressive clause in the constitution (Saliu, 2006). The federal character principle does not seem to take care of the struggle amongst various ethnic groups to have a share of the said "National Cake". In the real sense of it, the federal character intends to be a unifying factor with the aim of promoting national unity yet, its politics due to lack of definitive accepted guidelines, have been extremely divisive in state and ethnic terms (Sagay, 2001).

One of the major objectives of federalism is to take care of the problem of pluralism by establishing a union between several states or state-like bodies which was one of the reasons for its introduction in Nigeria. An abiding threat to the stability of the Nigerian federation is the growing division and polarization of the country along ethnic and religious lines. It seems obvious that the federal arrangement in Nigeria has operated to legitimize and strengthen inherent divisions in the country, even as it is directly threatened by this division (Suberu, 1990). This, in effect have worked against the major reason behind the inclusion of the principle of federal character in the constitution which was to prevent tribal or regional dominance of any government or its agency. Federal character ordinarily protects the minorities but, it's inappropriate application in Nigeria has led to inequality, tribal dominance, promotion of mediocrity, lack of transparency and corruption.

Arguably, federalism functions effectively in a political system where the constituent units are structurally balanced. In Nigeria, the federation was built on a tripod of three political regions - the North, West and East. This lopsided nature of the federal setup was a consequence of the amalgamation of 1914 by the British Colonial Administration. One of the regions, the north was bigger than the other two put together in terms of size and population. With a land area of about three-fourth of the country and a population that was about 54 per cent, the regional tripod was heavily skewed (Lucky and Olarewaju, 2018). The imbalance in the structure of Nigeria as a nation negates the federal principle that no one component unit should be as large as to dwarf the rest of the union. In Mill's (1951:367) view:

There should not be any one state so much more powerful than the rest as to be capable of vying in strength with many of the combined. If there be such a one and only one, it will insist on being master of joint deliberations, if there be two, they will be irresistible when they agree.

As stipulated by Wheare (1964), the danger inherent in the structural imbalance of a federation will be the ability of the relatively bigger unit to over-rule the others and bend the will of the federal government to itself. This to him will lead to the monopolization of political power, usurpation of privileges and subordination of one group by the other. Wheare further argued that it cannot be denied that population and size are sources of power in economic and political terms especially when dealing with matters concerning representation and allocation of revenue to the component parts of the country. Also, commenting on the unfortunate

imbalance in Nigeria's federal structure, Mazrui's (1971) observed that the division of Nigeria into three regions and the granting of the North 50 per cent of the total seats in the central legislature at the Ibadan Conference in 1950 made the North a near absolute decider of joint deliberations. This arrangement violated the principle of equality of the states of the federation such that the North becomes the pillar around which other regions revolved.

The adoption of this structurally flawed system in Nigeria was a basis for the institutionalization of ethno-centricism. Therefore, at various periods, there were agitations and sometimes forceful demands for re-organization of the component units in order to create a healthy. It was for this reason that the Wilink Commission was set up in 1957 to address the fears of the minorities. The result was the creation of Mid-west region in 1963 while post-independence leadership began creating states to balance the federal structure. According to Baker (2000) when the federal military government created twelve states out of the existing four regions, it was to restructure the federation such that no one state or group of states could threaten the corporate existence of the country or hold the nation to ransom. The creation was to make for justice and fairness as the new states would now start on equal footing.

This action of Gowon later paved way for further restructuring of the Nigerian state. For example, seven more states were created in 1976 to bring the total number to nineteen while two more were created in 1987 to bring the number to twenty one. In 1991, nine more states were created and in 1996, six were additionally created to bring the total number of states to thirty six and 774 local governments. Suffice it to say that the above measure have unfortunately not been able to douse ethnic proclivities and jaundiced ethnic cleavages thus leading to intolerance, state of insecurity and distrust among various ethnic groups. The reason for this is the persistence of northern structural dominance. In the current 36 state structure, the North has 19 states while the South has 17. Out of the 774 Local Government Areas, the North has 417 with the South having 397. This perhaps explains why Oladeji (2006) noted that the creation and unceasing agitation for more states and local government councils remain part of the most structurally disruptive aspects of Nigeria's cake sharing experience.

**(iii) Political Hegemony/Dominance:** The issue of political hegemony has also threatened Nigeria's federalism. This has become a perpetual feature in Nigeria's federalism, because a striking feature of Nigeria's politics since independence has been that of intense elite power struggle especially along ethnic lines. This is understandably so because; according to Ake (1976), the form and function of the Nigerian state did not fundamentally change at independence because state power remained essentially the same immense, arbitrary, and often violent and always threatening. The political implication of this is that the political class perceived powers as everything and the control of state power became the focal and central preoccupation. Consequently, the struggle for power became so absorbing that everything else, including development was slaughtered on the altar of political struggle for power. Power politics apart from being seen as the quickest route to wealth was also the means to security and sure guarantor of general well-being.

A major element of this struggle has been the mutual tension between the elites of the South and the North resulting in concerns by the Southerners that the more populous Northern region would always have the upper hand in any major electoral contest. In the same vein, the Northerners were of the view that the more educated Southern elite would dominate state institutions. This scenario has continued unabated even till date. In the political arena, there has been a Northern domination and monopoly of political power at the expense of the other regions. Of the 15 Nigerians who have exercised executive powers at the federal level either as

Military or Civilian Presidents, ten have come from the old North, two from the old West and three from the old East. The North has ruled Nigeria for a collective period of about 40 years out of Nigeria's 58 years post-independence period (as at 2018).

**(iv) Constitutional Challenge:** Since its independence, Nigeria is faced with the challenge of drafting a constitution that has the backing of an overwhelming majority of Nigerians. Federalism in Nigeria has faced stiff challenges over the years, from those wanting a unitary form of government on the one hand, and from those wanting a confederal arrangement, on the other. Several indices of over centralization of powers abounds, thus negating federalism and heightening the call for restructuring. Adebayo (2001) queried the rationale behind the federal government's exclusive right on 68 items contained in the exclusive legislative list and concurrent powers on 24 others as contained in the concurrent list. Why does the federal government have overriding power to legislate for any part of the federation for peace, order and good governance? Other issues raised includes those of revenue allocation which is skewed in favour of the central government; the police force, judiciary, education, electoral body, among other, all federally controlled but have jurisdiction over matters in the federating units.

Unfortunately, the current foundation and principles on which Nigerian constitution has been operating over the years particularly since the advent of democracy has not in any way reflected a true federalism in its practical sense. Presently, Nigeria has a strong centre and weak component units. The states have become administrative units of the federal government. The relationship between the centre and the states still reflects the military command structure, an unwelcome legacy of the military administrations. The states are so weak that none of them enjoys fiscal independence from the centre, generally impoverished that they have no capacity even to negotiate meaningfully with the centre. The federal government pays the piper and is happily dictating the tune to the states. None of the states as they are now apart from Lagos and maybe Kano can generate enough internal revenue to prosecute any appreciable social and economic development. Instead of pillars, the states have become a burden on the federation. These have become major impediments to the nation's administrative, economic and political development.

**(v) Leadership Problem:** In addition, leadership has been a major mitigating factor against federalism in Nigeria. Achebe (1983) averred that the trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership which is a critical factor in nation-building. It was the view of Achebe that the standard for recruitment and the performance of our individual leaders over the years has left much to be desired. Hence, Achebe (1983:4) cautioned:

We do not need leaders who see themselves as champions of only some sections of our population. We do not need leaders who do not understand the economic and political problems of the country, not to talk of finding durable solutions for them. We do not need leaders who are more interested in silencing their opponents, than in pursuing justice. We do not need leaders, who preach one thing, and do the exact opposite. We do not need leaders who place themselves above the constitution and the laws of the country, but leaders who lead by upholding and respecting the law. We do not need leaders who have no sense of tomorrow, other than that of their private bank accounts. All these are the real reasons why Nigeria has not made any meaningful progress.



If Nigeria is to succeed in its federal practice, it must have a leadership that is committed to the rule of law and has a demonstrable sense of fair-play and democratic tolerance; it must have a leadership with ability, integrity and be able to see beyond the ostentatious pomp of office. Nigeria needs a leadership that will not only leave its foot-prints on the sands of time, but one which by dint of hard-work, fair-play, dedication and commitment, will live forever in the hearts of Nigerians.

In similar vein, Roy (2004) has asserted that bad leadership has been the greatest problem inhibiting Nigeria from realizing her full potentials as a leading nation in Africa. In his assessment, the moment proper people are elected to positions of leadership everything will start working out well. It will no longer matter who is at the centre once we have the right leadership in place. By this, we must de-emphasize money politics, ethnicity, nepotism and mediocrity. Instead, we must begin to ask questions about characters that represent us, demand accountability from them and align with those whose antecedents portray honesty, credibility, capacity and selfless track record. These to me are ways to dethrone bad leadership in Nigeria.

Commenting on problem of leadership in Nigeria, Cooper (1999) opined that it is not a new revelation that Nigeria's leadership is run as a business investment whereby the rich Godfathers invests through the sponsoring of campaigns, rigging of the elections, gets a candidate to the exalted seat of government, then pressures the candidate to yield his returns through the embezzlement of taxpayer's funds. The same candidate finishes his tenure enriches the Godfather and himself becomes a Godfather, invests in another candidate to bring him returns, and the vicious cycle goes on and on.

Contributing on leadership failure in Nigeria, Babangida noted disappointingly that Nigeria has had enough of analogue leadership that has taken us nowhere; has oppressed the people and balkanized the nation along ethnic and religious lines. Due to bad leadership, we are more divided than we were after the civil war. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria is at crossroad at this moment in its history; the choices we are going to make as a nation regarding the leadership question of this country and the vision for our political, economic and religious future will be largely determined by the nature or kind of change that we pursue, the kind of change that we need and the kind of change that we get (Ishiekwene, 2018).

Babangida who ruled Nigeria for more than 8 years as a Military President concluded that there is need to enthrone digital leadership with all the trappings of consultative, constructive, communicative, interactive and utility-driven approach where everyone is given a sense of belonging. In the words of the former military president, as captured by Ishiekwene (2018:1-2:

The time is now for the nation to rise from its leadership lethargies and chart a new course in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. No more should we allow recycled leaders to take charge of governance affairs. We need contemporary leadership that proactive and not reactive; it must factor in citizens' participation and have language of discourse as persuasive and not agitated and abusive. This leadership must give room for confidence and consensus building as well as form aggregate opinion on any issue to reflect the wishes of the people across divides. We must be unanimous in enthroning federalism that will lead to real development, promote peaceful co-existence among all nationalities, strengthen the nation's political foundation, democratize our

politics, enhance internal democracy, devolve powers to the federating units and allow for resource control.

Though there is consensus from several scholars on leadership being the reason why Nigeria's federal practice has failed, the treatise by the Achebe (1983) is more apt. According to Achebe (1983:2-3):

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal examples which are hallmarks of true leadership.

The assertion by Achebe summarizes the dilemma of the Nigerian state; hence the persistent call for restructuring. Based on Achebe's analysis as to why things are the way they are in Nigeria, it has been assumed in several quarters that the leaders are largely ethnicists in orientation; they present false image of Nigeria, they lack patriotism, promote the culture of social injustice, impunity and mediocrity and they lack discipline. All these have contributed to the present scenario Nigeria finds herself. He said the leadership trouble with Nigeria can be changed if the nation discovers leaders with the will, ability and the vision. He further said it is the duty of enlightened citizens to lead the way in their discovery and to create an atmosphere conducive to their emergence.

**(vi) Inter-Ethnic Rivalry:** One of the factors militating against federalism in Nigeria is inter-ethnic rivalry. Nigeria, we all know is made up of diverse group of people with different ethnic groups, and the rivalry among Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo has become a serious issue overtime. According to Achebe (1983) different set of people from different geo-political regions agitates for power or position of authority which sometimes lead to disagreements and ethnic conflicts among the parties involved. Achebe further stated that the major reason for ethnic rivalry in Nigeria is lack of cohesion and the inability of the parties involved to concede the defeat in order to promote national peace and unity. A good example of a leader and a patriotic Nigerian is the former President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who conceded defeat by congratulating the President-elect, Mohammedu Buhari, via a phone call after election 2015 presidential election results were announced by the electoral umpire. This we believe he did in order to promote unity, harmony, and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians.

In contributing to the above, Dode (2014) asserted that the colonial administration through the constitution, bequeathed on the country ignited ethnicism and tribalism; hence the different governments that ruled the country either civilian or military had not only grappled with this problem, but had indirectly exacerbated it through their resolution efforts. For instance, the British adopted political and administrative policies of divide and rule that mobilized and manipulated the ethnic consciousness that eventually emerged from the violence of the colonial state. In the same vein, Nnoli (1999; 2003) opined that the British policy of divide and rule, initially adopted ethnicity and sectionalism to confront the nationalists and to maintain colonial authority and power in the British enclave. The British colonialists also did everything to further disunite the Nigerian people. They spread the propaganda that Nigerians did not have a common distinct identity attributes with respect to political independence.

The creation of Nigeria by Britain in 1914 has led the nation to over fifty years of conflict, violence and massive bloodshed. In fact, since political independence in 1960, the

Nigerian federation has been torn apart by war, conflicts and bloody ethnic violence. The most famous of these disputes was the thirty-six months old civil war (1967-1970), which was caused by an attempted secession bid from Nigeria by the three Eastern States. In fact the domination of the sizeable North and dissatisfaction of the Igbos of Eastern region culminated in the civil war (Nwabueze, 1983).

**(vii) Unequal Sharing of Constitutional Power between the Component Units and the Centre:** Given the provisions of the 1999 constitution as amended and the manner in which the country is presently being run, it is fair to say that the federating units do not share constitutional powers equitably. This idea of fair sharing of constitutional powers took place in the 1960 and the 1963 constitutions. What is obtained today is a far cry from true federalism as the federating units are mere appendages and subordinates to the federal government.

It must however be observed that the federal structures have never existed in Nigeria society but was a creation of the British government to serve their purpose. When the federal military government came on board, it foisted its centralized governance structure and has always assumed superiority over the state government (Dode, 2015). Because military federalism had been more common than civilian federalism, this model made the federal government the “master in relation to the dependent” state governments. According to Dode (2015) at independence largely autonomous regions possessed the residual powers in the federation and functioned almost independently. The regions had independent revenue bases, separate constitutions, foreign missions, and the primary and secondary education were under the residual list while the university education was under the concurrent list. All these changed under military rule.

In Nigeria, the powers and functions of each level of government are clearly spelt out in Second Schedule of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). There are two legislative lists, namely: The Exclusive Legislative List and the Concurrent Legislative List. The former is made up of subjects which the Federal Government alone can make and administer laws, while the latter deals with matters over which the Federal and State Governments have legislative powers. There are sixty-six (66) subjects on the Exclusive List and twenty-eight (28) subjects on the Concurrent List. The constitution is silent on the residual list. However, based on the tradition in most federations, it is assumed that the residual powers are to be exercised by the State. Also spelt out in the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution under reference, are the functions of the local government. The derivation of power from the constitution is a clear attestation to the assumption of the status of a third tier of government, but the local government is still hamstrung by the provision that its powers include such other functions as may be conferred on a Local Government Council by the House of Assembly of a State.

The division of the legislative powers between the Federal and State governments by the 1999 Constitution does not reflect the view that a federal state is one in which there is a central authority that represents the whole and acts on behalf of the whole in external affairs and in such internal affairs that are of common interest. Awa (1976) emphasized this much, when he emphasized that the component units of the federation must be enabled to control some of their affairs in its own way and with their own resources. For socio-political survival of Nigeria, the federal government must give up some of its powers to the federating units; the federal government represents injustice to millions of minorities in Nigeria especially the Niger-Delta.

Power distribution is a volatile issue which if not properly handled could lead to various forms of crises which are bound to crop up. But Dode (2015) noted that Nigeria has not been forthright in applying this principle to the letter and the result of this has been the heightening of ethnic tension, mutual mistrust among ethnic groups, minority problems, and clamour for an answer to the national question. He maintained that ethnic tension and the problems of minority in Nigeria is the resultant effect of improper distribution of functions and resources. This is because the people who now feel left out in the scheme of things see it as a necessity to rely with their ethnic groups which will provide them a good ground for competing with others for resources and against domination by the dominant ethnic groups. This can escalate to open confrontation among the groups which has happened countless times in Nigeria. This has contributed significantly to the heightened calls for restructuring by leaders of thoughts and federating units especially those from Southern part of Nigeria.

### **Restructuring Nigeria's Federal Structure: A Necessity**

Restructuring has become the latest buzz word in the political landscape with political and non-political actors pushing forward their ideas of the word that was not too long ago, an anathema to many state actors. Given the view of some that Nigeria is presently a federation, it is not surprising that different political actors would give different perspectives to the concept of restructuring. While some of the calls have primordial and political undertones, a lot of the calls are anchored on well-established premise of ensuring the socio-political survival of the country. But what exactly is the idea of restructuring? Why are the calls for restructuring so loud and reverberating across the country?

To restructure entails changing the way that organization or system is organized in order to make it work more effectively and efficiently. A number of analysts have pointed to what Achebe (1983:2) referred to as the "failure of the leadership" to keenly address the nagging needs of the citizenry and all segments of the federating units. This failure on the part of leadership and political elite, essentially led to disequilibrium in the distribution of the common wealth, thereby giving rise to calls for restructuring. Some parts of the country feel alienated in the scheme of things with the attendant call for self-determination by some ethnic groups; some Nigerians do not feel safe in parts of the country where there is so much violence, insecurity and economic marginalization of the majority. Most of the fears which tend to drive present day agitation for self-determination seem to emanate from ethnic and tribal dominations. The minority ethnic groups are afraid of the dominance of the majority, while the latter are afraid of the onslaught of the agitators from the minority (Adenugu, 2016).

The latest effort to revisit the structure and make it more accommodating came by way of the National Political Conference organized by the President Jonathan administration in 2014. Even when a number of people had misgivings about the motive of the government in convening the conference and its composition, some remarkable agreements were nonetheless reached. But Jonathan's successor, President Muhammadu Buhari and his party, the All Progressive Congress (APC) do not seem to be excited by some of the key recommendations of that conference (Osadare, 2016). Again, as postulated by Abubakar (2018), the incumbent government is not interested in the 2014 National Conference report and is dismissive even of its gain which its predecessor spent an estimated 9 billion Naira to organize. Although some people may not agree with all recommendations of the conference, it did provide avenue for Nigerians to air their opinions about the nature of the Nigerian state, disagree and agree on some ways forward. A genuine path to restructuring should not dismiss the outcome of that conference.

Series of clarion calls by eminent and well-meaning Nigerians have been directed at restructuring the Nigeria federal structure. Chief Anthony Enahoro (late) made a renewed effort through his Movement for National Reformation and the Pro-National Conference Coalition (PRONACO) to restructure the country and even came up with a people's constitution for the country. These were against the background of the effort of the Aluo-Aka Bashorun led National Consultative Forum (NCF) under the military dictatorship of General Ibrahim Babangida and later the Beko Ransome Kuti led Campaign for Democracy (CD) and the Pa Ajabin led National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) which made the call for Sovereign National Conference (SNC) one of its cardinal programmes in the fight against military dictatorship.

The emerging pan-Nigeria support for the idea of restructuring means the stand patters are coming to terms with the fact that the country has been living a lie for more than half a century. It is a reality that the federal structure at independence endowed the three regions and later four with a considerable measure of autonomy, and consequently engendered growth and development as well as healthy competition among the federating region; a period when resource allocation was also based on 50 percent derivation principle. This was however, dealt a blow by the centralizing dynamic of Military regime. The present structure has bred identity, politics of ethno-centrism; undermined national unity and patriotism, institutionalized corruption, violation of the rule of law and a dehumanization of the people. These anomalies have also led to state-led violence and enduring separatist impulses on the part of many nationalities that make up the country.

Recently, the former Nigerian Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, threw his weight in support of the clamour for restructuring of the country's federal structure. While the presidency dismissed the call, many interest groups have commended Alhaji Abubakar for his position on restructuring the Nigerian polity. The restructuring of the Nigerian state, with regards to its federal practice is long overdue. The present structure is a pointer to the tension at the heart of the agitations by many right thinking Nigerians calling for a restructuring and a renewal of the federation to make it less centralized, less suffocating and less dictatorial in the affairs of the country's constituent units and localities (Abubakar, 2018).

Nigeria's federalism, as it exists today, encourages parasitism, dependency and laziness. Stupendous oil wealth which drove the centralization impulse is gone and restoring resource fullness of the state would be inevitable. It is perhaps time to ponder the concept of federalism and what it should mean in the context of Nigeria's particularism. As earlier indicated, classical definition of federalism sees it as division (sharing of legislative power between central and regional governments in a manner that provides shared independence in their respective spheres. Its meaning is to be found in the nature of society, not in the constitution. Nigeria by nature is multinational, linguistically and culturally diverse and its component nationalities are territorially segregated. What is erroneously called the Nigerian federation has been governed by principles that are anything but federal - a centralizing bureaucracy, a heavily skewed three tier structure not based on social contract but created by administrative fiats and has continued to expand domination with a corresponding societal disorder (Dode, 2014).

On the contrary, federalism ought to mean that component units (States and Local Governments) should survive on their own. Each state should unlock its potential. It means real resource control, that is, ownership and control of resources by the people so endowed who

should decide who share it, with, the country is simply living a lie, hence there is imperative for restructuring.

### **Restructuring as a Prognosis for Socio-Political Stability in Nigeria**

The call for Nigeria's restructuring is gaining momentum by the day. Quite unprecedented is the curious demand from all territorial segments of the nation. Those who were originally opposed to it have joined the wagon of agitators. It is indeed tending towards what could rightly be described as the popular demand of the masses. It is obvious from the analysis in preceding sections of this paper that Nigerian federalism is faced with a myriad of problems which have precipitated the clamour and agitations for political restructuring. It is important to pinpoint that the Nigerian nation will certainly profit from the restructuring of Nigerian federalism or power devolution from the centre in so many ways:

**(i) Promotion of National Integration and Stability:** Restructuring will bring about cohesion among the people, which will in turn foster stability and unity among Nigeria citizens. Integration is very important in nation building, as it examines the problem of diversity and inter-ethnic rivalry and breeds peace and unity among people. A Nigeria restructured is a Nigeria with enhanced leadership-building culture, where a truly-federal system allows each region to locally identify leadership for public governance, nurture and closely monitor such leaders for hard work and spirit of public service, focused on the development of each region, at a pace and a rate that reflect the quantum of each region's effort and efficient use of local resources; indeed, the rivalry for- regional-success resulting from a truly federating Nigeria, will boost sustainable development across all zones of the country.

**(ii) Fairness Among Ethnic Groups:** Restructuring will bring about fairness and justice among ethnic groups which will in turn eliminate the issue of favouritism in Nigeria. A good example of this is the government of the late president Umaru Musa Yar'adua that was able to solve the Niger Delta issues. What this has taught us today is that government should not always resort to the use of violence to settle conflicts, instead they should embrace dialogue. A Nigeria restructured is a Nigeria where every area, region or zone of the country will be able to devote more thinking time, conceptualization, research, exploration and analysis to its mineral and agricultural resources, with a view to developing an economic value-chain from them, which is the first serious step towards the development of a manufacturing capacity across the country. When governments and private investors in every part of the country, are challenged to look for sources of wealth creation primarily within their own region, and to work with international investors to transform these natural endowments into real economic empowerment for millions of their people, then we know restructuring is at work.

**(iii) Economic Stability:** Federalism, if properly practiced will bring about economic stability in Nigeria. The idea behind the creation of federalism in Nigeria was to bring about economic development and established an effective administration. Restructuring will bring about stability in the economy, and would eliminate any form of crisis which could emanate from ethnic rivalry. Each region would be forced to manage its resources more prudently and judiciously giving little or no room for wasteful spending. This will tame or cripple the endemic monster called corruption. Regional autonomy will certainly discover hidden goldmines, hitherto untapped resources and talents as each region will concentrate on its area of comparative advantage. There will be rapid and massive improvement in infrastructure development. Government will be closer to people at the grassroots.

**(iv) Political Stability:** The motive behind restructuring is to promote unity and to bring the government closer to the people. Federalism was borne out of idea of peaceful coexistence among citizens where government is brought closer to the people, stability and cohesion in order to promote national integration. Because more public appointments and elected offices may likely be needed within the federating Regions, with relatively less at the Centre, a Nigeria re-structured will be one where the process of recruitment into public leadership could be better subjected to closer local scrutiny for reputation, character and track record, as against the current practice where persons with dubious reputations and questionable bona fides among their own people, are chosen into high national office as leaders - presumably on behalf of their regions or localities - by a distant central government, which often knows relatively little (or, sometimes cares little) about the poor and low character reputation of such appointees among their own people.

**(v) Eliminate the Problem of Uneven Distribution of Government Allocation:** Restructuring Nigeria's political structure will address the problem of uneven distribution of budgeting allocation by the federal government by ensuring that allocation of revenues to different regions are not politicized. A restructured Nigeria will be a Nigeria in which the Central Government will no longer be able to automatically pool funds un-evenly from different parts of Nigeria, while re-distributing the same funds unfairly and inequitably (at the expense of the larger contributors) among the various states and local governments - regardless of the quality of policy choices and good governance efforts by State and Local Government leaders.

Discernibly, restructuring of the country's political and administrative structure will serve as a prognosis for peaceful coexistence among the various ethnic and religious groups, because the already existing federal structure is unitary in nature which make the central government so powerful and autocratic; the system encourages injustice, corruption, marginalization and is not only antithetical to growth and development, but also breeds needless tensions.

## **Conclusion**

The Nigerian variant of federalism was at the initial stage tolerable; the federal system inherited at independence was one which allowed the federating units to retain their autonomy to raise and retain revenues, promote development, and conducts their affairs as they saw fit, while engaging in healthy competition with one another. After 19 unbroken years (1999-2018) of democracy in this dispensation, however the country is yet to wean itself off the large doses of Unitarianism injected into the system by successive military regimes.

It is the submission of this paper that political restructuring in Nigeria is imperative, however, close attention should be paid to the subliminal factors that can make such restructuring a positive one. It should not be a restructuring along geo-political or ethnic/linguistic boundaries alone. While the paper subscribes to the call for the restructuring of the country, it differs from the voices of those who perceive Nigeria's restructuring wholly from the perspective of ethnic or regional lines. Restructuring along ethnic or regional divides alone will not achieve the much desired results. It may simply end up in a pyrrhic victory. Restructuring should be carried out to meet the demands of the various groups, and it should also be sustainably dynamic to accommodate the ever evolving political space.

Restructuring should not be seen as just a political agitation; it is the foundational plan for Nigeria's future prosperity without oil. Again, restructuring should not be conceived only

as progressive politics but also as excellent economics. The 2019 election is around the corner and politicians are busy negotiating for personal positions and interests, but hardly anyone is negotiating for the future of Nigeria. Restructuring should be a front-burner during and after the 2019 elections. To be credible, political parties and candidates need to spell out the specifics of the restructuring they offer. The debate needs to be elevated beyond pedestrian manifestos that do not add up. The Nigerian polity, like the cloud, is threatening; and as a wise man gets the umbrella ready before the rain starts, Nigerian leaders should act now and translate the restructuring agitations beyond mere words!

### Recommendations

Flowing from the issues analyzed in the preceding sections of this paper, the following suggestions are offered towards curbing Nigeria's federalism imbroglio:

- (i) The present political arrangement whereby so much power is concentrated at the federal and state levels is unnecessary. A natural realignment of political authorities is the answer to realizing peaceful coexistence. There has to be a conscious transfer of power from the centre to other levels of governments for effective administration of all units.
- (ii) Restructuring should be geared towards solving the leadership problem in Nigeria. Real attention should be given to good governance which would lead to poverty reduction and better distribution of wealth affecting Nigerians, and not necessarily the divisibility of the country, which is not feasible or viable.
- (iii) There is need for attitudinal re-orientation. Thus, commitment to the unity, indivisibility and progress of a new Nigeria through effective governance is very essential as well as jettisoning corruption, hunger and poverty.
- (iv) Each federating unit should be made and reassured of a sense of belonging through a well-articulated charter of equity. Authority and responsibilities should be driven from local government to the state and the centre should play a crucial role in ensuring compliance to and enforcement of law and order and values.
- (v) Traditional authorities should be given constitutional roles that will help in maintaining security, at least, the issue of community policing cannot be put on the back-burner any longer. Authority and responsibility should be driven from the local authorities (family, communities, towns, local governments) to the state and centre.

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