



NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY: OPTIONS FOR GREATNESS

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War and the hostile East-West relations in the late 20th century resulted in the emergence of new challenges to statehood in many parts of the world. In Nigeria, such challenges have been exacerbated by political and leadership ineptitude and an equally pauperized and docile followership. This study adopted the historical descriptive research methodology of content analysis because, by its very nature, it was not amenable to the quantitative research method. The findings showed that there are vital issues to be addressed if Nigeria is to embark on a sustainable path to national rebirth and development in the 21st century. Though not exhaustive, some of these issues have been isolated and analyzed. The conclusion reached is that political leadership, ethnicity, religious bigotry, regional dichotomy, defalcation, and the absence of identification with the Nigeria state by both the leaders and ordinary citizens constitute a huge obstacle to nation-building and national development.

Keywords: Citizens, corruption, democracy, justice, nation-building, national question

Introduction

Nigeria became an independent country in 1960 following the withdrawal of the British colonial regime which had ruled the country for sixty years. Independence from British rule came with very high expectations not only from citizens of Nigeria, but also from other African countries. Nigeria was seen as the beacon of hope for Africans both in the mother continent and in the diaspora. But that expectation became a forlorn hope because barely six years after independence, the country's democratic government was overthrown by the military. Decades of military rule witnessed a wanton and conscienceless misappropriation of national wealth by the military leaders and their civilian co-travellers. Rather than use the huge earnings from exports of crude oil to embark on meaningful and people-oriented development programmes, the monies were stolen. Corruption became a national pastime, and investments in education and critical infrastructure suffered neglect. The country's debt profile rose astronomically, and her international image perception nosedived.

The return to democratic rule, first between 1979 to 1983 and later from 1999 till date (2023) has not helped matters. If anything, the culture of greed, graft, and incompetence has been taken to higher levels by the political class. The ordinary citizens have been emasculated and pauperized so much so that they now seem



helpless. The situation is redeemable but it requires a committed and visionary leadership to surmount the myriad of problems to make Nigeria relevant to the demands of the 21st century. In this programmes in the task of moving Nigeria forward in the 21st century. In other words, this paper has put forward practical approaches towards ensuring political stability, economic progress, and harmonious inter-ethnic relations, and therefore, security and progress for Nigeria. Therefore, the following have been isolated as some of the most important approaches towards tackling the challenges of the Nigerian state:

- i. Addressing the National Question.
- ii. Civic education and cultural transformation.
- iii. Achieving regional economic parity.
- iv. Balancing political power.
- v. Youth development and empowerment.
- vi. Creating a national history and ideology.
- vii. Addressing the security challenges.
- viii. Strengthening the industrial base and enhancing electricity generation and supply.
- ix. Satisfying the citizens' basic human and material needs.
- x. Upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights.
- xi. Visionary and committed political leadership.
- xii. Electoral justice and the consolidation of democracy.

Addressing the “National Question”

The National Question in Nigeria has a long history which dates back to the circumstances that conditioned the evolution of the country itself. It has remained a recurring and lingering decimal in national politics, and has elicited a variety of responses. In the main, the manner or style of governance since 1960 which has persistently dichotomized relations between the pre-1914 former British Northern and Southern protectorates is often blamed for the inability of successive governments to address the issues involved in the National Question with any appreciable sense of honesty and commitment. Such governments have rather exacerbated the many disparities which have all along threatened the unity of Nigeria. Both in the distribution of national financial resources and in the allocation of political appointments, official policies have tended to be deliberately skewed in favour one class, region, and ethnic/religious group over others. Those who are favoured by this arrangement are determined, albeit, immorally and unjustifiable, to defend their advantages. Similarly, those who feel short-changed desire to have a review of the existing policies and programmes. This is the crux of the matter.

What has come to be known as the “National Question” in Nigeria acquired meaning and became a nuisance as a result of British colonial rule.¹ Colonialism resulted in enclave development, a situation whereby social amenities and economic opportunities were concentrated in the few urban areas. There were struggles and competitions for access to these scarce but desirable amenities and facilities. With time, these struggles and competitions (which were initially between the indigenous groups and the settler elements), led to inter-ethnic hostilities.² Today the “National Question” has come to mean the composition of the Nigerian state and the dynamic problem of how relations between the country's many ethnic groups should be ordered in such a way that every ethnic group would have equal access not only to political power but also the equitable distribution of national economic resources. It seeks to address issues relating to ethnic minority interests, citizenship, and local government.³

Thus, the “National Question” in Nigeria is the outcome of dissatisfaction with the Nigerian state and its failure to meet the needs of Nigerians, often by deliberate exclusion, marginalization, injustice, insecurity, and of not protecting the lives and welfare of various groups inhabiting the national space. It is a composite of several questions, all of which relate to the challenges of national integration and citizenship rights.

The sub- categories of the question include the following:

- a) To what extent do citizens and groups feel a sense of identity with the Nigerian state?
- b) Does the state protect the citizens' interest?
- c) Is justice and fairness preserved in the manner in which the state relates to every section of the citizenry?
- d) To what extent is justice dispensed in the extraction and distribution of proceeds of resources extracted from certain parts or regions of the country?
- e) To what extent is political leadership in the Nigerian state just in its decision and execution of matters affecting various groups and constituencies?



- f) To what extent are Nigerians able to express their uniqueness as a group (culturally and economically) without being hindered by the structure of power and the state?⁴

Finding answers to these questions will no doubt, show that there is an urgent need for a fundamental reform of the faulty legal architecture of Nigeria through a constitutional process that will address the problems hindering the attainment of a truly integrated, peaceful, and progressive country. Put differently, it is because of Nigeria's failure to address the age-long challenges of political instability, ethnicity, economic development, and political instability, as well as social harmony that has made the call for the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) more persistent. Those calling for it feel strongly that unless appropriate actions are taken urgently and as a matter of necessity, the Nigerian state will remain a time-bomb waiting to explode. The country, in other words, appears to be moving towards a precipice which can only be avoided through a sustained analysis and discourse of the many issues raised by the "National Question".

Admittedly, some efforts have been made by the federal government to keep hope alive regarding the future of Nigeria, especially since 1970. But the issues raised by the calls for a Sovereign National Conference to address the "National Question" have been politicized. In fact, two recent examples have brought to the fore the emotional contexts and dimensions of the "National Question". For example, soon after Nigeria embarked on her fourth experiment at democratic governance in 1999, some state governments in the northern part of the country adopted the Islamic Sharia legal code to regulate inter-personal relationships in their states. Despite opposition from non-Muslim residents in such states on the implication of the laws on their lives and activities, the adoption of Sharia law was justified by the affected governments on the basis of "federalism", and not secularism, as embedded in 1999 Constitution. Secondly, Nigeria's third executive President, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, took ill in early 2010 and was flown to Saudi Arabia for medical attention. His movement out of Nigeria was without the knowledge of the then Vice-President, Goodluck Jonathan, who made futile attempts to personally meet with the ailing President. But his moves were rebuffed by a group of Northern Nigerian political and military leaders. As the President's condition deteriorated, he was surreptitiously brought back to Nigeria, again without the knowledge of the Vice-President. When Yar'Adua eventually died on May 6, 2010, Northern leaders ganged up to demand that Goodluck Jonathan should not contest the 2011 presidential elections because it was still the turn of Northern Nigeria to complete Yar'Adua's tenure.

Sentiments over who should become Nigeria's President in 2011 became emotive, and when Jonathan formally indicated interest to run for the office of President despite the opposition of Northern political and opinion leaders, the Nigerian polity became highly charged and heated up. In newspaper and radio commentaries and even beer parlour debates, fears and rumours of a sudden break-up of the country became resonant. They all elicited more calls for serious discussions on the way forward for Nigeria. These calls would also appear to have been made strident by the 2003 report of National Intelligence Council (N.I.C.) of the United States which had expressed fears about the future of Nigeria. In its analysis of situation in the country, which included the wide chasm between the rich and the poor and ethnic and religious hatred and animosities, the Council's position paper predicted that unless urgent measures were taken to tackle these and other issues, Nigeria may cease to exist as one country by 2015. Indeed, the fear widely entertained was that the 2015 presidential election and the burning desire of the Fulani-led Northern Nigerian oligarchy to take over political power, would lead to the disintegration of the country.

The agitations for a platform to address the "National Question" were made more compelling by the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election by the military government of Ibrahim Babangida. The said election was adjudged to have been very free and fair, despite the fact that the presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the presumed winner of the election, Moshood K.O. Abiola and his Vice-Presidential candidate, Babagana Kingibe, were both Muslims. The annulment of that election and what followed thereafter, including the overthrow of the Interim National Government (I.N.G) led by Ernest Shonekan, by General Sani Abacha, was perceived by many Southern Nigerians as a crude manifestation of the born-to-rule mentality and principle of domination of other Nigerians by Northerners.

This and other contradictions in the composition of Nigeria have resulted in discussions on how to convene a conference of ethnic nationalities through a platform where Nigerians from various ethnic, religious, political, and socio-cultural backgrounds would debate the issues and reach a compromise. According to B.N. Adamu, injecting the word "Sovereign" into the discussions was intended to ensure that the outcome of the conference would not be "... tinkered or panel-beaten out of recognition into uselessness, absurdities and ambiguities to be introduced thereafter by self-ordained divine right rulers of this country".⁵ But various attempts at convening



such a conference became politicized as reasons quickly became relegated to the background while emotions were allowed to flourish. Thus, Nigerians were once again polarized into two antagonistic camps, namely: those in support of the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC), and those opposed to it. While Southerners generally supported the idea, Northerners objected to it. For the Southerners, the Nigerian state is structurally defective and needs to be restructured in order to ensure social, economic and political development. The position of the North is not on the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference whose “sovereignty” is repeatedly questioned⁶. Rather, they believe that the Nigerian state is still functional and the citizens are sufficiently at peace with themselves⁷. To them, therefore, a Sovereign National Conference is not an answer to the country’s problems. They contend instead that the issues plaguing the country could be resolved in a federated Nigeria; one that is restructured, just, and fair.⁸

The failure of successive governments before the return to democratic rule in 1999 to address the problems associated with Nigeria’s structure of governance gave rise to the mushrooming of a variety of groups. Their agenda, basically, are aimed at drawing attention to their real and perceived marginalization from the central government and redressing the situation through a more inclusive arrangement. In the words of Adebayo Olukoshi and Osita Agbu:

The issues which dominated the discourse of most of the groups included ways of ensuring that federal political power is equally accessible to all Nigerian nationalities which should also be allowed to have their own political and economic space in a radically restructured federation in which the power of the federal state is reduced. Vociferous demands were also made for a greater balance between the north and the south of Nigeria in the leadership of the country, in the distribution of political and parastatal offices, and the economic benefits accruing to the country.⁹

Previous attempts at interrogating the entire basis of the Nigerian federation and how it could be reformed to promote a more sustainable sense of unity were not acceptable to the military junta. For instance, the Alao Aka-Bashorun-led National Consultative Forum (NCF) tried to hold a Sovereign National Conference with the Theme “Agenda for Democracy”. But the meeting could not hold because security forces were detailed to lock the attendants out of the venue- the National Theatre, Iganmu, on September,6, 1990. All these pro-SNC organizations were formed mainly by opinion leaders and patriots from Southern Nigeria. Both the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and the Movement for National Reformation (MNR), as well as the Campaign for Democracy (CD) emerged, more or less, from the ashes of the NCF, to agitate for a sovereignnational conference.

It has never been in the character of the Northern Nigeria elite to acquiesce to any call for the convocation of any conference under whatever guise, to address the obvious abnormalities of the Nigerian federation. It goes without saying that British paternalism in the North (which found no parallel in the South), emboldened the leaders from that region to arrogantly continue to insist on the North taking and enjoying the greater share of the economic resources of the country and dominating other Nigerians politically. Therefore, it has always been the practice and determination of the Fulani-led Northern Nigerian oligarchy to frustrate any attempt by the South (and increasingly, the Middle Belt) to challenge the economic and political advantages bequeathed to them by the British colonial regime and which the various Northern-dominated junta sustained and indeed, extended for the almost thirty years of military rule.

For instance, the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), the apex socio-cultural organization of the core Northerners (the North-East and North-West geopolitical zones) does not believe that the North should ever compromise its unwholesome and unwarranted political advantages over the South. The organization is aware of the economic limitations of the North which depends mostly on political patronage and agriculture. Because of this very fact, the ACF has never been favourably disposed to any discussions or debates on the issue of resource control and political restructuring. Meanwhile, these are among the salient issues in the “National Question”. It is ironical that while the Northern elite has routinely criticized the implementation of the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference because they argue that the delegates to the Conference were not democratically elected, they see nothing wrong with the jaundiced 1999 constitution which was drafted by a few Nigerians that were hand-picked by the military junta led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, a Muslim Northern.

However, of all previous conferences called to discuss the “National Question”, none appears to be as comprehensive and rancour-free as the 2014 National Conference (CONFAB). Its predecessors were the



1994/1995 Constitutional Conference convoked by late Head-of-State, Sani Abacha, and the National Political Reform Conference convoked by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2005. The 2014 Conference was convoked by the then President Goodluck Jonathan. Chaired by an eminent jurist and former Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN), Idris Kutigi, the Conference had nineteen committees set up to address such issues as devolution of powers, political restructuring and forms of government; national security; the environment, politics and governance; law, judiciary, human rights and legal reforms; social welfare; transportation; agriculture; society, labour and sports; public service; electoral matters; land tenure matters and national boundaries; trade and investment; energy; religion; public finance and revenue generation; science; technology and development; and immigration.

The 2014 Conference had four negotiating positions which were advocated by the delegates and representatives that attended it. While the South-West and South-East groups advocated devolution of powers and the adoption of the existing six geo-political zones to replace the thirty-six state structure, the core North (that is, the Fulani-dominated North-East and North-West geopolitical zones) was not ready for any radical alteration of the existing order. In other words, the Northern delegates sought to retain the status quo. On their part, both the North-Central geopolitical zone (the Middle Belt) and the South-South, which comprise largely minority ethnic groups, shared fears of domination and marginalization and therefore, opposed the obliteration of the state structure. In particular, the South-South delegates advocated resource control under states instead of zones or regions. Altogether, there were four hundred and ninety-four (494) delegates to the Conference, comprising academics, technocrats, interest groups, et cetera. Over six hundred (600) resolutions were approved by consensus, not by voting. In his speech to the then President Jonathan while submitting the Report of the Conference, Justice Kutigi said "...all our resolution were adopted by consensus. Not once did we have to vote or come to a division... The official report of the 2014 National Conference was adopted unanimously".¹⁰

Notwithstanding the fact that the 2014 Conference was characterized by what an observer described as "A scenario of unsolicited hugs, multiple pats on the back, wide smiles, handshakes unhindered by ethnic divides...",¹¹ Muhammadu Buhari, on assumption of office as Nigeria's third elected President (following the disengagement of the military from national politics in 1999), vowed never to have anything to do with the Report, even without perusing it. Instead, President Buhari boasted, rather sarcastically, that he will consign it to the dust bin. Not surprisingly, Buhari's position was supported by the leadership of the Arewa Consultative Forum mainly because implementing the Report of the Conference would, in their thinking, erode the entrenched economic and political advantages of the North vis-à-vis the South. One can also safely assume that, among the reasons for the desperation of Buhari to become President and thus return power to the North, was informed by the North's consuming fear of losing both economic and political power to the South should there be devolution of power and resource control as embodied in the Report of the 2014 Conference.

In as much as the 2014 National Conference contained a lot of platitudes, there is no gainsaying the fact that it represents the best effort so far undertaken by the government since 1960, to address all the vexatious issues which have all along constituted the albatross to Nigeria's search for national integration and development, and by extension, her relevance in international relations. That Conference was the highpoint of the Jonathan administration, his original intention of convoking it at the twilight of his tenure, notwithstanding. Unfortunately, and in spite of the fact that its implementation would have gone a long way in addressing the perennial agitations that have continued to threaten Nigeria's unity and made it difficult for the country to make progress, the Buhari government did not seem willing to give it a chance, both for personal, religious, and regional reasons. However, it is imperative to have aspects of the Report implemented, while the platitudes could be consigned, as it were, to the dustbin. The idea of a few self-seeking political elite from a section of the country trampling upon the destiny of millions of Nigerians is the worst form of injustice and man's inhumanity to his fellow beings. The implementation of relevant sections of the Report, even if it involves a critical re-evaluation, should be advocated by right-thinking Nigerians. Withholding or blacklisting the report when there is no viable alternative, will not do the country any good.

The devolution of powers, the adoption of true federalism, and resource control by states, will engender regional competition for economic development as was the case in the First Republic (1960-1966). Issues relating to the North-South dichotomy in national politics, urban and rural poverty, electricity generation and distribution, religious intolerance, ethnic bigotry, rule of law, human rights, industrialization, regional economic disparities, security challenges, education, youth development, agricultural development, unemployment, and so many other impediments to the full realization of Nigeria's potentials as the true giant of Africa, would be fully addressed if



the Report of the 2014 Conference is faithfully implemented, devoid of ethnic, religious, and sectional interests and considerations. Such a move would, in turn, enable Nigeria to join the league of rapidly developing countries like her contemporaries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, India, among others. The obtrusive intransigence and conservative disposition of the Northern Nigerian elite to the implementation of the Report of the 2014 Conference, on the other hand, will only leave Nigeria mired in its current state of underdevelopment. The choice is ours to make, and the time is now.

At no time since the end of the Nigerian-Biafra war (1967-1970) has the country been polarized along ethnic, regional, class, and religious lines as it has since 2015. A new culture of incompetence, cronyism, nepotism, sectionalism, and sycophancy has taken over the Nigerian political landscape. At the global level, Nigeria is today the world's poverty capital, with 105 out of the country's estimated 205 million population living in extreme poverty, according to the World Poverty Clock¹². It is also home to more than eleven (11) million out-of-school children. Youths make up about 65% of the country's total population. Yet, the unemployment rate (27.1%) is alarming and was the major reason for the #EndSars uprising of October 8, 2020. This inauspicious and perilous scenario has been compounded by insecurity arising from the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents in the North-East and North-West geopolitical zones, the unending violent conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and local farmers, especially in the South and the Middle Belt, as well as the activities of bandits and criminal gangs in different parts of the country. The result is a steady decline in foreign investments and the worsening of Nigeria's economic predicament. Interrogating and implementing the 2014 National Conference Report is, therefore, imperative if political stability and economic development is ever to be achieved in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, it should constitute the fulcrum of a new constitution for the country.

Civic Education and Cultural Transformation

There is no denying the fact that Nigeria's educational system has failed to imbue in the younger citizens a sense of national pride and loyalty to the country. In other words, not much efforts would appear to have been made to inculcate in Nigerian children an awareness of national identity, especially in their formative and impressionable years. The emotional attachment which such a move can have on the children is enormous, and it could lay the foundation for unflinching loyalty to the country. The British colonial educational curricular which tended to stress on religion (Christianity), character training and on subjects which were necessary for the administrative requirements of the colonial regime, are partly to blame for this development. Also, the way and manner which the political military, religious, and even traditional leaders have conducted themselves in their private and public lives, leaves much to be desired. In particular, political leadership as presently portrayed and displayed has sent very wrong signals to the youth because they have come to see politics as the fastest means of enriching oneself. Thus, the required cultural transformation and value re-orientation has to be enforced in order to change the existing and prevalent negative value systems. In as much as the federal government has, over the years, initiated a number of programmes in this direction, such as the War Against Indiscipline (W.A.I) and the National Orientation Agency (N.O.A.) the fact remains that a lot still needs to be done if the younger ones are really to become the leaders of tomorrow.

The culture of impunity and selfishness which is a carry-over from decades of military dictatorship, as well as the disparate and dissenting aggregates of the Nigerian state, have worked against the creation of a national history, culture, and ideology. Policy-makers and relevant institutions have negated the positive role which history could play in encouraging and sustaining national stability and development. A proper knowledge of Nigeria's past, including her struggles and triumphs, is a necessary stimulant for national cohesion. Conversely, de-emphasizing the country's glorious past will tantamount to a denial of a brighter future. Therefore, there is a compelling need for an articulated ideology: one that would provide the requisite framework for national cohesion. Nigeria's political system has failed woefully in this regard. Political parties are formed without any discernible ideological bent: what the parties and their candidates present to the electorate are merely vague statements of principles intended to achieve not long-term national goals, but personal gains. In addition, citizenship education which would include such civic rituals as singing and reciting the National Anthem and the National Pledge should be emphasized. So should the studying of, and tolerance of the cultures and traditions of each other's ethnic group also be emphasized.

Achieving Regional Economic Parity

If genuine national integration is to be achieved, the federal government needs to step up efforts at encouraging balanced economic and educational development. Unless sustained efforts are made to achieve balanced growth, disparities in regional economic development will inevitably mean that certain groups in



the country will continue to prosper while others will remain poor. In particular, the Northern states may continue to lag woefully behind their counterparts in the South. Globally, Nigeria is ranked as one of the lowest countries on the Human Development Index. Back home, the regional disparities are such that the North has more than 60% of its peoples living in extreme poverty. Part of the blame is on the activities of the Northern Nigerian elite. They are supposed to be the drivers and pilots of their societies. Instead of advancing the well-being of the poor, they tend to exploit their poverty and ignorance. This, no doubt, is a fall-out of the traditional conservative and anti-development feudal system of the North. In the end, the South is often portrayed to the gullible poor Northerners as the cause of their poverty. Thus, at the slightest chance, any and every riot in the North, will become an opportunity for the frustrated youths to attack Southern businesses and their owners.

Furthermore, between 2016 and 2018, the South contributed at least 80% of the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) of the country, while the North contributed the balance.¹² Ironically, those communities in the South, (especially in the Niger Delta) who generate the bulk of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, feel marginalized in the allocation of development projects. For instance, during the military era, most federal government projects executed by the now defunct Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), were concentrated in the North (76%), while the South had only 24%.¹³ Meanwhile, solid minerals exploration in the North is undertaken mostly by private individuals who pay little or nothing to the coffers of the federal government. One way of achieving regional economic parity is to encourage both local and foreign investors to extend their investments beyond their traditional areas of operation. For instance, there is a heavy preponderance of manufacturing companies, banks and other corporate business in the South, especially in Lagos and Port Harcourt. The North does not seem to have attracted a lot of these companies and businesses. Also, the federal government should diversify its capital-intensive projects and consider the availability the nearness to sources of raw materials in choosing the location of manufacturing industries.

When regional economic parity is encouraged, it will ease tensions and acrimonies, especially between the North and the South. Poverty will also be reduced, and the living standards of the citizens will improve. But regional economic parity without educating the teeming population of youths (especially in the North) and without access to public health institutions, will amount to nothing. Therefore, the federal and state government should harmonize their policies in the area of job creation and social welfare. Rich private individuals from the North should also create employment opportunities in their communities by investing in agriculture and manufacturing. These would create employment opportunities and improve the quality of life. With more people gainfully employed, security threats will be reduced.

Balancing Political Power

The distribution of political power is an essential requirement in any genuine effort at balancing pluralistic pressures against the need for national unity. It has been repeatedly stressed in this book that the federal arrangement was adopted by the British colonial regime as a means of containing the ethnic diversities in Nigeria. But, the intrusion of the military resulted in the adoption of a lopsided unitary form of federalism. Under the unitary federal arrangement, political power became the preserve of the North, especially during the long years of military rule, so much that Sokoto state adopted the embarrassing and arrogant slogan of "Born to rule". States in the South have never hidden their dissatisfaction with the domination of political power by the North. Since 1960, the North has continued to literally intimidate the South. This has led to political and economic instability, as every move by the federal government is often viewed from the prism of the North-South dichotomy. Added to this is the fact that all military and security establishments are located in the North. These include the Nigeria Defence Academy, the Nigeria Air Force, the Nigeria Navy, the Police Training College, the Nigeria Army University, the Nigeria Military School, among others. Certainly, this has continued to generate feelings of marginalization because the concentration of these military establishments in the North is being viewed with apprehension by southern Nigerians who see it as a deliberate plan by the North to maintain the status quo of dominating the country at all cost.

Furthermore, all aspects of the security architecture have mostly been dominated by Northern Nigerian military officers. These include the Defence Ministers, Chiefs of Army Staff, Naval Staff, Air Staff, Inspectors-General of Police, Comptrollers-General of Customs, Immigration, and Prisons. In fact, between 2015 and 2023, the Buhari-led federal government brazenly and deliberately chose Northerners to head all but one of the arms of the military, namely, the Navy, contrary to the federal character principle. Also, the choicest federal ministries, such as those of Petroleum, Internal Affairs as well as most of the Group



Managing Directors (GMD) of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), have become virtually the birth-right of Northerners. Indeed, balancing political power has remained a problem in Nigeria. It has become emotive essentially because of the absence of any form of political philosophy among the country's leaders and policy-makers. When political power is centralized or concentrated at the federal level, the authorities and status of political leaders from outside the region and ethnic group of those dominating the centre may become threatened. Separatist agitations might erupt in violent forms. Both the rulers and the ruled are, therefore, at an edge.

In order to escape from this quagmire, the relevant sections of the 1999 constitution, especially those relating to the federal character principle in appointment into political offices, federal government ministries, departments, and agencies, the Armed Forces, et cetera, should be strictly adhered to. This will give Nigerians from all ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds a sense of belonging and a renewed commitment to the preservation of the Nigerian state. It will also greatly reduce the North-South dichotomy in national politics, a factor which has remained a major impediment to national integration, unity, and development.

Youth Development and Empowerment

In every culture, youthfulness personifies energy, hard work, talent, zeal, and commitment. These attributes are expected to be utilized to achieve positive success for the benefit of both individuals and the society. In Nigeria, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was a forerunner in the country's quest for independence from British colonial rule. Over the years, however, the fortunes of Nigerian youth have suffered terrible reverses, so much so that the reference to the youth as leaders of tomorrow elicits opprobrium and resentment among this group of Nigerians. The government has not feigned ignorance of the relevance of youths in nation-building and national integration. That was why the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme was instituted by the Yakubu Gowon regime in 1973 as a veritable tool for encouraging interactions between youths from different regional and ethnic backgrounds who have concluded their studies in the country's tertiary institutions. Such fresh graduates are expected to mandatorily serve the nation for a year, usually outside their ethnic homelands.

Furthermore, other youths-friendly programmes, such as the National Youth Policies (1981, 2001, 2009) were initiated to promote youth development and empowerment, protect their health, social, economic and political well-being, and ensure that they participate actively and contribute meaningfully to national development. In addition, several youth empowerment programmes have been initiated by various administrators in the country. These include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), as well as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). However, there is no gainsaying the fact that despite well-embellished slogans and procedural semantics about improving the lot of the Nigerian youth, not much has been achieved in concrete terms. This is due to a number of militating factors, such as political interferences in the implementation of the programmes, absence of clearly defined frameworks and guidelines, lack of continuity and policy somersaults, political instability, and macroeconomic dislocation¹⁴. These factors, to say the least, portend great danger for the future of the Nigerian state. It is, therefore, imperative for governments at all levels to address these challenges.

It is important here to attempt a definition of the two major concepts, namely, youth, and empowerment. There is no generally accepted and acceptable definition of who should be referred to as a youth. At the barest and most elementary level, a youth is someone who is young, vigorous and fresh; someone who is at a relatively early stage of development or existence; someone who is neither an adolescent nor an adult. Thus, it would exclude someone above a certain age bracket, that is, an adult. As a matter of fact, objective conditions and realities are often used by societies and nations to assign meanings to the concept. Legally speaking, in many jurisdictions, including Nigeria, a youth is someone who is up to 18 years of age. This is usually regarded as the age of responsibility, and a person of that age could be held accountable for any untoward behaviour and actions. In Nigeria, for instance, any citizen who has attained the age of 18 is constitutionally qualified, barring other factors, to participate in the election of candidates aspiring for political offices. For the purpose of this study, the definition given by the Draft Policy Document is accepted as the most relevant. According to that Document "...the youth comprises of [sic] all young persons of ages 18 to 35, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria".¹⁵



On its part, youth empowerment has to do with all programmes and activities which seek to create the enabling environment for youths to actualize their dreams and aspirations. According to Sulle Magaji and Auwal Adamu:

...youth empowerment is the process of availing the youth with the opportunities to realize their potentials, to know how to create choices in life, and to be aware of the implications of these choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of those actions. It also means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than on the direction of others.¹⁶

About 65% of Nigeria's estimated population of about 200 million is made up of youths. Managing such a huge majority of youths is a daunting challenge, one which Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria's President, acknowledged in his message to the 2015 Youth Day Celebration. In his words:

It is...an issue of serious concern that in Nigeria, so far, economic growth has not translated into commensurate and improved social outcomes, especially for our 60 million young people who made [sic] up the majority of the population. Consequently our youth migrate to other countries across borders in search of greener pastures.¹⁷

Adding his voice to the crises of the Nigerian youth, Emmanuel Nwobi has argued that:

The ideals of nationhood hang in the balance and our political ability to compete globally is seriously threatened. We have to stop rearing our population solely as workforce for the developed countries of the world or risk the dimming of our prospects of self realization.¹⁸

The implication of these two comments is the imperative of both the parents and governments to not only prepare the youths for tomorrow, but to also prepare tomorrow for the youths. This is a challenge that has to be faced, given the inescapable reality that youths constitute the engine of growth of every nation. In other words, youth development and empowerment is an essential ingredient for any meaningful development. Conversely, poor youth development stifles patriotism and could lead to insecurity. Governance and the protection and promotion of youth-friendly policies are, indeed closely linked. It is, thus, a truism that effective and equitable development is far more likely when youth-oriented policies and programmes are rigorously and genuinely promoted. It is, therefore, a matter of national responsibility to develop a sustainable framework for supporting youth development and empowerment programmes in the country. Unfortunately, successive governments have failed the youth, despite the many policy pronouncement, which were embellished with superlative expressions of commitment to the plight of the Nigerian youth. Yet, the youth remain the soul of the Nigerian state. Put differently, the pivotal role of nation-building and national integration, cannot be over-emphasized. But the governments (Federal, State, and Local Government) do not appear to have put in place the necessary mechanisms for youth empowerment, especially as envisaged in the 2001 and 2009 National Youth Policies. A number of factors, as earlier pointed out, are to blame for this failure.

In Nigeria today, it is common for older people to lament that young people are no longer like youths of the past. On their part, the youth resent any complaint that they no longer measure up to the moral and ethical standards of years gone by. Increased crime rates, as well as drug abuse and alcoholism, are more or less, expressions of the youth's frustration with a country which they believe has no future for them. Because of the increasing stress which the youth of today face in the country, many have allowed despair to lead them into risky undertakings and even suicide. Material possessions, unrestrained leisure and entertainment have become the major goals of many youths. They are the victims of a materialistic world who are being stabbed with economic, financial and emotional pains. At the same time, they reject the deteriorating moral standards exhibited by adults and recoil at the injustice and callous attitude of power-hungry politicians and businessmen. It is a combination of these and other factors that have made the youth to become restive. Poor examples of honesty by civil leaders do not inspire the youth to raise their own levels of ethics and standards.¹⁹ There are very few good role models in the upper echelons of political and religious society. Furthermore, youth often have an overriding need for love and a feeling of belonging. Because satisfying this is hard, some youths have come to see Nigeria as one where love is becoming an increasingly rare commodity and one which, at best, holds no future for them. Therefore, fear and



an uncaring society can quickly push vulnerable youths into extolling unconventional behaviours. It is, indeed, a challenge for governments and the society to adopt measures that would restore hope to Nigerian youths.

It is important for the Nigerian government to create a social security programme to enable the youth who, for no fault of theirs, cannot find gainful employment, to get financial assistance. Also, the relationship between good governance and youth development and empowerment should involve a strict adherence by the government, to the global civic ethic of ensuring a secure life for its citizens, equitable treatment, and an opportunity for every individual to earn a fair living and provide for their welfare. That way, the continuing chasm between the qualities of lives of rich and poor families would be contained. Also, the current state of things whereby many children in poor neighbourhoods in both the urban areas and in the rural communities graduate from street urchins to hardened criminal gang leaders, will be addressed. Education, undoubtedly, remains the best option to be adopted in protecting and preparing the youth against the vicissitudes of today's globalizing world where cultural values are being increasingly eroded by foreign influences. Admittedly, the target groups for such an educational enlightenment are diverse, such as youths in post-primary schools, those in tertiary institutions, those who are out of school, the unemployed and the unemployable youths, and others.

It is relatively easier to mobilize and sensitize those who are in schools than those who are unskilled workers, apprentices and touts, on the evils of drug addition and substance abuse, as well as on reproductive health issues, especially HIV/AIDs, and environmental management and protection. In addition, the interests and aspirations of female adolescent youths should be protected. This will serve to restore their dignity and motivate them to make meaningful contributions in the task of national development, especially those who have been victims of sexual harassment, physical violence and abuse, labour exploitation, gender discriminations, negative attitudes, and obnoxious cultural practices. Education and youth empowerment would keep the youth away from drugs and crimes, including electoral violence, internet fraud and unhealthy lifestyles. That way, will become better citizens and potential leaders of tomorrow, as it were.

Creating a National History, Culture, and Ideology

One of the important reasons for the adoption of federalism generally is the need to balance and contain the forces generated by diversity. This is exemplified by the situation in countries like the United States of America, India, and Canada, among others. As has been previously pointed out in this book, Nigeria has not yet succeeded in operating a true federal system of government where the component units are equal and where the centre is not entrusted with too much powers. Rather, the Nigerian brand of federalism is one where regional imbalance in both political representation and the attendant benefits or advantages have been nurtured and sustained through official government policies and programmes. It is also characterized by an over-concentration of power at the federal level, and by obvious implication, the dependence of the various states on the federal government for their economic survival.

However, there are lessons to be learnt from history in the search for national integration and development in Nigeria. As an academic discipline, History studies man in dynamic interaction with his environments in times past. Thus, it helps to look at the past and to appreciate its mistakes, successes, and failures. It also affords people the opportunity to know contemporary trends in human behaviour and social relations, and to project into the future with some degree of confidence. Not only is there a dialectical relationship between history, society and the state: every nation builds its future on its past.²⁰ Therefore, if it is true that history leads the wise man and drags the fool²¹, then those factors that have frustrated efforts at national integration should be scrutinized and analyzed through the periscope of history. Factors like ethnicity, corruption, political instability, and religious bigotry and intolerance, are all products of British colonial rule.

Prior to the advent of the British, the various peoples that make up modern Nigeria, had interacted in a variety of ways. States and empires were formed in places like Benin, Nupe, Borno, and Oyo. These expanded and incorporated peoples who were not ethnically homogenous with such states and empires. Rivers and creeks also facilitated inter-ethnic relations among pre-colonial Nigerians. The River Niger, River Benue and Cross River, among others, were very important in nurturing and fostering commerce and communication among and between those who derived their livelihood from the resources of these rivers. For instance, frequent commercial interactions between the Ijo, Igbo, Igala, and Nupe along the banks of the River Niger, engendered peace and trust among members of these ethnic groups. Apart from trade, there were



also inter-ethnic marriages and cultural adaptations, especially between ethnic groups that live in close proximity to each other. These sustained harmonious and peaceful coexistence. For instance, the Igbo communities of Ihechiowa, Ututu, Isu, and Arochukwu in present day Abia state, were at home with their Efik and Annang neighbours in present-day Cross River and Akwa Ibom states. Similarly, the Igala people of present-day Kogi state related and interacted with the Igbo people of Onitsha in present-day Anambra state. Also, the Nsukka people of Enugu state have a history of very intimate relationship with their Igala neighbours which predate British colonial rule²².

Since interactions between the peoples of modern Nigeria predated British colonial rule, and since Nigerians must live not just as neighbours but also as brothers and sisters, the study of Nigerian History should, of necessity, follow the advice of A.E. Afigbo that such a study should, in his words, give:

...more attention to the pre-colonial period of our history because this would teach the different nationalities that contact and interactions amongst them predated colonial conquest and rule, and thus that the Nigerian state is far from being "a mere geographical expression" coined only in the 20th century by the British²³.

This advice is in tandem with E.O Erim's position that "Modern Nigeria is an amalgam of the various pre-colonial states and civilizations which today constitute...Nigeria."²⁴ Also, in pre-colonial times, there were inter-regional migrations from the eastern to the western parts of present-day Nigeria,²⁵ and from the North to the South, though these were first and foremost a function of the opportunity structure and secondarily, a function of distance.²⁶ Unfortunately, the study of History as a subject and a course in Nigerian secondary and tertiary institutions has suffered unfold neglect in the hands of the country's leaders and policy-makers. As a rational discipline, History satisfies a need for identity²⁷, and when Nigerians recall how, in times past, they shared much in common and co-existed peacefully, fears and mutual suspicions will be minimized, for as has been asserted "Nigeria's past has been a heavy burden on all of us. A proper knowledge of that past is our only hope of emancipating ourselves from it".²⁸ Today, cleavages and aloofness have come to characterize inter-ethnic relations and Nigerians from different ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds no longer trust each other because they have no sense of shared historical identities. Thus, it has been argued that "It is a fact of our history that no attempt has really been made in the post-independence constitutional engineering to resolve... issues that have plagued the polity".²⁹

Finally, there is a compelling need for an articulated ideology: one that can provide the requisite framework for national cohesion. The political system in Nigeria has failed woefully in this regard. Political parties are formed without any discernible ideological bent. As earlier stated, what Nigerian political parties and politicians present to the electorate are merely vague statements of principles intended to achieve not any long-term national goals, but personal gains. In other words, there are no well-laid out plans by the political class to ensure economic prosperity and political stability in the country. There is, therefore, need for political ideologies which will provide the citizens the basis and opportunity to evaluate the right political parties and candidates to vote for during elections.

Addressing the Security Challenges

A security challenge means any act or situation which does not conform to normal organizational process in the society. It could also mean a breakdown of law and order in any given political system.³⁰ Security challenges do not exist in a vacuum: they are often caused by a variety of factors. These include failure of government to foster economic development and ensure social justice; environmental degradation; political marginalization; abuse of human rights, as well as the negation of the principles of the rule of law. Due to the failure of governments at all levels to create employment opportunities for the country's teeming youths, as well as pervasive corruption by the political class, poverty has continued to pose a challenge to security in Nigeria. Joblessness, economic dependence, inability to access the basic needs of life, are some of the indicators of poverty in Nigeria. Citizens who are subjected to poverty by their leaders naturally tend to become deviants to social control mechanisms. They become drug addicts, thieves, kidnappers and assassins and employ all manners of strategies to survive.

Injustice is another cause of insecurity in Nigeria when citizens are faced with real or imagined instances of injustice, they tend to resist it by means that are everything but legal and normal. When and where



there is injustice, it could serve to incite those citizens so affected, to join together to offer resistance. The case of militancy in the Niger Delta, as well as the activities of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), are all reactions of those Nigerians who have felt a poignant sense of injustice and frustration. Similarly, environmental degradation has resulted in the migration of some Nigerians from the Northern parts to the South where the climate is more favourable. Such movements have stretched the capacities of the governments to provide sufficient social amenities, especially in the urban areas. Clashes have often occurred between the migrants and their hosts over access to such amenities and facilities. The spiralling farmers/Fulani herder's conflict in Nigeria is a direct fallout of environment degradation. The Fulani, who are the world's largest nomads, have migrated in large numbers to the southern part of Nigeria not only from their northern Nigerian bases, but also from other parts of West Africa. Desertification in the western Sahel region and northern Nigeria, and other factors related to the global climate change, have resulted in Fulani cattle herders and local farmers in the south of Nigeria struggling for access to land and water. The struggle has led to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the country. The Fulani herdsmen in particular, are now well-armed and pugnacious, and have killed thousands of farmers across the length and breadth of North-Central, and Southern Nigeria, especially since 2015. The federal government has not shown sufficient political-will to tackle the problem which has become a very big threat to the nation's stability and unity.

Political marginalization is also a cause of security challenges in Nigeria. Politics has, since the return to democratic rule in 1999, become a zero-sum game where the winner takes all there is to be taken. The opposition parties and other election losers continue to heat up the polity through their utterances and actions. In the allocation of political offices, cronyism, nepotism, as well as ethnicity and religious considerations, have taken precedence over merit. Since 2015, for instance, the Muhammadu Buhari-led federal government has concentrated the control of the armed forces in the hands of Northern Nigeria Muslims. This is in addition, as earlier observed, to the fact that virtually all the country's military establishments and tertiary institutions are located in the North, especially in the North-East and North-West geopolitical zones. In order to deal with these and other triggers of security challenges, government at all levels, traditional rulers, politicians, religious leaders, civil society groups, as well as ordinary citizens, should be involved in adopting counter-measures to criminality, marginalization, and unemployment. Such measures would include job creation, civic education and public enlightenment, justice and fairness, among others. In other words, there should be some sort of security alliances and cooperation which would involve the security agencies, licensed vigilante groups, and political and traditional leaders. Through such measures, criminals under whatever guise could be easily identified, apprehended, and appropriately dealt with.

Most importantly, there should be enhanced collaborative networking among the country's security agencies. A situation where the military has come to usurp the statutory functions of the police in containing civil unrests or disturbances does not augur well for such collaborative networking. Information gathering and sharing is a necessary requirement in this regard. Also, the many threats to national security should be identified and the necessary frameworks put in place in order to stem their disruptive effects on the country. Furthermore, Nigeria has about 4,477 kilometers of land borders with contiguous countries, namely, Benin Republic, Cameroun, Chad, and Niger Republic. About 1,400 of these are illegal routes. Her citizens also share linguistic, cultural, and religious affinities with citizens of these neighbouring countries. As a result, controlling the movement of non-Nigerians who share borders with the country is a herculean task. This certainly has great security implications. Many of the bandits terrorizing Zamfara and Katsina states, for instance, are citizens of Niger Republic.

The country's porous land borders are also used for smuggling activities. Manning these borders, thus, needs a lot of collaboration between Nigeria's security agencies, including the Customs Service, the Immigration Service, and the indigenous peoples. The smuggling of contraband goods along the Seme border and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, for instance, could be contained if such a collaborative networking among security agencies is encouraged through motivating their staff and meting out appropriate punishments and sanctions to culprits. The staff strength of both the Immigration Service and the Customs should be boosted, and relevant and adequate training programmes should be initiated for the personnel. More control posts should be opened in order to monitor the borders effectively and check the activities of criminal elements from neighbouring countries who often cross the borders with ease.



Strengthening the Industrial Base and Enhancing Electricity Generation and Supply

Nigeria's industrial sector contributes only very marginally to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Yet, given its huge population, the country stands to gain immensely from sustained government – propelled efforts to strengthen the sector. In particular, the manufacturing sub-sector, if given the proper incentives, has the potential to join the global Fourth Industrial Revolution. This so-called 4IR or Industry 4.0 is driven by the application of digital and automated technologies. By strengthening the production processes and service delivery, the 4IR presents abundant opportunities for emerging markets like Nigeria. For that to happen, however, the country must first of all invest in new technologies and improve productivity by replacing human or manual labour with automated technologies, including robotics.

Similarly, both local and foreign investors, as well as the federal government, have to be committed to growing the country's mining sector. The country should leverage on its abundance of natural resources and huge population to become a key player in international economic relations. Although Nigeria's major export earner is crude oil, the country is also blessed with such other natural resources as tin, iron ore, uranium, tantalite, coal, gas, lead, gold, zinc, gypsum, bitumen, gemstones, limestone, kaolin and columbite, among others. But the mining industry, except for crude oil, has not been fully exploited. As a result, the country has been importing minerals like salt, kaolin, uranium and iron ore, which it can conveniently produce locally. Solid minerals, such as the ones mentioned here, constitute very important raw materials for the manufacturing sector. Some, like limestone and gypsum are used in the production of cement; coal is used to generate electricity; iron ore is important in iron and steel production; bitumen is used as an asphalt binder in road construction, while kaolin is used in paint production.

Nigeria's manufacturing sector was very vibrant in the 1960s and 1970s, and indeed up to the early 1980s. But it has witnessed a steady decline for some time now due to the country's harsh economic circumstances, especially since the time of Ibrahim Babangida as the Head-of-State. That regime's decision to adopt the World Bank-inspired Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) had deleterious effects on Nigeria's manufacturing sector. Corruption in high places combined with the application of SAP to kill, as it were, such manufacturing companies as the National Fertiliser Company at Onne, the Aluminum Smelting Company at Ikot Abasi, and the Newsprint Manufacturing Company at Oku Iboku. The textile industry is another important victim of the SAP policy. In the 1970s and 1980s, Nigeria's textile industry was the third largest in Africa and employed about 25% of the workers in the manufacturing sector.³¹ Tyre manufacturing companies like Dunlop and Michelin have also closed down their plants in Nigeria

The unfortunate fate of Nigeria's industrial sector can be blamed on inept political leadership, the injection of politics, ethnicity and nepotism into the management of the sector, as well as the adoption of hasty and unworkable policies by successive governments. For instance, while the federal government has committed maximum attention to the production and export of crude oil, it has not shown a similar commitment to wresting away the solid minerals sector from powerful individuals who mine them by circumventing extant laws regulating their activities. The dearth of the textile industry and the country's inability to fully utilize the opportunities offered to her by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to export textile materials to the United States has been blamed on Nigeria's hasty accession to the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. By the terms of that rule, Nigeria agreed to remove all protective barriers from her textile industry, among others.³² Thus, Nigeria's textile products could not withstand competition from imported textiles and smuggled cheap textiles. Many workers were therefore, retrenched as the textile mills began to fold up

Furthermore, Nigeria's industrial base has been affected by poor power supply which has, in turn, led to high costs of production and a reduction in the capacity of manufacturing industries. Nigeria has the unenviable reputation of being the world's second poorest in terms of electricity supply.³³ The country needs to supply at least 12,000 megawatts (mw) of electricity. Yet, it still finds it difficult to supply even half of that. Only about 55% of Nigerians are able to access the about 5,000 megawatts of electricity supplied by the various Distribution Companies (DISCOs). This is less than the required percentage.³⁴ In terms of electricity generation, the country has a capacity of about 8,300Mw. 16% of this is lost during transmission to distribution companies. Thus, only about 4,300Mw gets to these companies who have to supply them to an estimated population of about 200 million.³⁵ This appalling situation is due to many factors. These include



the privatization of electricity generation, transmission, and distribution, as well as consumers' attitudes, such as not paying for electricity consumed.

To overcome these challenges, measures should be put in place to diversify sources of electricity generation. These should include solar, coal wind, biomass/biofuel, and even nuclear. Also, the distribution infrastructure should be overhauled to minimize losses by the distribution companies. Therefore, there should be a synergy among the relevant agencies such as the National Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), the Ministry of Mines, the Nigerian Atomic Energy Agency, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Ministries of Petroleum Resources and Power, among others. The federal government should formulate and implement policies that would ensure a sustainable roadmap for electricity generation, transmission, and supply. Such a plan should ensure that moribund coal mines are reactivated and coal mining is revitalized. Also, new hydroelectric power plants should be diversified to include more in the South.

With enhanced electricity supply and generation, Nigeria's industrial base would be strengthened. This would in turn reduce the cost of production and therefore, favour local manufactures and industrial products. Then more people will patronize locally manufactured goods. Exports would also pick up, especially if seaports outside Lagos are opened up for business and modern railway lines extended to such other port cities as Calabar, Warri, and Port Harcourt. The River Niger should also be dredged upto Onitsha and a sea port established there to serve the people of the South-East geopolitical zone. Furthermore, Nigerian roads should be given adequate attention since most Nigerians travel by road.

Satisfying the Citizens' Basic Human and Material Needs

Chapter 11 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) in its section 16, sub-section 1, provides that:

The state shall, within the context and ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution:

- i. harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, a dynamic and self-reliant economy:
- ii. control the national economy in such a manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity.

In sub-section 2(d) of the same constitution, the Nigerian state pledges to commit its policy towards ensuring that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled, are provided for all citizens.

The government, unfortunately, has not honoured its statutory obligations to Nigerians in this regard. Greed, selfishness, corruption and outright wickedness on the part of the leaders, both military and civilian, have combined to make the fulfillment of these noble objectives practically impossible. The elite has callously breached these constitutional provisions. By so doing, they have also contributed to the pauperization of the citizenry and the underdevelopment of the country. In spite of Nigeria's abundant human and natural resources, the country is still one of the poorest in the world today. As has been pointed out in the preceding chapters of this book, Nigeria has well over 60% of her citizens living below the poverty line. Also, the country counts for about 23% of the global malaria burden. She also has one of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. In the area of public service delivery, such as the provision of social services-health care, pipe-borne water, education and electricity, housing, among many others, governments at all levels have continuously fallen short of the people's expectations. These are core services which every responsible government is expected to provide for its citizens. But bad governance has resulted in a deliberate denial of these social services to ordinary Nigerians. This is evidenced by the fact that increases in governments' revenues over the years have not led to any dramatic improvements in the growth of public services in Nigeria. As has been observed;

The provision of qualitative, reliable, accessible and affordable public services in a country are major indicators of the quality of life of the citizens of that country and is inextricably tied to the quality of governance. The positive effect of good health, education, water and electricity supply, good and decent



housing, good and reliable transportation system in enhancing productivity and general development of a country ... is underscored by the fact that these are being used as indicators in assessing the level of development and progress of countries in the world.³⁶

The country's political-economic system is characterized by a heinous and toxic imbalance between the various social groups. In essence, an unprogressive economy cannot sustain a stable democratic polity in much the same way that an unstable political system cannot nurture a progressive economy. Therefore, there is an urgent need to embark on a restructuring of domestic institutions to empower the majority of Nigerians to engage in development activities that are congruent with their needs. Also, the internal socio-economic inequalities have to be bridged if a sustainable democratic culture must be achieved. The elitist, dependent, and predatory political culture and the prevalence of an economic ideology that is ill-equipped to offer genuine solutions to problems of socio-economic inequality should be jettisoned and a more humane and realistic economic ideology adopted.

It is against this background that a new strategy of development – the Basic Needs Approach (BNA), is being suggested here as an alternative strategy for Nigeria's development. But what exactly is the BNA?³⁷ Put simply, it is concerned with defining and hoping to meet the basic human and material needs of the poor majority. It is both an analytical concept and a strategy of development which made its debut in the lexicon of development studies in the early 1970s. It reached its apogee with its acceptance in 1977 by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It, thus, entered the rhetoric of most aid and development agencies. As an organizing concept for development strategy, the BNA is concerned with the primary needs of communities and individuals. It does not, in other words, concentrate on Gross National Product (GNP) measures of growth. Rather, it studies possible strategies of economic development towards the goal of satisfying the basic needs of the population, such as food, shelter, clothing, provision of public services, and good governance, including the rule of law. The BNA does not only project present trends into the future, but also analyzes feasible alternative paths of development towards its goals. Furthermore, it is concerned with such non-material needs as self-determination, self-reliance, political freedom, security, a sense of purpose in life and work, among others.³⁸

Also, the emphasis of the BNA is the primary redistribution of income, assets, and power. This is because it views the separation of production and distribution as theoretically unsound and practically impossible. But if adopted and applied in Nigeria, it is most likely that those who may feel that their interests would be threatened, would argue that one is advocating communism. This is, of course, wrong because a variety of countries and political systems, including Israel, the former Yugoslavia, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, and Japan, have successfully adopted and implemented the BNA as their strategy of development. As is evidently clear, the current pattern of development in Nigeria does not adequately address the fundamental problems of self-reliant development, such as the ability of the nation to raise its social ability to achieve development without resort to the advanced countries for foreign aid, technical assistance, and investments. Thus, given the challenges of development in Nigeria, a measure of satisfaction of the citizens' basic needs seems, at least, as important as GNP index as a test of economic performance. In other words, a basic needs strategy would be consistent with self-sustained and more inward-looking patterns of development in the country.

It is almost axiomatic that socio-economic egalitarianism would contribute not only to social justice but to the overall economic growth and development of Nigeria. In this regard, the level of satisfaction of the basic needs should be measured simultaneously in per capita consumption of each basic good separately. That is to say, there should be no trade-offs between the types of consumption, as in the case where there is one number representing value output given by GNP or welfare function. This is because the method used in measuring output in an ideal economic model should literally study output as a vector of real goods rather than as a number or Naira sum of value of goods produced at market prices. It has to be also emphasized that the growth rates by which the desired objectives of the BNA are achieved include the implementation of an active policy to better distribute goods and services and to eliminate deficits in international trade.

Finally, if the average Nigerian is better fed, his family better housed and educated; if the citizens have access to adequate health care facilities and political participation in the country's political processes, the lure of money and corrupt tendencies, as well as the bastardization of the electoral process and thus compromising the quality of political leadership, could be avoided.³⁹ This is why it is imperative to adopt



the BNA because it will reduce the penchant for corruption, ethnicity, religious fanaticism, and the glorification of ill-gotten or fraudulently acquired wealth.

Upholding the Rule of Law and Protecting Human Rights

The rule of law is the legal principle which stipulates that regular law must be supreme to arbitrary powers; that is, that every citizen is subject to the ordinary (constitutional) law of the state. It is also known as the supremacy of the law, and envisages a scenario where two things are obtainable, namely: (a) that everyone respects the law; and (b) that the law has to be obeyed collectively and individually by both the citizens and the state. Impliedly, the rule of law means that not only will there be no exercise of arbitrary power, but also that the fundamental rights of citizens must be protected as provided for in Chapter IV of the 1999 constitution. The government's relationship with the citizens is also bound by the constitution, which is the supreme law of the land.

Therefore, the rule of law is the platform on which states and powerful individuals are restrained in the use of their power in their relations with the citizens. It, thus, sets the rules which guarantee the protection of human rights. In other words, there is a nexus between human rights and equality under the law, as well as fairness and accountability. Human rights can, therefore, only be protected where there is a strong adherence to the principles of the rule of law. The relationship between the two concepts is, indeed, intrinsic, as both seek to ensure the freedom of individuals to live in dignity. But as has been rightly said:

... the rule of law is not just what courts do, it also encompasses what every other public and private institution do. A country where there is rule of law is not just a country where the court decides disputes without official interference and citizens comply with the judgment of the court. It extends to how institutions of a state are structured and the written and unwritten rules that guide interactions between the states and its citizens and between how state institutions are observed and enforced; the rule of law permeates every facet of life of the citizenry and government.⁴⁰

Insecurity thrives where the rule of law is not respected. As the Nigerian case has vividly and amply demonstrated, non-adherence to the principles encapsulated in the concept of rule of law is an open invitation to anarchy. To curtail insecurity in Nigeria, therefore, the wanton and flagrant breaching of the provisions of the constitution by highly-placed citizens must be curtailed. Otherwise, the ethos of militancy and brigandage occasioned by decades of authoritarian military rule, may continue to threaten national security and by extension, economic and political development.

Similarly, human rights protection is an important component of good governance. Human rights refer to those rights which the international community recognizes as inherently due to every individual on account of his/her humanity, irrespective of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion. In other words, it has to do with those rights which human beings are naturally entitled to. They were previously referred to as natural rights, but became part of international law following the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and its adoption in 1976 consequent upon the two international conventions on human rights of 1966. These rights have been replicated by many United Nations member-states in their national constitutions and are now thus, referred to as "Fundamental Human Rights". Examples of such rights include the right to life; the right to fair hearing; the right to own property; freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment; freedom of expression; freedom of movement; freedom of association; freedom of thought, and so on and so forth.

In Nigeria, the many years of authoritarian military rule witnessed political repression and violation of human rights. On one hand, every military regime in the country started by first suspending the constitution, thereby effectively subjecting Nigerians to systematic human rights violations. On the other, by their training and orientation, members of the armed forces believe in what is referred to in popular usage as "obey before you complain". Thus, civil, political, and socio-cultural, as well as economic rights, were routinely abused. Military rule also resulted in economic ruination, characterized by a decline in public infrastructure and institutions. The situation under democratic government has not witnessed much serious improvements in the brazen abuse of human rights of the citizens. For instance, in late November 1999, barely a month after he was sworn as an elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo, ordered soldiers to invade Odi, a rural community in Bayelsa state. They were sent to avenge the alleged murder of twelve policemen by youths in the area. At the end of their operation, the soldiers razed down the community completely and killed dozens of civilians.



The Obasanjo government also ignored court orders severally, such as that of the Supreme Court in respect of the federal government's seizure of funds of local government areas of Lagos state.

The government of Muhammadu Buhari has followed in the footsteps of Obasanjo's in showing utter disregard and disdain to the judgments of Nigerian courts on issues between the federal government and Nigerian citizens. For instance, the federal government refused, until 2019, all calls to obey court orders to release the country's one-time National Security Adviser, Sambo Dasuki, who was detained in 2015. The same is true of Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, the leader of Nigeria's Shiite Muslims who was also detained in 2015. Other prominent Nigerians have sometimes also used their connections to circumvent diligent prosecution by the courts. Nigerian security forces are in the habit of arresting, torturing and extrajudicially killing suspects. In particular, the Nigeria Police, through its numerous units, such as the Joint Task Force (J.T.F.) in the North-East, and the Special Armed Robbery Squad (SARS) in the South, has been particularly accused of high-handedness and brutality in the treatment of ordinary citizens. This is in addition to extortion of money which has virtually become a culture among policemen and members of other security agencies. These are all clear manifestations of abuse of the human rights of Nigerians. The Boko Haram insurgents, Fulani herdsmen and common bandits are also involved in the violation of human rights in various parts of the country.

Since Nigeria has incorporated the human rights regime in its constitution, it is also only logical that the government should ensure, at all times, that the norms of human rights are respected in order to make them impact on the citizens. The country should submit herself to all international obligations to protect the rights of her citizens. These include both the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Like O.W. Igwe has argued:

Respect for human rights correspondingly attracts both domestic and international attention, creates hope and integrity in the system and provides the necessary environment for growth and development. It is in the respect for human rights that the essence of statehood is strongly expressed. Civilized states justify their existence by respecting and protecting human rights.⁴¹

In today's globalizing world where events and developments in one country are transmitted world-wide in a matter of minutes, it is imperative for Nigeria to straighten up her acts and ensure that the rights of her citizens are respected and protected at all times.

Electoral Justice and the Consolidation of Democracy

All elections in post-colonial Nigeria have been marked by violence and controversies. These are the obvious outcomes of the winner-takes-all approach to national politics. Part of the explanation for the culture of electoral violence is the political elite's exaggerated sense of incapability which is traceable to the British colonial policy of divide-and-rule. Another explanation is the role which earnings from exports of crude oil have come to play in the Nigeria economy, especially since 1970. Because there is so much money under the control of the central (federal) government, the nexus between political power and economic power has become too manifest. Also the struggle for control of the federal government has been accentuated by the many years of military rule which favoured the North vis-à-vis the South. Finally, both the 1979 and 1999 constitutions of Nigeria were modelled after the presidential system of the United States of America. These constitutions invest enormous powers on the president and also allocate the bulk of the national revenue to the federal government. Thus, whoever controls the federal government, ipso facto, determines who gets what, when, and how.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the struggle for control of the federal government has often been characterized by violence right from the 1959 elections. In fact, since the 1950s, political parties in the country have also assumed an ethnic cum regional rather than the national orientation and flavour.⁴³ For instance there were schisms within the political parties, as well as coalitions which eventually resulted in violence, especially in the former Western Region in 1965. This has continued. It is against this background that electoral justice is considered imperative in order to consolidate the ethos of democracy in the country. Defined as "A political culture that promotes lawful behaviour and civic respect for democratic norms".⁴⁴, electoral justice will help not only to ensure the stability of democracy in Nigeria by encouraging adherence to the legal framework provided in the Electoral Act of 2022, but also encourage political participation. It is unfortunate that many Nigerian voters have lost hope in the electoral system because of the riggings,



ballot box snatchings, monetary inducements, and the outright manipulation of votes to favour candidates who do not merit victory.

Both the 2015 and 2023 presidential elections for example, were marred by violence and controversies. A strict adherence to the provisions of the Electoral Act will go a long way in enthroning a new culture of politics in Nigeria. Similarly, courts entrusted with determining matters pertaining to elections should be composed of judges whose characters are impeccable. The rather common scenario of tribunal judges being compromised through financial inducements by desperate politicians does not augur well for the country's political development and international image perception. It also discourages political participation by the electorate, and by extension, emboldens individuals with questionable characters to hijack the political processes and create more problems for the country.

Visionary and Committed Political Leadership

It has to be admitted that leadership is one of the major challenges confronting Nigeria in her search for real national cohesion, stability, and development. To Chinua Achebe, therefore, leadership failure is the root cause of the trouble with Nigeria. In his words:

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 their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership.⁴⁵

Defined to mean "...the discipline of deliberately exerting special influence within a group to beneficial performance that fulfills the group's real needs",⁴⁶ leadership has to do with role performance, and good leadership is a sine qua non for national development. In particular, political leadership is about propelling a given political, entity towards achieving development in all its ramifications, be it economic, political, or any other known form of development. According to Howard Jetter:

[Political] leaders need not only make a difference ...they are the distinguishing factor among nations. And it is their actions, their vision, their commitment that determine whether their countries are rich or poor, at war or at peace, developing or decaying models to emulate or pariahs to be avoided.⁴⁷

The reality of the Nigerian situation is that its disparate ethnic groups were lumped together by the British colonial regime along with their intertwining and contradictory religious, socio-economic, and political interests which have combined to confine Nigeria to a state of anomie.⁴⁸ Today, the political aspirations of the aggregating ethnic nationalities domiciled in various parts of the country, have exacerbated ethnic and religious intolerance. Mutual distrust and suspicion; in-fighting over scarce resources, as well as religious bigotry occasioned by lack of respect for each other's religion and cultures, characterize the contemporary Nigerians state as an unstable environment which has continued to generate tensions in the polity. Such tensions, in their trail, have created fears as to the viability and continued existence of the country.

As a matter of fact, the economically developed and politically stable countries like the United States, Japan, Singapore, China, and Western European countries, are those that have selfless and visionary political leaders. Such leaders have shown a commitment to carrying their followers along rather than seeing them as people to dispense with once elections are over. According to Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's former Head-of-State:

Political intimidation, intolerance of opposing views, abuses of power, complete disdain for the voter as the ultimate umpire in any democratic process and assassination of political opponents are signals of the deteriorating political situations in most African states.⁴⁹

Instead of enthroning good governance that exhibits transparency and is committed to serving the people, political leadership in Nigeria, according to Niyi Osundare, appears to be "...Waging an undeclared war on



the country's resources and general welfare. And it is a war that is savage in its method and dehumanizing in its impact".⁵⁰

For Nigerian political leaders to rescue the country from its age-long governance quagmire and development logjam, they must embrace transformative leadership; one that can honestly and dispassionately harness the country's enormous natural resources and abundant human capital to propel national development and put the country in an enviable position among the comity of nations. Political leadership, after all, preeminently demands moral leadership⁵¹ and is generally associated with visionary and committed role performance. In other words, the leaders' most important role is that of vision, commitment, and guidance. A good political leader, therefore, must empathize with his followers, listen to them, and communicate with them compassionately. This is what transformative leadership entails. Thus, the transformed leader is he/she who is principled and focused; visionary and charismatic: honest, committed, and selfless.

Though it cannot be said to be a magic wand that would solve all of Nigeria's problems, a transformative political leadership will ensure that the primary functions of government (which is the satisfaction and protection of the interests of the citizens) is pursued with a tenacity of purpose. Government therefore, has to efficiently manage (and be seen to have managed) the resources of the state to promote the well-being of Nigerians. When that becomes the case, it will make it easier for political leaders to mobilize and guide the citizens who are naturally the catalysts of change and ensure a harmonious peaceful coexistence. To succeed, however, good leadership must be accompanied by good followership and responsible citizenship. This is because if the followership is docile, subservient, or indolent, the leaders will most likely become callous and tyrannical. But when the leaders are acutely conscious of the citizens' possible reactions to acts of injustice, oppression, and misrule, they are more likely going to exhibit tact and caution in their utterances and actions. It is, therefore, not enough to agitate for good political leadership: responsible citizenship (that is law abiding citizens who impact positively on the society) is equally important.

Conclusion

The challenges of statehood in Nigeria are not divine. Rather, they are man-made, and include the failure of governments at all levels to adhere to the provisions of the constitution. The military ruled Nigeria for decades and destroyed the country's social fabric, economic progress, and political stability. By the time the country returned to democratic rule (first in 1979 and again in 1999), the culture of impunity which the military introduced and thrived on, had become an acceptable standard of governance and even interpersonal relations. Since the ills plaguing the country are man-made, they are surmountable. What is needed is a total attitudinal change and a restructuring of the Nigerian polity. The idea of one section of the country insisting on dominating the federal government, the military, paramilitary agencies and such federal government-owned parastatals as the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the Customs Service and the Immigration Service, among others, is a reflection of the long-standing North-South dichotomy. Beginning from the 1950 All-Nigeria Constitutional Conference at Ibadan, and subsequent developments, including the issuing by Northern leaders of the Eight Point Programme in 1953, Northern Nigerian leaders (both civilian and military) have continued to insist on their part of the country controlling both the political system and the national economy.

The North-South dichotomy is, therefore, the biggest threat to national unity. It is made worse by the fact that Southern Nigeria is predominantly Christian while the North is predominantly Muslim. Thus, balancing political power has been difficult because of the lack of trust. For instance, the North houses the headquarters of virtually all the military and police establishments, including schools and military industrial complexes. While the fear of the military rulers' reaction somehow, subdued complaints against this preponderance of military establishments in the North by Southerners, the return to democratic rule since 1999 has brought the issue to the front-burner. That is also why there have been calls by well-meaning Nigerians to address the so-called "National Question" by convoking a national conference to specifically interrogate all the challenges of the Nigerian state and find mutually acceptable suggestions for a solution. In this regard, though a number of such conferences have been organized since the regime of Babangida, the 2014 National Conference represents the most ambitious and comprehensive of all of them. The implementation of its recommendations should no longer be politicized. Rather, it should be scrutinized and possible amendments made, where necessary. Most importantly, the report of that conference should form the fulcrum of a new constitution to replace the 1999 constitution, which like its 1979 predecessor, was drafted by senior military



officers and which has continued to exacerbate the North-South dichotomy and by extension, stifled national unity, political stability and development through many of its provisions, such as compromising the secularity of the country.

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