



Journal of Arts & Humanities

Political Leadership and Challenges of National Integration and Development in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

Concrete and genuine national integration and development have been elusive in Nigeria, which has been a thing of serious concern to scholars. The study interrogates why true integration and meaningful development have been elusive in the country? This constitutes the key problem of the study. The historical method of research and analysis was employed in the study as the paper under discussion covers the past, the present and likely implications on the future of the country. The major findings in the paper revealed various factors or challenges as been responsible for this abysmal state of affairs and which Nigerian political leaders have been battling with. The paper examines some of these challenges which among others include: the elusiveness of a national leader, corruption and mismanagement of material and human resources, lack of proper accountability on the part of Nigerian political leaders, the crushing economic depression which manifested in high cost of living, poverty, mass unemployment and dissatisfaction among the citizenry, problems of democratic consolidation, the Niger Delta environmental crisis, religious crisis and the recent Boko Haram scourge which had proved intractable for Nigerian government. The implication of the totality of all these factors has the effect of partly contributing to Nigeria perambulating at the same spot or even dancing backward rather than progressing, thereby making stability, true nation building, national integration and development elusive to the Nigerian nation. Recommendations proffered towards curbing the problems in the paper include: the need to learn from history, the need for improved electioneering culture, declaration of assets by political leaders

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to enhance accountability, respect for the secularity of Nigeria, creation of jobs and putting in place of people oriented programmes and the need for re-orientation of both leaders and followers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Political leadership, challenges, national integration, development, crisis.

Available Online: 31st March, 2015.

MIR Centre for Socio-Economic Research, USA.

1.0 Introduction

Nigeria is an heterogeneous nation which is a conglomeration of diverse ethnic groups that possess distinctive social beliefs and expressions, which some accounts have estimated at about 300. Nigeria came into being with the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates by Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard in 1914. In such a multi-ethno-cultural state like Nigeria, true nation building processes geared towards national integration, unity and development of the country should be given a primary concern by the political leaders in order to facilitate socio-political and economic development. The colonial rulers did not see this as their primary objective but rather the exploitation of Nigeria and her immense resources. They did not lay any sound base and foundation upon which the new state Nigeria could build upon. Rather than embarking on genuine efforts that could prepare the people to feel a higher loyalty transcending tribes and region, their policies fuelled tribalism. "Thus at independence, Nigeria was an uneasy federation of three regions characterized by ethnic chauvinism and cultural diversities" (Ohanbamu, 1996:278).

Be that as it may be, the political elites that arose after independence ought to have been genuinely committed to the tasks of truly welding the different groups together in order to achieve a smooth nation building process and enhance national integration and development in Nigeria; as it is not right to still be blaming the colonialist for the contemporary problems in Nigeria. But this has not been the case.

The above thus provides the background to this study. This is followed by a review of relevant literature, the methodology used for the research, discussion and analysis of the findings and the contribution of the paper in the literature and policy making which appears under the conclusion and recommendations section.

2.0 Literature review

Leadership according to Tannenbaum (1968) is the exercise of power or influence in social collectivities such as groups, organizations, communities, or nations. This power may be addressed to any or all of three very general and related functions: establishing the goals, purposes or objectives of the collectivity, creating the structures through which the purposes of the collectivity are fulfilled and maintaining or enhancing these structures.

This emphasis has the implications of exhibiting the functions of leadership as maintaining the integrity and viability of the collectivity against threat both internal and external, in maintaining collective order and unity, in minimizing dissension and conflict, and in motivating members (followers) and fostering their acceptance of the collectivity, of its goals and of leadership itself. This further implies that the political leaders must be able to carry along the followers in building the nation, thereby ensuring a responsive and responsible leadership which can only be achieved through a democratization of the political process (Akinbi, 1999a).

Weber (1961) throws more light on this point when he argued that the stability of social systems depends on acceptance by followers of the right of leaders to exercise control. He referred to this as legitimate authority. Schmidt (1968:282) corroborated this position when he submitted that: "The relationship of leadership arises only where a group follows an individual from free choice and not

under command or coercion and, secondly, not in response to blind drives but on positive and more or less rational grounds”.

It is clear from the foregoing that the colonial rulers and the military leaders fall short of the above requirements of Weber and Schmidt as they were neither elected by nor responsible or accountable to the followers. Even, the civilian leaders who came to office through dubious means, such as rigging of elections lacked the above prescriptions. No wonder that leadership within the context of Nigeria’s peculiar political economy could not perform the necessary leadership functions discussed above especially as regards engendering true nation building, integration, unity and development in Nigeria.

This standpoint was supported by Claude Ake when he observed that “the circumstances of our history have conspired to produce an elite which cannot function because it has no sense of identity or integrity and no confidence, does not know where it is coming from or where is going” (Cited in [Ihonvbere, 1989:50](#)). Adamolekun (1985) discussed some of the challenges under discussion, which led to the fall of the second republic in Nigeria, 1979-1983. However, this research is not limited to particular regime or republic in Nigeria but gives a survey of development in Nigeria right from independence in 1960 to the contemporary time.

Akinbi (1999a) also examined the topic of Political leadership and factors militating against nation building in Nigeria; but the work stopped at 1999. While the work has been very useful for the present study, this research is an extension of the former work. Bamikole (1995) analysed the fundamental human right violation of the military regimes especially the application of violence in the service of power under the Babangida administration. However, the present research covers not only military regimes in Nigeria but the civilian governments as well. Therefore, this study builds on earlier works already done in the field of political leadership and challenges of National integration and development in Nigeria.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed the historical method of research and analysis. This is due to the nature of the research which sought to unravel those challenges of the past and those of the contemporary (present) time that have impinged and are impinging on efforts geared towards achieving genuine national integration and development in Nigeria, which the political leaders have been battling with; and its implications on the future of the country.

The study is also descriptive in nature or style as it built on the findings of earlier works done in the field of political leadership and challenges of national integration and development in Nigeria; while Newspapers were relied upon for the contemporary developments in Nigeria.

4.0 Analysis and findings

This section covers analysis and findings on a host of challenges which confronted Nigerian political leaders in the task of national integration, unity and development of the country. These problems could be adduced as militating against nation building, true integration and concrete socio-political and economic development in Nigeria. They are discussed below:

4.01 Elusiveness of a national leader

By National leader, we mean a leader who commands respect and gains nationwide acceptance from the different ethnic groups and regions of the country. For instance, during the first republic, political parties emerged on ethnic platforms, prominent among which were the Nigeria Peoples Congress (NPC) headed by Sir Ahmadu Bello from the North, the Action Group (AG) headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo from the West and the National Council of Nigeria citizens (NCNC) headed by Dr. Nnamdi

Azikiwe from the East (Ajayi, 2012). The problems generated by the ethnically heated polity of the first republic were instrumental in bringing in the military into the political arena in 1966. Again, ethnicity reared its ugly head during the military dispensation and eventually plunged the nation into an avoidable civil war of three agonizing years (1967-1970), which led to mass destruction of lives and properties (Akinbi, 1999b). There was not much difference between the second republic and the first republic as political parties also emerged mainly along ethnic and regional lines. For instance, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) had large followers. In the North while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and Nigeria People's Party (NPP) drew large followers from the West and East of the country respectively (Adamolekun, 1985).

The truncated third republic was a bit better than the first two republics, perhaps due to the formation and imposition of two political parties on the nation (Akinbi, 1999a). For the first time in the history of the nation, a Presidential aspirant-Chief M.K.O. Abiola, was able to garner massive votes that cut across ethnic and religious borders. The Babangida administration did not allow this positive development to be given a trial as the results of the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections were brazenly annulled without any just cause despite the report of the International Observer Team describing the elections as free and fair.

The fourth republic appears better in this regard due to the preponderant nature of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that emerged as the ruling party. But it is germane to point out that the victory has been seen in some quarters as aspirious one, in view of allegations of rigging of elections that followed and the challenge of the victory in the courts. It is necessary to also state that the rejection of President Good luck Jonathan as President of the nation by some sections in the North lay at the root of the Boko Haram scourge presently plaguing the Nation.

4.02 Corruption and mismanagement of resources

Corruption of Nigerian political leaders and mismanagement of material and human resources had contributed to Nigeria's litany of Woes. The leadership had become incorrigibly corrupt as the concept of 'chop politics' was popularized to the detriment and stagnation of national development. For instance, there was the mismanagement of the money accrued from petroleum oil (petro-dollars), after the civil war. The deluded impression created by the leaders then was that Nigeria's problem was not how to get money but rather how to spend it. The leadership thus embarked on squandermania of public funds as evidenced in the Festac '77 Jamboree and Father Christmas display of wealth of donating money to poor countries in Africa, rather than investing such money into meaningful and viable projects. According to Nnoli (1989:263), "the impression was given the Nigeria was a big Spender, a diplomatic santaclaus, an Africa Yankee".

The situation was worse during the second republic as representatives of the government looted the state treasury with fat bank accounts in foreign land while extravagant spending continued unhindered.

The Babangida military dispensation did not fare better as the money set aside on the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project was wasted on frivolities, while the billions of dollars windfall from the sale of crude oil during the Gulf war of 1990-1991 was wasted. The late General Sanni Abacha, former Head of State was incorrigibly corrupt and took corruption to a height unsurpassed in the history of the nation, as it was revealed that he had N500 billion in foreign banks (Nigerian Tribune, July 6, 1998).

Moreover, it was also on record that Diepreye Alamiyeseigha, a former Bayelsa State Governor, had \$401, 931 forfeited in the United States which was proceeds of unjust enrichment while he was governor (The Punch, September 12, 2012:12). Also, former Delta State Governor, James Ibori was in 2012 sentenced to a five year jail term in the United Kingdom over the \$5m (N2.3bn) assets he unjustifiably possessed through stealing from the Delta State treasury (The Punch, September 10, 2012:73).

Furthermore, the N1.7tn short-changing of government during the fuel subsidy regime by some oil firms including Zenon oil & Gas limited being investigated in 2012 could not have been possible without collusion with some government functionaries. Also being investigated then was the case including Mr. Farouk Lawan, the suspended Chairman of House of Representatives Committees on Fuel Subsidy and Education and others, who are involved in a \$620, 000 bribery scandal as alleged by Chief Michael Otedolain the bid of covering up the involvement of his firm-Zenon Oil and Gas Limited, in the fuel subsidy scam *The Punch* (July 24, 2012:2). Also the allegation by former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor, Charles Soludo that about N30 trillion is either missing from the treasury or unaccounted for, under the current government of President Good luck Jonathan, is yet to be investigated.

The mismanagement of human resources by Nigerian political leaders also deserves some elucidation. Brain drain has reached an alarming proportion in Nigeria, consequent upon the degrading condition under which Nigerians work and the stipends they earned as emoluments. This has made Nigerian experts in various fields including professors, medical experts, and engineers etc. to search for greener pastures abroad where they could develop themselves to the maximum and enjoy a better living. (Akinbi, 2014). Lackadaisical attitudes have also been exhibited by the leaders towards the future development of the nation in terms of human resources as buttressed by the fact that many libraries, laboratories and teaching hospitals in the ivory tower are devoid of the necessary books, equipment and other materials with which to work. This portends grave implications on the future of the country.

4.03 Lack of proper accountability

Closely related to the above problem of corruption and mismanagement of resources, is lack of proper accountability on the part of Nigerian political leaders. This problem was worse under the military regime, as the military leaders are not elected by the people but assume power through force, they are not accountable to the people. They are often being regarded as 'sacred cows' that cannot be touched, no matter the degree of atrocities they perpetrated while in office.

Even the civilian leaders that are elected by the people, lack proper accountability to the latter. Many of the leaders had refused to declare their assets while in office, which had encouraged them to be entangled in corruption cases. What comes out of the budgets that the government prepared and implemented annually is not known to the citizenry; while the heavy government spending that are broadcasted yearly did not positively reflect in improved standards of living of the masses. Up till now, Nigerians are still 'kept in the dark' as to how the recovered Abacha's loot had been judiciously expended to facilitate development and improve the lot of the suffering masses (Akinbi & Olupayimo, 2011).

4.04 Economic challenges

Crushing economic depression which manifested in high cost of living, poverty, mass unemployment and dissatisfaction among the citizenry and Nigeria's huge external debts was another challenge that confronts Nigerian leaders. Cost of living is very high in the nation; no wonder that the government workers always agitated for increase in their salaries and allowances, which the government had not seriously attended to. Many graduates from the nation's tertiary institutions are jobless, perambulating the streets of Nigeria searching for jobs that are not there. Moreso, majority of the people are in the state of abject penury and mass dissatisfaction and could not see any dividends of democracy accrued to them. The fact that Nigeria, the most corrupt country in Africa is bedeviled by foreign debt amounting in 2003 to about 30 billion dollars (despite the fact that 300 Nigerians own 30 billion dollars in European and North American banks), is a pointer to the level of poverty and economic deprivations, the citizens of the country faced, as huge chunk of annual budgets have to be dedicated to debt servicing, instead of the provision of basic goods and services that will improve the people's welfare (Okoosi-Simbine, 2005) and (Akinbi & Olupayimo, 2011). Despite the debt forgiveness Nigeria enjoyed from the international financial institutions, during the Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian regime,

marked improvement in the standard of living of the people is yet to be seen (Akinbi & Olupayimo, 2011).

4.05 Problems of democratic consolidation

There is no gainsaying in the fact that responsive and responsible leadership can only be attained through the democratization of the political process; moreso, that military rule has become an aberration in world politics. Out of Nigeria's almost fifty five years of independence, Nigeria has been ruled by the military for about twenty nine years. Thus the military has a better opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the progress, development and stability of the nation, more than the civilian elite. But it is disappointing to observe that the military regimes perpetrated worst evils than their civilian counterparts, doing mostly what they claimed was responsible for the civilian governments they displaced through forcefully seizing power through military coups. Thus the military regime could not be accountable to the people as it was an imposition. Fundamental human rights and freedom of the press are often trampled upon under the military; while the latter also made use of the forces of repression and suppression at its disposal any time, to deal with people, opposition groups and institutions that pose threat to the existence of the government (Bamikole, 1995). Thus the assertion of the military as being a corrective regime is an illusion or mirage.

The military has not been committed to the task of smoothly transferring powers to the civilian regimes as could be buttressed by the activities of General Gowon who reneged on his promise to transfer power to civilian regime, claiming that the earlier fixed date was not realistic. General Babangida also expended about N40 billion on an unsuccessful transition to civil rule programmes, while he also brazenly annulled the results of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections for no just cause (Akinbi, 2003). Only General Obasanjo (in 1979) and Abdusalami Abubakar (in 1999) had good records of handing over power to civilian regimes.

Problem of election rigging is part of the problems of democratic consolidation in the country. Democracy could only survive where there are free and fair elections, the absence of which, will produce contradictions in the society. For instance, there are records of election rigging and other acts of electoral malpractices in the guber national elections of Edo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti among others, which led to the challenge of the elections in the courts of the land and which eventually led to the emergence of governors like Adams Oshiomhole (Edo State), Rauf Aregbesola (Osun State) Segun Mimiko (Ondo State) and Kayode Fayemi (Ekiti State).

Moreso, for democracy to be consolidated in the country, the masses should be made to enjoy the dividends of democracy. Dividends of democracy according to (Omotola, 2007:258) would include but (not limited to) "rising legitimacy of the state, improved standard of living for the majority of the populace, improved climate of human rights in all its ramifications; all culminating in popular empowerment, participation and enhanced atmosphere of peace and stability". Contemporary observers of the nation's political development will agree that these basic conditions are conspicuously absent in the Nigerian polity

4.06 Niger delta environmental crisis

This is another challenge militating against National integration, unity and development of the country that confronts Nigerian political leaders. The Niger Delta region had been infested with a lot of crises or problems which demanded urgent solutions and which have threatened not only the security or safety of lives and properties of the people living within the region but also constitute social and security problems for the entire nation, and which the federal government finds difficult to manage (Akinbi (2012). The constant environmental disarticulation occasioned by oil and gas exploration and production and the seeming indifference of the government and the oil companies to the plights of the indigenes of the oil enclave constitute the bone of contention or the main source of the conflict (Akinbi (2012). The nature and pattern of the reactions of the people of the Niger Delta to the above scenario

manifested in three basic forms. These are: vandalisation of oil installations, sealing of production sites, hostage taking and demand for ransom (Akinbi, 2012).

4.07 Religious crisis

Religious violence had crept into the country and seems to have been recurring almost yearly (Ogunwole, 2008). The mostly affected part of the country is the Northern region of the country, while the attacks have been mainly targeted against the Christians and churches of the North by the Northern Muslims who are violence prone. The Newspapers are replete with instances of religious violence in the North. Many innocent Christians have been killed, churches burnt down and properties destroyed. The major cause of the crisis is religious intolerance and fanaticism.

4.08 Boko Haram scourge

The Boko Haram group is Nigeria's militant Islamist group associated with waves of bombing, assassination and other insurgent acts especially in the Northern part of Nigeria. Boko Haram has waged a relentless battle against the federal government with attacks on government security agencies, public institutions and churches among others, especially in the Northern part of the country. Abimbola & Adesote (2012). The sect has accounted for no fewer than 700 killings in 2012 alone. Its targets that were attacked in 2011 included the Police headquarters building and the United Nations office complex in Abuja, where over 45 persons were killed. The Punch (September 24, 2012:2). Also over 200 girls were kidnapped by the sect from the Federal Government Girls College, Chibok in 2014.

It is pertinent to note that all the efforts made by the government to curtail the activities of the dreaded Boko Haram sect had not yielded any noticeable positive result in light of wave of bombings that appears almost daily in the North Eastern part of the country. For instance, The Nigerian Tribune (25.02.2015) recently reported of 26 persons killed, 36 injured as explosions by suicide bombers rocked Potiskum and Kano motor parks in the North.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

This section entails the concluding remarks made on this paper which come under the conclusion and the recommendations proffered under the way forward.

5.01 Conclusion

The paper has examined the multifarious challenges which confronted Nigerian Political Leaders in the task of achieving national integration and development of the country. These problems had been responsible for stagnating or slowing down the pace of development of the nation and acted as the "centrifugal forces" working against the genuine integration of Nigeria. Viable recommendations are proffered at the end, as way out of this imbroglio. The policy implications of the findings especially if the recommendations are adhered to, shall manifest in engendering genuine national integration and development in Nigeria, while the country would continue to perambulate at the same spot, if the recommendations are jettisoned.

5.02 The way forward

The following recommendations are proffered geared towards curbing the leadership problems identified above:

First, there is the need to learn from History. It is high time we learnt from our past mistakes and March forward. "Not until we see History as a bridge between what was (the past), what is (the present), and

what should be (the future), true stability, progress and development will continue to elude the Nigerian nation, while genuine nation building will remain an illusion or a mirage” (Akinbi, 1999a:9).

Also, there is the urgent need for an improved electioneering culture in Nigeria. Leadership should not be imposed or manipulated upon the people. Only popular leaders that are given such mandate by the electorates should be allowed to hold political/public offices. Adhering to this will go along way in contributing to democratic consolidation in the country. Thus ethnic sentiments, sycophancy, bribery, rigging of elections and vandalism should be jettisoned to enhance fairness in elections which can only be attained through determination of contestants as well as the people to obey the rules of right behavior in elections. This call becomes imperative especially as the country is currently preparing for presidential, gubernatorial and other elections. The elections have been slated for March 28 and April 11, 2015 respectively.

Furthermore, in order to arrest the rising wave of corruption in Nigeria and enhance accountability, political leaders should sincerely respond to the call to declare their assets publicly. Through this, ill-gotten wealth and assets could be discovered at the end of their tenure. The press should also expose whatever such leaders may want to hide, while all past and present leaders who have stolen money from the government should be made to face the full rigours of the law to serve as deterrent to others; while their properties should be confiscated by government for public use.

There is need for the government at both federal and state levels to embark on poverty alleviation programmes and provide employment opportunities for the people. This will go a long way in instilling a sense of belonging in the teeming unemployed youths in the country and deterring such from joining armed robbery gangs, ethnic militias and other retrogressive forces in the nation. Skills acquisition training centres should also be built by the government; while the unemployed should be receiving some stipends from the government.

Respect for the secularity of Nigeria as entrenched in the constitution must be upheld both by the government and the citizenry; while culprits of religious violence should be severely dealt with, by the government to serve as deterrent to others.

There should be a call to the President of Nigeria to be courageous enough to effectively address the insecurity in the nation, failure of which, he should resign, in the face of the ruthless killing of innocent Nigerians almost daily in the country. One of the major functions of the government is to protect the lives of its citizens. Rather than dialogue with Boko Haram leaders, as is being proposed in some quarters, the government should forcefully wipe out the disintegrative forces, to put an end to further shedding of innocent blood, if they fail to heed to an awareness campaigns against acts of terror being perpetrated under the cloak of religion, which should be spearheaded by Imams and other Muslim clerics.

Finally, according to Akinbi:

There must be a re-orientation of both leaders and followers in Nigeria. Leaders must not only be willing to lead, they must be prepared to serve, give initiative and exemplary leadership and motivate the citizenry collectively to greater heights. While followers must not only give unalloyed loyalty and support to leaders but must also see the task of nation building as a collective one. Thus emphasizing the display of high sense of patriotism on the part of both leaders and followers, in order to move the nation forward. (Akinbi, 1999a:11).

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