

## **TOWARDS NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY: MANDATE FOR VISIONARY LEADERSHIP**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria at this critical stage of its national development faces enormous challenges, a salient one of which is the frantic search for national integration. Fanatical ethnic consciousness, loyalty, manipulations and struggles for political power remain significant factors in the intractable challenge of national integration in Nigeria. After fifty-four years of political freedom and a centennial of union as a country, Nigeria cannot and must not heap the whole blame of her inability to forge a truly united nation on the colonial administrators. All the efforts made so far by the successive Nigerian government have yielded little or no desired results in ensuring national integration. Nigeria needs a visionary leadership with a big dream for one Nigerian society. The paper thus recommended credible election leading to the emergence of a truly national leader, creation of appealing national image thereby that will render the image of separatist, ethnic group or loyalty unattractive. There is a greater need for more commitment to national project of integration from

all and sundry, especially on the part of the elite who manipulate tribalism for their own political advantages.

**Key words:** Leadership, National Integration, Nigeria, 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Introduction

January 1, 2014 marked the centenary history of Nigeria. During these past hundred years, the country has had its struggles and challenges of growth and development, which have revolved around the search for national integration and governance among others. Nigeria as an amalgam of different micro-nations is divided along ethnic, cultural, political and religious lines thus laying a weak foundation for national integration. The problem of unhealthy ethnic and sectional rivalry with its attendant threats to sustainable integration and security started a long time ago. Anyanwu (1999) and Kur (2012) pointed out that it started immediately after the amalgamation in 1914. The three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) at different times viewed the amalgamation as a forced one that is incapable of achieving the desired unity. The British colonialists and Nigerian elites that succeeded them used ethnicity to perfect their political strategies and notch up some socio-economic and political gains.

The phenomenal wind of disintegration in Nigeria is no doubt almost irresistible. Recent events in Nigeria reveal beyond doubt that the threats of disintegration are staring us in the face. Across the length and breadth of Nigeria, there are serious disturbances which are seriously affecting economic fortunes of the country adversely (Ajayi, 2013). It is interesting to note that the existence of ethnic groups or cultural diversity is a global phenomenon. That is, it is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. In other words, ethnic diversity is a feature of most celebrated countries of the world including United States of America. Contrariwise, after fifty four years of national political independence and a centennial of marriage as a country, the British colonial administrators should not be blamed for the woes of the post-colonial dispensations especially challenges of national integration and development. Conversely, Nigerians should rise up and confront internal contradictions and forces militating against their corporate

existence and build a united, peaceful and democratic nation.

Struggle for political power remains a significant factor in the intractable challenge of national integration in Nigeria. The crux of integration and development challenges in Nigeria lies in good leadership and governance. Nigeria leadership have paid more lip service to the quest for national integration in our enterprise in nation building. History and unfolding events in Nigeria reveal poor governance, endemic political corruption, selfishness and hunger for political power, wide gap between the rich and the poor, massive youth unemployment, abject poverty to mention but a few (Albert, 2011).

### Conceptual Framework

#### National Integration

The term national integration is now widely used to cover a wide range of political phenomena. National integration is used to refer to specific problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality which eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. In this sense, it is generally presumed that there exists an ethnically plural society in which each group is characterised by its own language or other self-conscious cultural qualities. Thus, integration is used to refer to the tensions and discontinuities on the horizontal plane in the process of creating a homogeneous progressive reduction of cultural and regional territorial political community (Bamisaiye, 2003).

Sanda (1999) defined national integration as the collective orientation of members of a society towards the nation and its society in such a way that micro-loyalties are not allowed to jeopardise the continued existence of the nation and its objectives, goals and ideals. National integration is feeling of oneness which is not imposed by any authority. Feelings and actions in this regard come from within. The purpose of national integration is to build a united and strong nation. National integration is the awareness of a common identity among the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different races, religions and speak different languages, we recognise the fact that we are all one. It means unifying all the forces in the country so as to give the idea of one nation.

### Visionary Leadership

Leadership is open ended. Visionary leadership is thus a sub-set of the broad concept of leadership. Leadership is an essential element and ingredient of effective management. To start a journey of self-sustained development in any endeavour of human life, whether in groups, organisations or nations, correct, charismatic and visionary leaders are envisaged and required. The great nations of the world assumed their positions of greatness mainly because they have effective leadership that can maintain, support and liberate their followers from the shackles of unnecessary domination, indolence, poverty and other social ills that artificially bedevil a society (Salauwa, 2002). Kolade (2012) a leading advocate and exemplar of corporate governance in Nigeria, explained that leadership is behaviour and performance not just position. Position may confer authority but performance and behaviour earn respect and help to release rather than control the energy of others. Leadership must be qualified and its purpose identified. Ayobolu (2014) submitted that leadership unveils a clear vision to give direction to corporate goals, devices strategies for achieving them, mobilizes, manages the dynamics involved in the process of change, engages in problem-solving and ensures continuity or sustainability through a succession plan. He summed up the character of leadership that Nigeria needs as follows: strong, competent, visionary with character and integrity.

Monroe (2010) conceived leadership as vision driven and follower centred. She believed leaders must always start at the "heart of the matter" and that the job of a good leader is to articulate a vision that others are inspired to follow. Olukoju (2014) submitted that successful leadership is associated with vision – a future that one hopes to create or achieve in order to improve upon the present state of affairs. The term visionary leadership describes a leader who brings to the situation a clear and compelling sense of the future, as well as understanding of the actions needed to get there successfully. But simply having the vision of a desirable future is not enough. Truly great leaders are extra ordinarily good at turning their visions into accomplishments. This means being good at communicating the visions and getting people motivated and inspired to pursue the visions (Monroe, 2010). The leadership terrain especially in post-

independence Nigeria and many of the African countries has been a barren landscape (Hardball, 2012; Obayuwana, 2011). There has been no articulated vision of leadership and good governance beyond mere sloganeering. Yet, a nation's values and visions-articulated and personified by the leadership-drive its developmental activities (Jegede, 2013). An accompaniment of leadership failure in Nigeria is mediocrity and the rise of the personality cult, symbolised by "political fatherism" syndrome. It is clear from the foregoing that Nigerian leaders can not escape blame for much of the challenges of national integration and of course national development in the post-independence era.

#### Re-examination of Recipes for National Integration in Nigeria

Realising the great potentials of our diversity to make or mar our collective aspiration as a nation, successive administrations have devised various mechanisms in managing its emerging challenges. Ifeanacho and Nwagwu (2009) observed that, Nigeria's efforts aimed at achieving national integration have remained largely unrealised. They are:

i. Adoption of Federal System of Government

Since 1954, the colonial administration in Nigeria introduced federalism as an integrative mechanism. There is a consensus among scholars of inter-ethnic relations that there is a positive correlation between pluralism and federal system of government. They believed that it is capable of not only achieving, but maintain stability because of some elements of liberties, socially and constitutionally granted to the component units even when the citizens have to look up to the centre. Jekayinfa (2012) attested to this when she noted that federalism is the most convenient system for the multi-ethnic Nigerian community. However, Nigerian federalism is doted with imbalances both in term of structures and processes. For example, it empowers the Northern part electorally and demographically over the Eastern and Western parts put together. This inequality has led to dissatisfaction in governance, betrayal of trust and suspicion among the ethnic groups. This is against the warning of Akinrinde (2012) that any multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria, that erected its

political edifice on arrangement that devoid of equity will not survive.

ii. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme meant to instill sense of patriotism, arouse national consciousness, wipe-off ethnic loyalty and religious bigotry is no longer a laudable and relevant scheme geared towards national integration. Gwanmo and Amanago (2012) observed that the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, one of the government's initiatives for national and cultural understanding is being threatened by frequent ethno-religious crises. Parents and guidance alike now take keen interest and joy in their wards serving within the confines of their ethnic origin. They are trying to avoid a situation where their children will be slaughtered in a cold blood at the expense of national integration and loyalty.

iii. States Creation

The logic of continued state creation in Nigeria purportedly to bring government closer to the people and achieve national development is a failed strategy. The continuous balkanisation of Nigeria into smaller, weaker and unviable units will multiply the existing problems of ethnic minority, issue of lack of development, endemic corruption and adversely affect the overall integration and unity of the country. Adeniyi (2011) affirmed that state creation in Nigeria remains entirely an elite's affair. It is an enterprise controlled, prosecuted and employed by the elite for the satisfaction of their desire for power and political relevance. Since 1963, states creation has not been a basis for resolving the national questions and the attendant problem of mass alienation from the political and economic processes of Nigeria (Emeka, 2012).

iv. Federal Character Principle

The intent and purpose of Federal Character Principle in Nigeria is a laudable one. However, the application and operation of the principle tends to differentiate rather than integrating and

unifying Nigeria. Olugbemi (1987) and Suberu (2004) were of the opinion that the Federal Character Principle as defined and pursued by the 1979 and 1999 constitution can not succeed in integrating and uniting the people because it is an ideology of the minority ruling class aimed at protecting their interests. Awa (1972) and Gboyega (1989) confirmed that it is merely an elite ploy, which will not materially improve the lot of the down trodden in whose name it is raised.

v. National Symbols and Nigerian Constitution

The National symbols especially the National Anthem and Pledge whose recitations are made compulsory in schools, at private and public occasions have no meaning beyond the confines of the political elite who enjoy the goodies of the government. The recitation is equally not impactful on nationalistic feelings and consciousness of the students. In the same token, the constitution as a body of laws uniting the country is nothing but a document in which those who are expected to form part of those who are to make it are excluded. The exclusion of the cross sections of the population from the making of the constitution coupled with high level of illiteracy are great minus for using constitution as a unifying mechanism in Nigeria.

### Visionary Leadership: A Sine-qua-non for National Integration in Nigeria

The crux of integration and development challenges in Nigeria is put at the door step of poor governance. Achebe (1983) Nigeria's master of prose put it very graphically in his book "The Trouble with Nigeria". He asserted "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with Nigerian land but inability of its leadership to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership".

Ukaegbu (2010) noted that profound society changes require extra-ordinary leadership exemplified in transformational policies and actions. This philosophy of leadership relegates embezzlement of public revenue, mismanagement of public resources and other forms of corruption by indigeneous and international actors, the managing

of national affairs and brings transparency and accountability to the fore. This is the history of development left by transformational leaders in many countries of the world. Adamolekun (2002) attested that the leaders of the success stories in Chile, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan etc all demonstrated strong commitment to development, with clarity of visions and of goals.

Lai (1995) observed that Nigeria is too promising a nation to be allowed to disintegrate. Against the background of the enormity of her human and material resources and given a government that is stable, purposeful and upright, Nigeria can in no distant future, rank among the world superpowers. This is why posterity will not forgive anybody or group of people, who, by error of commission or omission should allow Nigeria to fall apart.

Impact of corruption on the political and socio-cultural integration processes is unmeasurable. Corruption in Nigeria can be curbed by good governance. Singapore was turned into a buoyant economy, mainly due to the fight against corruption. Lee Kuan Yew and the People's Action Party came into power through election. From the beginning, People's Action Party set out to have a clean administration, and it used its power and position to progressively tighten up the laws relating to graft and to give added muscle to the official agencies set up to deal with corruption. It has never let up in this campaign and the country's leader had wisdom to apply the rules indiscriminately (i.e. to themselves as well as others) and in a public manner. This government practices what it preaches, and while some have criticised it for being too straight-laced and controlling, even the critics admit it is clean (Quah, 1989).

The key success factor in Singapore anti-corruption effort is the setting up of an independent and strong anti-corruption agency. In addition, political will is a key ingredient in the transformation effort from Singapore's corruption infested past. Ikubaje (2004) remarked that the war against corruption is being lost in many countries including Nigeria because of lack of strong political will and commitment to fight corruption. Lee (1998) attested that without the unwavering determination to overcome corruption system, no anti-corruption strategy will work. Such action demonstrated to the public the determination of the government to keep Singapore clean. And

this has won public support in the on-going fight against corruption. With the efforts put in and public support over the years, corruption was brought under control. Singapore is what it is today because of its system of transparency and integrity.

Visionary leadership has a vital role to play in the citizens development and internalisation of core values enshrined in the National Anthem and Pledge which are capable of enhancing national integration not only in Nigeria but the world over. Ajere and Oyinloye (2011) noted that in every society across the globe, core values are attached prime priorities as social ingredients for social transformation, peace, unity, stability, growth and development. These values are in most cases enshrined in the National Pledge and Anthem of various countries of the world for citizens to internalise for inner transformation. In Nigeria for instance, values such as faithfulness, loyalty, honesty and patriotism are topical in her classical national documents for the citizens to absorb into their body system. Onipe (2011) affirmed that lack of national consciousness, patriotic orientation and manifestation of uncivilised acts had painfully led to social disorder and disorientation in Nigerian society. Poor governance is wholly responsible for this. Apparently, Rock (2010) reported that negative attitudes could be changed to positive irrespective of the period of assimilation and internalisation.

The sense of national integration should stem from within the hearts of Nigerians. Historically, national integration was strengthened when our country fought a united struggle for political freedom in 1960. In our struggle for freedom people from different ethnic communities participated, keeping one thing in mind that they are all Nigerians. This reveals that emotional integration is the basic foundation on which the main structure of national integration can be erected. Radhakrishnan (2012) corroborated that national integration can not be built by brick and mortar; it can not be built by chisel and hammer. It has to grow silently in the minds and hearts of men. We need today in Nigeria, legitimate and truly national leaders that can synthesis the power of the minds and hearts that can give rise to a vision of one Nigeria. We can not afford to be parochial, narrow minded, provincial and communal because we have a great mission to accomplish. Political integration has already taken place

but emotional integration is a must for national integration.

National integration in Nigerian context has been an attempt to forge “unity in diversity” and aggressive attempt to ignore, if not dissolve historical differences. The more such projects were pursued, the more acute the contradictions become, the more conflicts erupted, and the more problems were created which posed obstacles to peaceful co-existence. The best possible approach of the government to begin to address threats to national integration is to recognise that unity does not mean uniformity and that understanding, respecting and tolerating of differences occasioned by socio-cultural diversity, is by far better than strenuously striving to wish them away. Jega (2002) observed that a complex, plural colonially created ‘nation state’ such as Nigeria can only survive and flourish in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the basis of tolerance and accommodation of socio-cultural differences rather than on a narrow-minded pursuit of exclusivist and parochial interests.

The stacking reality of poverty and unemployment coupled with the wide gap between the poverty stricken majority and the few extremely rich in Nigeria are threats to peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Emelonye & Bourgenthal (2011) remarked that poverty and in-effective governance in Nigeria have further sharpened ethnic divisions leading to misunderstanding between ethnic and religious groups who see themselves as rivals that must be surpassed by all means, thus hampering national integration and unity. Job creation, social security and poverty alleviation programmes should therefore form the nucleus of transformation agenda of Nigerian government in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Conclusion

Although Nigeria gained political freedom in 1960, she had never been lucky to produce a national leader capable of steering the ship of the country in a way that it could metamorphose into a strong and united nation. Rather than Nigeria having produced any national leader, it has only produced mere ethnic leaders. This explains the reason why after fifty four years of Nigeria’s independence, we can not and must no longer heap blames of inability of the country to forge a truly united nations on the colonial administrators. The unity, harmony, indivisibility and indissolubility of Nigeria cannot be compromised.

Through national integration, the country can prosper and flourish, carry with it power, strength, solidarity and element of cohesion which will give the country further permanence to stay strong in the present competitive and globalizing world.

From the foregoing the following recommendations are pertinent:

- (1) A credible election leading to emergence of a truly national leader, for whom the entire federation remains his constituency. Legitimacy of government is germane to national integration and Nigeria project. Until elections are fraud free in Nigeria, the quest for national integration remains a mirage.
- (2) National image must be created that will have such appeal as to make any image of separatist, ethnic group or loyalty unattractive.
- (3) National resources must therefore be diverted into such things as job creation, poverty alleviation, social security programmes, provision of basic services as well as waging strong war on the endemic corruption in Nigeria.
- (4) There is greater need for more commitment to national project of integration from all and sundry, especially on the part of the elite. Many ingenious politicians have often preached ‘tribalism’ and exploited ethnic differences for their own political advantages.
- (5) Social Studies education should be taught more effectively particularly at the primary and junior secondary levels of education and tailored towards inculcating appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness and fair play which are hallmarks of effective leadership and followership the world over.

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