

FEDERALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA

EEGUNLUSI, Tayo Raymond Ezekiel, PhD*

Abstract

This paper adopts a critical approach to addressing the problems relating to federalism in Nigeria's multi-ethnic society and the methods of solving these problems to promote national unity. Rooted in the events of the trans-Sahara trade, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism, and complicated by centuries of inter-tribal conflicts involving the tribes, Nigeria's problems are as diverse as the over two hundred and fifty cultural and people groups or tribes in it. With the tribes having different worldviews, social and moral values and orientations, they are hugely polarised and deal suspiciously with one another. Using conceptual and historical analyses, this work discusses and addresses the problems relating to federalism in Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflicts, federalism, multi-ethnic culture, national unit, problems, prientations, worldviews.

INTRODUCTION

This paper adopts a critical approach to addressing the problems relating to federalism in Nigeria's multi-ethnic society and the methods of solving these problems to promote national unity. Nigeria's problems are as diverse as the over two hundred and fifty cultural and people groups and tribes in it. These problems have both internal and external causes. Internally, these various cultures are different in worldviews and orientations towards doing things. Influenced by a long history of inter-tribal conflicts, suspicious social interactions and business exchanges, these cultures are heavily polarised and there appears to be an unpalatable contradistinction in the peoples' moral and social values given the divergence in their orientations (Abiola, 1974: 17-59, 125-132; Johnson, 1921:274-493).

Externally, (i) the factors of trans-Sahara trade, Europe-dominated trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism and the spread of external religions, resulting from these, which come into sharp conflict with the people's animist practices created new orientations that occasion both idealistic and empirical conflicts within the nation (Abiola, 1974:11,76-88; Johnson, 1921:197-205); (ii) the activities of other nations, the multilateral organisations (MLOs) and the multinational/transnational corporations (M/TNCs) also affect the harmony of the nation (Edoho, 2008: 210; Stiglitz, 2007: 9). As historically obvious, the problems emanating from colonial rule, in form of the dichotomy created by the imposition of direct rule and indirect rule systems of the colonial administration on both southern and northern Nigeria, respectively, and the determination to uphold tribal and religious ideologies, pitched the peoples in the nation against one another (Mamdani, 1996: 145-150; Mamdani, 2000: 43-45). Also, various practices of the supranational corporations and powerful nations inhibit national economic performances and political controls such that the nation's peoples sometimes rise against their governments because of economic problems (Pegg, 1999: 473-484; Courson, 2007:2-51; Eegunlusi, 2004: 17-18; 2014: 10-19). On a general note, divergent moral, religious, political and cultural orientations have created hegemonic conflicts, competitions and both sensible and insensible clamours for social justice and national restructuring.

Critically examining the different traits the various peoples exhibit will show the peoples' multivalent cultural practices and the roles they play in the conflicts and crises in the nation. Using conceptual and historical analyses, this work discusses and addresses the problems relating to federalism in Nigeria. The dichotomy created by the adoption of indirect rule system in the north and direct rule system in the south and the volatile structure resulting

from agitation for religious, political and tribal identities have not healed. This was part of what was responsible for the Nigerian civil war of 1967 and 1970 and many post-civil war conflicts (Aremu and Buhari, 2017: 63-66). The events are parts of the underlying causes of the various socio-political and moral conflicts within the nation. In practice, Nigeria's federalism has been a very traumatic one because of a gross lack of harmony between its different human elements (Shedrack. 2020: 3-6). Over several decades since the nation's independence, several political systems have been found to have been embedded in the federalism, the poor understanding of which equally hinders national unity. For instance, it incorporated parliamentary system at independence and embraced republicanism shortly after, jettisoning cabinet system to adopt presidential system after the civil war while still retaining republicanism. While these identified systems are not bad in themselves, the nation does not seem to have really profited from them as it should because of conflicts of interests at all its levels. Though we will be unable to address all the issues raised in this introduction, this paper attempts a conceptual and historical understanding of federalism, in general, and Nigeria's federalism, in particular. It essentially aims at unearthing and addressing the problems underpinning Nigeria's federalism, taking cognizance of the various solutions adopted by the nation in the past and the issue of its national unity.

Federalism: A clarification

Federalism, as a political system and a system of government where there exists partly autonomous states, allows states, provinces, territories or regions existing as a nation to give some powers to the central while holding on to some level of autonomy. Tracing the philosophical foundation of federalism, Adeola and Ogunnoiki (2020: 77) observe that:

Federalism remains the idea of two or more independent nations forming a union for political, economic, socio-cultural and security reasons. Beginning from the 17th to the 19th century, European philosophers: Johannes Althusius, Immanuel Kant, Baron de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Alexis de Tocqueville and, John Stuart Mill laid the philosophical foundation of federalism in their respective magnum opus. In the 20th century, K. C. Wheare, W. S. Livingston, W. H. Riker, C. J. Friedrich and, W. E. Oates propounded the legal-institutional theory, sociological theory, bargaining theory, process theory and the theory of fiscal federalism for the purpose of explaining the idea 'federalism'.

Going by the above, federalism is a political system that exists based on consensus or agreements between different states or people groups or ethnic groups. As revealed in the works of Kant, Montesquieu, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, the American Federalists, Rawls (Hobbes, 2002:58; Locke, 1924: 117-168; Rousseau, 2008:337-350; Hamilton, Madison and Jay, 2017; Rawls, 1972) and many other contemporary scholars, human nature and desire for survival dictate the idea of consensus in human association, the formation of social and political systems and institutions as well as the sustenance of these systems and institutions. The consensus involved in federalism is dictated by a number of factors, such as peoples' desires and interest for federalism, security concerns, economic considerations and benefits, leadership concerns, administrative and political gains, and so on. Under federalism, every consenting region or state or territory or province shares power and resources together as it seeks to attain a balance of power and operate by the principles of equality and fairness. Federalism is a type of government that differs from country to country and is mostly

common among multi-ethnic peoples who do not wish to abandon or relinquish their unique identities, whether geographical, cultural, political, economic, and so on. It is a system that is a product of the desire of nationals to fashion out a common identity. Thereby, operating under the federal system helps in creating unity in diversity.

Nations agree to federalism for different purposes. As part of these, it is arranged (i) to protect the different interests of all the ethnic groups involved in the federalism, especially the minority groups; (ii) to ensure proper sharing of power between the states and the central so as to guard against misuse or abuse of power; (iii) to foster unity in a country with many ethnic groups and allow everyone to have a sense of belonging; (iv) to ensure devolution of power, that is, to make sure that power is decentralised (Tella. 2014:51-53); (v) to create partly autonomous states in relation to a well-coordinated central government; (vi) to avert the dominance of a state or an ethnic group by another (Hamilton, Jay and Madison, 2001: 54); (vi) to offer opportunities for different individuals to partake in governance at all levels of the federalism as well as promote the rich heritages and divergent cultures of the different peoples (Hamilton, Jay and Madison. 2001: 457); (viii) to promote the practice of democratic ideals, since federal states are usually democracies, and (ix) to ensure that places with large geographical territories feel the presence of or have good governments controlled at the centre that can respond promptly and adequately to their needs and welfare.

The Federal system of government usually operates by and is built on a written constitution. As such, the constitution serves as guide for governance both at the central and state(s) levels. It is what helps the different peoples and divisions under the nation to know their roles and the functions to really perform. These constitutions are rigid and uneasy to alter. In modern times, federal states usually operate a system that divides into central and state governments and operates by a constitution that empowers the central government and the different states and local governments to act in the people's overall best interest. As part of the provisions, the modern federal system usually operates a three tier system of government: the central, the states and local governments (Quint, 1988: 379-396). Federalism is a system that is common among nations with large geographical territories and is determined by the choice made by the various peoples coming together as a federal state. It may operate a bicameral or unicameral legislative system. At present, many nations profess federalism. These include Nigeria, United States, Brazil, Germany and Malaysia. Conceptually and in practice, federalism is the opposite of unitarism, a system of government which does not really allow for division of power in a state and is, thereby, a highly centralised and strong one. It is also similar to confederalism which is the loose union or alliance of two or more states for certain purposes which may include protection of military, economic and political interests. Thus, unlike federalism, confederate states have weak centres and stronger peripheries because member states usually steadfastly hold on to some level of autonomy and authority. In this respect, real central authority is either minimal or non-existent. As such, it becomes unstable because members may pull out of the union at will. Besides these, confederacies allow member states to have total control over affairs involving their citizens which also weakens the union because of the issue of proper allegiance to it.

Problems of Federalism

In every multi-ethnic culture, the problems of federalism are many. First, divergence of interest among the different ethnic groups or states often leads to conflicts and allegiance to ethnic nationality and state interests. Included in this are the deliberate activities of certain individuals who disbelieve the idea of the federalism, due to various religious, socio-political and cultural ideologies, and consciously or unconsciously work to destabilise it. Second, the

fear that the interest of the minority groups might never be represented, which makes agitations for secession and resource control more pronounced. Third, the fear of discrimination between states and tribes which leads to complete repulsiveness and non-acceptance of members of one group or state by another. Fourth, the fear of domination and marginalisation of one ethnic group or state by the other. Fifth, federalism is costly to run due to functions' duplication between the central and state governments (Benton, 2020:536). Sixth, there may be a strong centre that overrides the interests of the states or regions. Seventh, there are contradictions in application of federalism in certain cases as nations claim to practice federalism but act as if under unitary system because of strong control that allows for domination of other regions within the federalism. Eight, situations of conflicts sometimes happen between the central government and the states, if the state considers the central as usurping its roles and vice versa. Nine, delays in implementation of federal policies by the states has serious negative implications for the welfare of citizens. Ten, there is sometimes an almost uncontrollable level of extensive corruption resulting from allowed injustices due to favouritism, nepotism, god-fatherism, and so on, that constitute national menace. In Nigeria, these things have played out a lot.

Focus on the Problems of Federalism in Nigeria

The major problem Nigeria's federalism has appears to be that of lack of consent in the founding of the nation. In what is an important theory of social contract, Hobbes argued that the determination to escape the anarchic state of nature, a hypothetical state, made self-interested individual men to consent to the founding of civil society (Hobbes, 2002:58). Thus, based on consent, they escaped an uncongenial situation of lack of peace and fear of death in which human life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 2002:58). Through their consent, these mutually self-interested men gave their rights to a group of men to govern on their behalves and protect their mutual welfare. This idea of consent in protection of mutual interest, which is an essential part of the contract theories as propounded by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, is not far from African thoughts.

In his *Democracy and Consensus*, Wiredu favours consensus and non-party democracy as ways towards avoiding the dominance of the majority at the expense of minority interests, so as to deal with "tyranny of the majority" as well as "institutionalised disaffection" among peoples in a particular geographical area. In his argument, he discussed the Akan model of consensus in which the paramount ruler's decision on any matter is not always his sole decision but the decision he takes with his chiefs who constitute the king-in-council (Wiredu, 1995: 53-60). Though fraught with its own problems,¹ such a consensual instance existed in the various Nigerian peoples' monarchical governance (as in the *Oyo Mesi* system) before the nation's forceful British colonial amalgamation (Johnson 1921, 70). However, in bringing the different peoples making Nigeria together, the colonial authorities did not allow them to have the chance of dialoguing to determine the nature of the nation that was being birthed. If they had been allowed to look inwards and dialogue on the suitable type of governmental system to adopt, they would have been able to factor their shortcomings into the discussion and evolve a blueprint for a sustainable (future) national survival. Since their federalism did not evolve from consent but forceful integration, they have been unable to forge a common goal of national unity in many decades of independence.

¹ Egunlusi has argued that what Wiredu identified as "consensus" may really be an expression of the interest(s) of (a) certain strong and dominant individual(s), within certain governmental arrangements, who present private ideas as if there are popularly agreed upon. See T.R.E. Egunlusi, (2022). Critical Reflections on Wiredu's "Consensual Democracy". *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya*, pp. 1-27.

Also, to worsen matters, despite their forceful amalgamation, the colonial authorities introduced divide and rule tactics under the indirect rule system that polarised the peoples and gave them different orientations about governance, morality, responsibility, national integration and unity that they have not been able to harmonise in over a hundred years of living together. For instance, the four constitutions put in place by the colonial authorities between 1922 and 1960, namely the Clifford's constitution (1922), Richards constitution (1946), Macpherson constitution (1951) and Lyttleton constitution (1954) were forged to favour one part of the country over another and foster colonial interests and policies (Okon, 2004:13-19). Though the 1922 constitution introduced elective principle into the nation's governance, which made easy the formation of the Nigerian Legislative Council, its implementation displayed disparity in the treatment of the northerners and southerners. The Legislative Council only made laws for the South and allowed indirect rule system of governance for the north through its Lagos and London colonial offices.

In the post-independence era, the initial lack of consensus and agreement in the founding of Nigeria's federalism and other colonial schemes hold serious consequences for the nation's existence. One of these is the power tussle between the members of the different ethnic groups over sharing of national resources and assets and considerations of what ought to be the conditions for peaceful coexistence. In most cases, the foundation of this behaviour is mistrust. This has led to loss of lives and properties as tribes raise militias to fight one another and threaten one another's existence (Eegunlusi. 2014: 10-17). Besides this, while the lack of initial agreement in establishing Nigeria has hugely played down the promotion of uniformity of ideas, it sometimes frustrates the national policies that should cater for human welfare across all strata of the nation. As such, in certain cases, delays in the implementation of federal policies by states usually have serious negative implications on the welfare of citizens. For instance, the payment of minimum wage in Nigeria has always varied from state to state because some states often claim to lack the financial capacity to pay what the Federal Government² approved as the minimum wage for all government workers in the nation. An initial agreement on this would have averted the disposition of the chief executives in the states.³ Also, conflicts sometimes ensue between the central and state governments over items to be included in the exclusive and concurrent lists of government activities. As an instance, a few years ago, the Lagos State Government created more Local Governments and

² Fixing of wages is usually done after dialogues and agreements between the Federal Government, the states, private sector employers and the trade unions. However, the states always act as if they have been forced to partake in the dialogues. An initial, unprejudiced, well-documented and constitutional agreement could have helped in avoiding this problem.

³ John Rawls' idea of the original position is useful here. Hypothetically, as a way to ensure justice, he thinks that societies should consider an original position in which rational self-interested but mutually disinterested humans, under a "veil of ignorance", choose roles to play in a future society and the principles to govern those roles. Arguing that justice is the first virtue of social institutions while its primary subject is the basic structure of society and social institutions, he holds that people in this original position can agree on just principles of distribution of resources in their society in favourable ways. Thus, distribution of benefits (say the rights of people, such as right to earn good or living wages rather than dead wages, sharing of powers, access to basic needs like food, clothing and shelter) and burdens (say various duties and obligations, like tax payments) should be discussed at the foundation of any society so that the actual roles later played by everybody can be void of prejudices, cheating and misgivings. Unfortunately, this is part of where Nigeria's federalism misses it. Those at the helms of affairs benefit hugely but want the people they govern to bear the burdens while forfeiting the benefits. This cannot create a just system. See John Rawls. 1972. *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.12, 60; John Rawls. 1999. *Justice as Fairness: a Restatement*. Erin Kelly (ed.). Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p. 42.

the Federal Government, under the Obasanjo regime, saw this as a usurpation of national role by the state. As such, the Federal Government wanted the state to revert to the previous number of Local Governments. To enforce this, the state's monthly allocation was withheld for many months until another government came into power.

Besides these, like in other places, federalism is costly to run in Nigeria. At Nigeria's central and state levels, there are duplication and establishment of different ministries, justice departments, legislative houses, seats of government, etc. Apart from the fact that some of these agencies and parastatals are unnecessary, many have become means by which corrupt nationals perpetrate and perpetuate acts of injustice and siphoning of national resources for different purposes such as fostering electioneering campaigns, funding of illicit activities and pervasive interests. Resulting from diverse interests, the fear of dominance by majority groups and non-representation of the interest of minority groups have for long constituted a strong part of the reasons for Nigeria peoples' demand for Sovereign National Conference (Kunle Ajayi, 2006; Eegunlusi, 2023:211). Until 2010 when Goodluck Jonathan, a member of the minority tribes⁴, came to power as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the attitudes of the three dominant tribes largely determined the way the nation was governed, as states/ regions with dominant ideologies imposed their values on the rest. Due to the strong ideological camps of the members of the big ethnic groups that usually find themselves in power and control both the political and economic resources, a strong centre often attempt to override the interests of the regions. On close scrutiny, this situation portrays the nation as not living up to its claims. While it claims to practice federalism, in practice, it acts as if under a unitary system. Obviously, the survival of the Nigerian federalism is threatened when such a situation as this prevails and struggles ensue.

Also, towing the line of conflicting interests, agitations for socio-political and economic controls have led to creation of ethnic militias and intra-wrangling political situations. Thus, amplified are: (a) fights over resource control in the Niger Delta, as the people agitate for control of substantial parts or total percentage of all crude oil earnings from the region in custody of the central government; resistance to dominance by other tribes through the activities of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), and many other groups (Antai and Anam. 2014: 1-5); (b) secessionist threats in Eastern Nigeria, started under Odumegwu Ojukwu and, later propagated by others like Ralph Nwazurike and Nnamdi Kanu. Ojukwu agitated for the State of Biafra, Nwazurike formed the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) while Kanu formed the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Oyewo. 2019). The urge for states to divide becomes strong when strong individuals, propagandists, ethnic jingoists and weak but lousy persons that seek cheap popularity, exist that negatively influence their peoples against national interests.

As means of consolidating regional interests and promoting activities involving certain notable people from their areas, regions sometimes reward their people and give them staunch support. There have been instances of conferment of chieftaincy titles on perceived warriors from the regions (Nwabuani, 1994:347-348). As at now, the activities of people and

⁴It was even debated among the members of the Nigerian political class that his ascension to power was not totally void of the consideration of the interests of the majority groups. They alleged that he had a pre-election agreement with one of them to win electoral favour the failure of which resulted in not securing his second term electoral victory. See. Leena Koni Hoffmann. 2014. "Who Speaks for the North? Politics and Influence in Northern Nigeria". Africa Programme Research Paper. *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Chatham House, July, pp. 1-28.

groups that share the ideals of federalism in the nation continue to assume new dimensions while the state resiliently wars against these activities. For instance, to sabotage federalism and democratic rule, the Boko Haram and Ansaru sects are collaborating with external terrorist groups like the Al-Qaida and the Islamic State to impose Islamic rule on the nation and fight against its government and peoples in attempts to actualise their goals. Unfortunately, the war against them is difficult to fight because many of them are active members of the Nigerian community and also have relatives, wards and supporters who move freely among the people to act as informants or spy networks.

What is the Answer to the Question of National Unity?

The question of how Nigeria can solve its problems of national disunity poses a daunting task. Without mincing words, national unity is essential for the survival of any federalism. This is what Nigeria has battled with in over a century of amalgamation. There are different schools of thought on Nigeria's unity which make obvious the mistrust that has prevailed among the nation's founders and its various peoples at different levels for many decades. As stated by Tunde Babawale, national politicians like Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello and Ladoke Akintola, and many others after them, shared the view that many "[Nigerians] deceive themselves by thinking that Nigeria is one" and claim that its "unity is artificial." Specifically, Awolowo (1947:47-48) affirmed that "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English," "Welsh" or "French." The word "Nigerian" is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not." These mindsets, observable in the pre-independence colonial descriptions, have lingered for long. Earlier before Awolowo's claim, Hugh Clifford who governed Nigeria from 1920-1931 had opined that the people of Nigeria were "a collection of independent Native States, separated from one another by great distances, by differences of history and traditions and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers" (Negedu and Atabor. 2015:76). In later years, thinking about these comments and other factors, Babatunde Ekanola (2006:279) said, "Nigeria is bedevilled by myriad problems which, despite its oil riches, inhibit its development and even threaten its continued existence as a sovereign state." The above statements by these influential personalities exemplify the nature and extent of the mistrust that has affected the nation's national unity.

Over many years, Nigeria's national mistrust has been of different forms. First is the mistrust among the different leadership echelons of the nation. They are always suspicious of one another as they relate as estranged friends, friendly foes and friends at odd who sometimes hide their insincere nature to secure their interests. Unfortunately, the ideological orientations of these people are usually the most dominant. Following Marx's and Engels' (1968) view that the ideology of the dominant class is the dominant ideology in society, their views dominate the minds of the populace in their different tribal and politico-religious spheres. Consequently, the populace sometimes imbibes and shares their ideas, ideals, sentiments, orientations, mistrusts, moral inclinations and whatever conceptions of values they hold, almost absolutely, while acting to breach national unity where such should have been promoted. The second level of mistrust is that of the people among themselves. As confusions arise from the activities by society's people, induced by the ideologies of the members of the dominant class, many people in society distrust their own people for at least two reasons: (a.) for doing what they themselves do and know to be wrong, (b) for doing what they know is wrong but that they do not do which others do. In the latter situation, they expect better performances from members of their own class and in the former they fear that those who do what they also do may betray them (Egunlusi, 2018:242-248). Besides these,

when realization dawns on them, the people often distrust the class for leading them astray or not doing things right.

The third level of mistrust integrates the mistrust among many of the elites and the common peoples that the Nigerian project will never work. This is why, as we saw earlier, they consider the nation as merely represented on global map and the people as different ensembles that will never fuse together (Skurnik, 1967:142). They think that instead of seeking national unity or bonding, each part of the nation should give utmost attention to tribal and regional sentiments and development. Unfortunately, for its impacts on posterity, the most virulent of these thoughts is from the youths who do not only disbelieve the Nigerian project, sometimes because of the antecedents of the adults, but think that the nation is a “scam”⁵ altogether. Thus, they live only for the moment while the nation further descends into a pathetic moral anarchy capable of endangering every aspect of its existence, and act in ways that threaten the basic systems and structures that can sustain its future (Alordiah, Omumu, Omenebele, 2023: 1-10). If this continues, what legacies will the future generation of Nigerians inherit?

As aftermaths of the various perspectives and mistrusts concerning Nigeria’s unity, ensuing internal conflicts have, at different times, turned the nation to a boiling cauldron. Examples are the 1963 to 1966 unrests and post-census conflicts, 1966 to 1970 military coups and civil war, 1983 election crises, 1993 June 12 crisis (Aremu and Buhari, 63-66; Omotoso and Oyeranmi, 2014: 3-17). Apart from civilian to civilian corrupt practices, conflicts and oppressions, at different times from 1966 to 1999, military incursion into politics heightened national mistrust, weakened the social and political structures, promoted favouritism and nepotism and created pseudo systems that allowed men who had the power of the guns and their cronies to rule and enrich themselves to the detriment of the populace who merely tagged along, having little or no say in their own affairs. Unfortunately, despite the end of the military era, the division in the country has become so intense that the reality of national unity is still far-fetched decades after self-rule restarted.

As pessimistic as some nationals are, there are many who believe in the Nigerian project and can sacrifice anything to pursue its unity and existence. In the past, various efforts were made towards solving Nigeria’s disuniting multi-ethnic problems. Some of these are itemized. First is the engaging of intensive campaigns for social mobilisations, social justice and self-(re)discovery. By this, efforts were made to ensure that the people come to the realisation that they can profit together by association as peoples sharing common geographical, political and social identities. This is why organisations like the Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER),⁶ later renamed the National Orientation Agency (NOA)⁷, were formed (Ugwuja, 2015:4-10). In making campaigns effective, print, electronic/communication and information technology are engaged for wider information dissemination. Second, promotion of mutual physical and social interaction through events as the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), postings of Federal Civil servants, establishment of federal institutions to cater for people’s welfare and national interest.

Third, democratisation or return to civil rule. Since democratic constitutionality is allowed, the draconian approaches of the military regimes were minimised or almost eliminated as the people choose their own governments and are responsible for their choices. They also enjoy

⁵ This is common in daily conversations among them, which one hears often.

⁶ Launched on the 25th of July, 1987 and led by Professor Jerry Gana.

⁷ Renamed on the 23rd of August, 1993.

the provisions of the constitution that allow for consent in relationship and governance, aspirations, free association, rule by the majority as well as the recognition of minority interest. Fourth, adoption of the principles of social and distributive justice, and equality of opportunities. This is why agencies like the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC) and the Edo State Oil and Gas Producing Areas Development Commission (EDSOGPADEC) were formed in 1992, 2006 and 2007 respectively. OMPADEC was replaced by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in year 2000. The North East Development Commission (NEDC) was established in 2017 while the South East Development Commission (SEDC) and the North West Development Commission (NWDC) were established in 2024.

Besides these, constitutionally, programmes like the 13 percent derivation formula and Federal Character were allowed. In 2008, the Ministry of Niger Delta Development (MNDD) (or, the Niger Delta Ministry) was created as the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) with NDDC subsumed under it (Egunlusi, 2014:11). In 2024, under Bola Ahmed Tinubu's regime, this ministry was collapsed under a new ministry, the Federal Ministry of Regional Development, which oversees all regional Development Commissions: the NDDC, NEDC, SEDC and NWDC (Mustapha, 2024). The purpose of instituting the above programmes and agencies is to ensure that every tribe enjoys the dividends of democracy.

Fifth, national dialogues. These are in forms of constitutional conferences and various national and regional conferences to ensure that people air their views on regional and national matters. Sixth, reconciliation committees. The Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (Oputa Panel) instituted by the Obasanjo Regime was a court-like arrangement aimed at reconciling aggrieved parties in the nation by investigating and mediating in the abuse of the regimes that preceded Obasanjo's civilian regime (Zwanbin, 2017: 77-87). Seventh, judicial procedures afford people from any part of the country the chances of seeking redress in the nation's courts of law.

Eight, more states and Local Governments were created at different times for government to be nearer to the people, for them to enjoy national resources and proceeds of good governance. In 2024, the Federal Government obtained a Supreme Court judgement to grant financial autonomy to the Local Governments for them to be able to operate without being controlled by the State Governments as they did before (Othuke, 2024:190-192). Ninth, preparation of governmental policy instruments and passing of legislative acts to cater for the welfare of (socially, politically and economically) disadvantaged people. As an instance, the agitations by the Niger Delta people reduced when the MNDD was created and amnesty was granted to some of the militants (Egunlusi, 2014:11). In later years, many of the militants who underwent higher institution trainings on government scholarships graduated with exceptional academic grades and rediscovered themselves. Thus, their penchant for crime was eliminated as they found fulfilment and learnt to make demands for the improvement of their communities through intellectual means.

Tenth, operating by principles of accountability and transparency through the anti-graft agencies. People are held responsible for the consequences of their actions by groups like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and

Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC)⁸, and the Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal (Ewa, Adesola & Kankpang, 2019:51-53). Also, whistle blowers are allowed to report witnessed or known financial crimes with possibilities of monetary rewards (if their claims are genuine) and punishment by jail terms (if their claims are false). By this approach, the consciousness of being wary to loot national resources is entrenched in people while those who determine to defame others unjustly and for gains will beware of such acts. In these, fear is instilled in the people for them to avoid being financially immoral. Eleventh, different arrangements and policies by political parties, which include party zoning structure, allow tribes and their members to have a sense of belonging in the political affairs of the nation.

All the above efforts appear to be meaningless because of people's agitation for restructuring which they consider as a way of returning to true federalism. This brings to fore the problem of lack of consensual relation in the founding of Nigeria's federalism. The agitators for restructuring are arguing that it is a way of promoting regionalism and making all the different tribes and peoples to discuss what will be to their long term interests. The agitation for restructuring overshadowed the earlier call for the implementation of the report of the National Conference arranged by the government of Goodluck Jonathan. With the idea of restructuring not being favourably disposed to by the Nigerian government for a long time, more crises ensued with groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) almost making the eastern part of the nation ungovernable and giving the nation a negative public image (Shedrack. 2020:4).

Vendetta and banter over restructuring made many tribes in the nation to clash and engage in hate speeches. For instance, at different times, the Youth Wing of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) issued ultimatums to the Eastern Nigerian people staying in Northern Nigeria to vacate the Northern region. This resulted in a serious war of words between the Eastern and Northern Nigerian peoples and their allies, further threatening national unity. There were series of governmental efforts and meetings of national elites to stem the tide of the conflicts and douse tensions resulting from hate speeches but the agitations of the IPOB did not cease. As a last resort, the government engaged military interventions to quell the rising revolts of the IPOB and its allies, provoking public outcries as a result of the approaches adopted during the operations. Also, in acts perceived as involving unclear diplomatic antics, government also seized some of its spokespersons to try them in the courts so as to deter others from involvement in perceived anti-unity activities. Whether or not these measures have achieved national unity is still a subject of debates.

Conclusion

This work examined the problems of federalism in every multi-ethnic culture and narrowed down to addressing Nigeria's particular challenge in relation to federalism. It equally dealt with different approaches by the nation and its citizens to solve the problem of national disunity. The problems experienced under Nigeria's federalism can be successfully and beneficially handled if the nation and its leaders stop paying lips service to things that can promote unity. Ordinarily, a people's diversity is supposed to be a blessing if they are willing to learn from their mistakes and from one another, and are ready to forge the means of promoting situations beneficial to all. Nigeria peoples' diversity still plays out negatively because they have not really sat down to address issues at two levels: individually and corporately. Individuals ought to take steps towards playing their roles in attaining national

⁸Also referred to as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission. It was established by the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (2000).

unity as the nation practices federalism. When individuals in particular tribes see humanity in others outside their tribes, they will respect this humanity of others. The most fundamental crisis of society is that we seldom recognise the humanity of others. Where this is the case, people will be treated as objects rather than with dignity. The collective respect for the humanity of every member of the society everywhere will lead to tolerance and the desire to work out unity because of the consideration that everyone is important, matters and has self-worth. This is when respect for human dignity, justice, equality, fairness and rule of law will thrive.

***EEGUNLUSI, Tayo Raymond Ezekiel, PhD,**

Lecturer-in-Philosophy,
General Studies Department,
School of Physical Sciences,
Federal University of Technology,
Akure, Nigeria.
kingadetayo@yahoo.com
+2348062515988

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