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National Unity: A Catalyst for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria

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Abstract
One of the factors toward achieving a sustainable democracy is unity. The ethnic problem in Nigeria is indeed the National Question, around which a great deal of our national live reveals and in the name of which all sort of crime have been perpetrated against the nation. It is this issue which has produced the "we want our man syndrome in Nigerians national politics. The Nigerian socio-polity is replete with many cases of inequalities, injustices, discrimination because even the appointments into the key and core areas of the economy and political offices are usually patently lopsided and ridiculously announced without much attention paid to the feeling and sensitivity of the other groups of Nigerians. It is in line with this that this paper tries to looks at the factor of Unity in transforming Nigeria to a sustainable Democracy. The extents to which these factors contribute positively to sustainable Democracy are recommended.
Keywords: National Unity, Sustainable democracy

INTRODUCTION

The lack of Unity in Nigeria generally known, was born out of the interest of the colonial masters whose interest is not for the sake of Unity in Nigeria as a nation but to pave way for their exploitive mission. The Richard constitution has affected the Nigeria democratic purpose which divided Nigeria into three regions namely The Northern, the Eastern Region and The Southern Cameroun serves as the begging of the political confusion in Nigeria. With the attainment of political independence and the first democratic government Sworn in 1960, it was hoped that the attainment of meaningful democratic as well as the national development as seen in other parts of the world would be easily achieved. That is to say Nigeria wished to witness an equal distribution of the national resources in order to raise the general standard of people lives. This became a history.

Inline with the above Sani (2008) explain that after independent the citizens expectations of witnessing serious national development through democratic ideals and practice was dashed soon thereafter, because the political elites only manipulated the democratic process to pave way for the emergency of another exploitative class. Sani (2008) added that, this time around, it is not the white colonial masters but the Nigeria political elites group who become dubious and corrupt propagating tribalism, regionalism and religious sentiment to settle personal cases and to perpetrate them in power. The elites created a situation that led to civil tribal and religious unrest, feeling of social injustice associated with nepotism and sectionalism which led to the collapse of the first republic in January 1966 and ushered in a military rule. Michael quoted by Umar (2008) stated that ethnically as a force in Nigeria politics originated from the colonial policies of the British, who through their "divide" and rule ''policy'' encouraged the different application of colonial policies on the traditional institutions and structures of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. This unequal impact of colonial policies saw the partial exposure of western education, by the British missionaries to a part of the country namely the southern part of Nigeria, while less emphasis was placed on western education in the northern part. The danger inherent in these segregationist policies soon become a part in the 1940s and 1950s, when the more educated and vocal south agitated for greater participation in the government of the nation.

As this was the case, the northern part of the country occupied namely by the Hausa/Fulanis group, soon saw themselves as not prepared to participate effectively in the discussion at the central legislative councils created as from 1946 (the north had been excluded in the Clifford constitutions of 1922). The northern inhabitants therefore agitated for the adoption of system of government in which greater powers would be exercised by the regions (the territorial base on the ethic group as a result the northern people come to own primary loyalties more to their ethnic groups members than to the center or nation as a whole. Similar development were also going on in the southern part of the Nigeria between the two regions (east and west) that had been curved out of the existing structures of their various ethnic groups in 1939. The initial exposure of western regions made up of predominantly of the Yoruba people who western education put them at an advantage over their Igbo counter parts, (who occupies the eastern region) in terms of access the few positions granted the indigenous elites in the colonial civil service and the economy in general. Sensing the threat of Yoruba ethnic group domination, the Igbo intensified their effort at "catching up" with the educational lead attained by the Yoruba thus process of "catching up" in the southern part of Nigeria created tension and violent competition between Yoruba and Igbo, which often resulted in physical clashes between the groups. It is in this

connection that even the political parties were formed by ethnic regional bias (Michael 1990).

Looking at what happed in Nigeria before and after independence, the government has not given serious attention to achieving national unity, it must be acknowledge that there were no serious shift forward attainment of unity in diversity which will lead to the achieving a sustainable democracy in Nigeria. The post colonial government inherited the approach of regionalism and tribalism which are ingredient of disunity.

It is in line with the above Sani (2008) explained that the democratic practices in Nigeria is to a large extent promoting class interest, social justice, inequality, of citizens, poverty, disease and backwardness associated with corruption of the political classes, which if national unity is achieve, the democratic processes in Nigeria will be a factor for the attainment and promoting the status and position of Nigeria interns of development socially, economically, and democratically.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL UNITY

The terms used for National unity have included national cohesion, national integration, nation building and social solidarity. Ojo (2009) see national unity as the process of unifying a society which tends to make it harmonious city, based upon and order its member regard as equitably harmonious.

Jacob and the Tenue in Ojo (2009) quoted by Onifade (2013) described national unity as a relationship of community among people within the same political entity. He further explained that it is a state of mind or disposition to be cohesive, to act together, and to be committed to mutual programmes. Morrison quoted by Onifade (2013) sees it as a process by which members of a social system become less consequential in affecting behavior. In this process member of the social system develop an escalating sequence of contact, cooperation, consensus and community.

Looking at the above definitions, what makes an ideal definition of this concept, in this study, National unity is seen as a process that produce an omnibus of initiatives put in place by a state, its representative or institution guided by respect for the unique traditions and cultural background of ethnicities sharing the same polity with the goal of harmonizing all interest through a form of dialogue and representation and addressing differences that may be divisive and conflictual using the instrument of fairness, justice and equity in the sharing of resources, benefits, opportunities and responsibilities in order to guaranteed stability, longevity and prosperity of the polity as long as the inhabitants decide to remain in the polity.

In view of the above, one can see that national unity is made possible when ethnic groups within a political setting maintain unity by coming together to reach consensus, social structure and function in society which bring about social order. This view is supported by the theory of structural functionalism as quoted by Anthony (2009) in which he stated that the theory explains how the relationship among the parts of the society are created and how these parts are functional and interrelated to one another. They see society as a complex whole whose parts work together to promote social solidarity and social stability. It states that social lives are guided by social structure, which are relatively stable pattern of social behavior, as one part is affected negatively, all other parts become affected. Macionis, (1979) quoted by Onifade (2013) stated that social structures are understood in terms of social functions which are consequences for the operation of society.

In trying to relate the view of this theory with the situation of Nigeria, one can see that, the social structures of the Nigeria society are sick for instance, the political, economic, religions, medicine, and family structures are no longer performing and promoting Nigeria to attain meaningful development democratically.

ACHIEVING NATIONAL UNITY IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY

The concept of national unity can be seen as a feeling of being united as a country especially in terms of trouble. In other words, it is the processes of coming together to fight against anything that effect the human development of a particular group of people. Joseph in maduabuchi (2003) pointed out that the most important aspect of the development of any country is indisputably the development of human personality. Is in other words, the moral development of the citizens. This means that, the development of a country is primarily the development of human dimension, which is the development of human person. Joseph (2003) added that the most important aspect in the development of human persons is his moral development. Morality is a mark of human development, and it is the most important aspect of national development. Mohammed (2011) stated that for national unity and security to be achieved to help the democracy in Nigeria we must also raise the issue of poverty and economic improvement. Despite its vast endowment, a large number of Nigeria's population is still living below poverty line, as one traverses the northern state, the incidences of poverty seem to rise substantially, with some states registering as high as 80%. It is for this reason that the former governor of the central bank of Nigeria (CBN) Prof. Chukwuma Soludo, was reported as saying hardcore poverty in Nigeria was essentially a northern phenomenon". These grim economic realities do not augur well for the even development of the Nigeria states. They cannot also be very helpful to the cause of democracy & peace building in the northern states for they only succeed in re-enforcing the cleavages between the modern, western sector and the traditional Muslims society. Furthermore, Mohammed (2011) expressed that for better achieving a national unity, Nigeria should

establish durable foundation for peace and religious harmony, we must also properly engage our youth population, provide it with genuine opportunities to learn, and practice Islam, imbue it with hope for a better and purposeful future, and equip this vital segment of our society to face adequately the enormous challenges of building a robust and dynamic Muslims society in the 21st century. Anthony (2009) suggested that, for achieving a national integration in a multiethnic society like Nigeria the model of cultured pluralism should be used in which ethnic cultured are given full validity to exist separately, yet participate in the larger society and economic and political life. In line with the above, Bhikhu (2000) quoted by Anthony (2009) state that:

> "The cultural identity of some group (minorities) should not have to be confined to the private sphere while the language, culture and religion of others ('the majority') enjoy a public monopoly and are treated as the norm. For a lack of public recognition is damaging to peoples self – esteem and is not conducive to encouraging the full participation of every one in the public sphere".

For achieving national unity which will lead Nigeria to attain a sustainable democracy Ali (2011) expressed that dialogue and tolerance must be encouraged by the various ties of government in order to achieve peaceful co-existence. Moreover, object poverty and mass unemployment which has been identified as the catalyst for violence in Nigeria should be given serious attention. in this case, government should create jobs and make the youths gainfully employed and self-reliant.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as Oyeyemi (2002) quoted by Onifade (2013) rightly observed, Nigeria is a multicultural society, a conglomerate of nations with different people and cultures, a basket of different religions and world-views and a country with the diverse expectations of its people. As a recipe for Nigerians growth and development, and by extension cohesion, he recommended the need to recognize that none of the ethnic groups, big or small, share a uniform dream about Nigeria. This is because the ethnic group's world-views are completely different such as their expectations from their leaders, their notion of government, their moral standards, their perceptions and understanding of religion, their ideas of how to live and regulate their lives and their goals and mission as ethnic nationalities. He explained this view point with the example that Nigeria heterogeneity can be seen in this wise: Where as one group would want their children to go to school, some others would want their to go to the farms and mosques; while a group could relate with men of another faith without any friction, another is odiously intolerant; while some are willing to move along with the twenty first century and be a part in the world, others want to bask in the bliss of the blind stone Age. He added that although these choices are not wrong in themselves, ethnic groups must be allowed to make their different choices, being different people with different cultures, dreams, hope and aspirations.

In line with the above, Onifade (2013) states that this cannot happen until a consensual agreement is reached by all Nigerians on the future of the country. By writing in the constitution the indivisibility of the country, the military drafters of that constitution failed to respect the wishes of the Nigeria people and that sovereignty lies in and with the people. For the country to fore stall a repeat of the Arab spring in the country, the establishment must begin to listen to the people and take steps to remedy years of wrongs and injustices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve national unity in Nigeria which will give room for a sustainable democracy in Nigeria the paper recommended the following:

The idea of unity in diversity should be planted into the minds of Nigerians particularly the youths and younger children. This can be done through teaching this concepts inform of drama practically into the Nigerian primary schools and secondary schools at all levels. Corruption which is so high in Nigeria should be fought. And to achieve this, the leaders should sight an example by themselves through punishing any person caught with corrupt practices in all levels of government such as local, state and federal. The criminal justice system of Nigeria should put in place the idea of punishing offenders o criminals proportionate to the offences committed as Benthan (1999) quoted by Umar (2012) who stressed that "punishment is considered evil but a necessary evil to prevent greater evils being inflicted on the society and thus diminishing happiness.

Understanding Unity in diversity, sense of brotherhood, should be improved through the National youth service corps (NYSC) scheme. There should be enlightenment campaign to the general public especially the illiterate's ones on the above. Inline with this Shuhaib (2012) stated that "to maintain peace and unity in Nigeria, massive enlightenment must ensured. The federal government must step into enlighten the public, especially the ignorant and illiterate population about unity and peaceful co-existence among the citizens with the central theme of equality and oneness. This can be relayed through the channel of media so as to reach massive population.

Despite the fact that Nigeria is facing serious challenges in the maintaining of national unity, people

should understand that they are made to stay together as a society. They are therefore required to stand strong and forget all other factors such as tribalism, nepotism and the notion of "we" as they are amongst the factors that prevent the achievement of national unity in Nigeria.

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