

**ISSUES ON FEDERALISM, POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING AND RESOURCE
CONTROL: IMPLICATIONS ON NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA.**

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ABSTRACT

Federalism, resource control and political restructuring have today remained a major theme on all issues bothering politics and governance as this has been one of the major problems facing the Nigerian nation. Most scholars have contended that resource control has remained a contentious issue in Nigerian federalism and they agreed that it is this development that is responsible for the polarization of the country into North and South divide. The issues have resulted into civil unrest and general conflicts that have affected the peaceful and corporate existence of the country as most ethnic nationalities, especially those from the oil-rich region, argued that by the virtue of their contribution to the nation's purse, the principles of justice and equity demand that they should be allowed to control and manage their resources. This paper adopts a qualitative method of study to examine the rationale behind the agitation for resource control and political restructuring of Nigeria. It attempts to proffer solutions as to how the problems identified can be addressed. The study employed secondary sources of data collection through journal articles, books, periodicals, newspapers, print interviews and internet materials. The paper concludes that restructuring and resource control will encourage the diversification of the economy as this will encourage the return to the era of export of other commodities like cocoa, cotton, hides and skin, groundnut, palm oil and much more, thereby promoting a shift from overreliance on a mono product oil. The paper recommends therefore, that though restructuring Nigeria, as it is presently being campaigned, will not be an easy task until comprehensive approach on revenue sharing and resource control is advocated, Nigeria's quest for nation-building will continue to be an endless struggle.

KEY WORDS: Federalism, Political Restructuring, Social Justice, Resource Control, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's history today is marked with issues of resource control, political restructuring and revenue sharing and this has remained a contentious issue in Nigeria. Anugwom, in his paper titled "Nigeria's federalism and the agitation for resource control in the Niger Delta region" contends that resource control has been a key problem facing the Nigerian state (83-88). Similarly, Dickson and Asua also agree that resource control has remained a contentious issue in Nigerian federalism (1-13). Consequently, this development has led to the clamour for restructuring with the oil belt region of Nigeria called the Niger Delta and also known as the South-South has been in the fore front of this struggle. The region is not only the hub of oil in the country but also the epic center of the resource-related conflict. Since the beginning of 2016, there has been resurgence in violence activities in the region and the new militant groups that have emerged are re-echoing the age-long demands of the people of the region resource control and self-determination.

The calls for reforms from different parts of the country are evidently clear. According to Adeosun et al., from the East of the Niger there have been calls for the actualisation of the independent state of Biafra by the Indigenous People of Biafra and the Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra. In the Niger Delta, various militant groups have emerged in the region demanding for resource ownership and self-determination. In the West, the demand for restructuring of the polity

otherwise known as true federalism is still top of the agenda of the people of the region. From the North is the insurrection or insurgency of the dreaded Islamic fundamentalist group called Boko Haram whose major goal is to establish an Islamic theocratic state. Indeed, the country is not at peace; it is experiencing economic recession, farmer-herdsmen clash, the upsurge in kidnapping and ritual killings.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Federalism: Federalism is a political system through which two or more governments have shared authority over the same geographical area (Saslem Media “What is Federalism?”). It is a type of government in which the power is divided between the national government and other governmental units. It contrasts with a unitary government, in which a central authority holds the power, and a confederation, in which states, for example, are clearly dominant.

A common characteristic of federalism is the presence of a central government, a Constitution and a certain procedure that must be followed to resolve any disputes. The Constitution serves as a guideline, which the different constituent entities use to check one another. Federations also usually have procedures and organisations that facilitate intergovernmental relations. However, there are variations in their structure. For example, some federations have a central government that regulates the whole country, while others give more power to the different states or provinces. In some federations there are clear divisions in the law-making powers of the different entities, while in other federations the powers overlap. Federal systems are often governed by a Congress, with a President or a Parliament with a Prime Minister.

Political Restructuring: There are different interpretations or meanings of restructuring. Restructuring has been seen as synonymous with resource control. Nwankwo (2) defines restructuring as “thoroughgoing process that allows each region to control its resources and pay royalties to the central government. It is a process that is anchored on the principle of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”. This definition likens restructuring to resource control but restructuring encompasses resource control. However, restructuring is reorganisation, rearrangement or reformation (Najakku 12).

Thus, political restructuring entails both political re-configuration of the country and devolution of powers to the constituent units as it is practiced in other climes. It involves ownership, control, and management of mineral resources located in a state by the state and power to establish its own police as against the present system where the police are under federal control. In short, political restructuring concerns the practice of what Nigerians call true federalism.

Resource Control: Adeosun, Ismail and Topiwa describe resource control to mean “ownership, control, management of a natural resource by a community or state and payment of an agreed percentage of the proceeds of the natural resources by the owners (community / state) to the central government for the overall running of its assigned duties by the constitution” (10) Henryik defines resource control as the control and management of resources by the state or local government where the resources are found, under the guidance of the central government and then pay agreed percentage to the central government (“Resource Control”).

Several other scholars like Sagay have viewed this concept using three different perspectives which include: the power and rights of a community or state to raise funds by way of tax on persons, matters, services and materials within its territory; exclusive rights to ownership and control of resources, both natural and created within its territory; rights to customs duties on goods destined for its territory and excise duties on goods manufactured in its territory (16).

NIGERIAS FEDERALISM, REVENUE SHARING AND THE POLITICS OF RESOURCE CONTROL: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

According to Ekpele and Nweke, the quest for change or restructuring by way of constitutional amendments to reflect the interests of the federating units or states is not strange to post-colonial Nigeria as it had been there from Nigeria’s colonial inception except that the methodologies leading to each process varied to an extent. And this has been part of the characteristics of Nigeria’s political developments right from inception until the extant Fourth Republic (372). Similarly, Awortu and Nue rightly confirm this when they observed that:

Interestingly, the persistent and recurring intense struggles and widespread protests by various ethnic nationalities is traceable to the dysfunctional federal system which is manipulated by the three major ethnic groups in the country, namely; Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo and the military-imposed 1999 Constitution which enervates principles of federalism. Their inordinate ambition to lord it over the Minorities had manifested in the country's several spheres of life, leading to non-utilization of the provisions of and benefits of true federal structure. (135)

It has been advanced that the economic and political marginalisation of the oil-bearing communities accounted for the demand for resource control and political restructuring. The South-South people argued that they were denied participation in the oil and gas sector and the proceeds derived from the oil wealth of the region was not ploughed back to the region but used in the development of other regions. Moreover, they were sidelined in the national politics by the majority ethnic groups (Dickson & Asua, 1-13; Ako, 40-44; Omoweh, 64-88).

Poverty and lack of basic infrastructures have also been identified as responsible for the demand for resource control and political restructuring. The Nigerian government has generated over \$600 billion in oil revenue since the exportation of the black gold commenced in 1958 and the inhabitants where the resource is located live in abject poverty without basic things of life such as water, electricity, and roads (Otitigbe and Otitigbe, 215, Obi, 201-222).

Following these developments, series of calls and agitations by ethnic nationalities had been made for the federal government to convoke a sovereign national conference of all ethnic nationalities in Nigeria to discuss and ascertain their desirability to live together as one country (Ekpele and Nweke 373). These calls and agitations are as a result of the level of disenchantment of the different federating units and ethnic nationalities over unfavourable and dysfunctional federal structure. And each phase of these struggles has had its major issues and demands revolving around perceived social injustices by the federal government and other dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria. Nkwede reiterates the foregoing position when he affirms that:

Over the years, Nigeria has had a history of national dialogue on its constitutional and political matters. In different phases of the 100 years of Nigeria as a nation from the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates on January 1, 1914 to the convocation of a National Conference in March 2014, the nature, character and prospects of national conferences have turning points in the history of Nigeria. Each phase has had a defining moment because of the issues, demands, struggles and movements peculiar to it. (221).

Political restructuring of Nigeria has been in the political spectrum of national discourse right from colonial period. A critical look at all the issues thrown up by our discussion above shows in clear relief that the issue of restructuring of the Nigerian state has more to do with elite world view and interest behind it than with the problem(s) that it is intended to solve. This is because the motive of the protagonists or antagonists is the ultimate determinant of the prospects of the agitations. In other words, the agitations for a restructuring of the Nigerian state, though desirable as it will give justice to the least advantaged people in the federation, may not be teleological because any attempt to really tinker with the extant structure of the country is dependent on what the objective interest of the ruling elite is (Ekpele and Nweke 380).

RESTRUCTURING AND RESOURCE CONTROL: IMPLICATIONS ON PEACE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Newton Jibunoh, one cannot talk about resource control without mentioning how this particular subject was partly responsible for the civil war of 1967 till 1970, lasting three years. Resource control put a halt to the mediation that attempted to prevent an all-out civil war. This mediation attempt is popularly known as the Aburi Accord and was held between January 4 and 5, 1967, in Aburi, Ghana.

At the time the accord was reached, the Federal Government realised that the agreement would not favour the nation as a whole. The Aburi Accord was based or structured on a loose federation giving more power to the regions. Seeing as the Federal Government would have had little control over the

major resources of the nation if the accord was followed to the letter, the Gen. Yakubu Gowon-led military administration decided not to accommodate the accord, if it meant relinquishing autonomous control of the resources it had begun to develop a taste for. Instead, it was re-interpreted to suit their purposes. Following the re-evaluation of the accord, a major part of the entire eastern region of Nigerian (which was later known as Biafra) objected strongly to the Federal Government's interpretation of the accord.

Resource control led to the origin of what we know describe as insurgency, particularly in the Niger Delta. Let us keep in mind that the whole of Eastern Nigeria that was to become Biafra was where most of the crude oil of the country was located and still is located. If Biafra had succeeded in occupying (the then) Bendel the way it was intended, the entire oil resources of the country would have been under the control of a foreign land. Foreign because the secession that Biafrans were fighting for, if gotten, would have meant they would no longer be a part of Nigeria. Nigeria would then have little or no oil to call its own.

The civil war might have ended but the issue of resource control has not been addressed and many of the problems that followed the exploration of oil, like the pollution of rivers and water bodies, negative health implications, unemployment and crimes such as robbery and kidnapping are still with us today.

From the foregoing, Nigeria as a nation has from its origin the seed of marginalisation and ethnic agitations; initially the south over the north in public service appointments in both the regional and federal level but later, the agitations surfaced among ethnic groups that formed the nation. Adeleye posited that:

The Southern people who are swarming into this region daily in large numbers are really intruders. We don't want them and they are not welcome here in the North. Since the amalgamation in 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people are different in every way including religion, custom, language and aspiration. The fact that we're all Africans might have misguided the British Government. We here in the North, take it that 'Nigerian unity' is not for us (12).

Since Nigeria became a Federal state in 1954 after the termination of Macpherson constitution in 1951-1952 and subsequently the Federal Constitution of 1955, the struggle for ethnic development and dominance over the other started (even) along regional divides. Precisely, the "minority groups-struggle" surfaced. The result of this agitation as noted by Suberu (127) and (Ozoigbo, 69) manifested in the creation of Mid-western region in 1963 with its headquarters in Benin; twelve states in 1967; nineteen states in 1976; twenty-one States in 1987; thirty States in 1991 and thirty-six States in 1996 and the current cry for additional one state to the present day South -east geo-political zone. All these states creation exercises pointed to the steps taken to moderate the effect of ethnic agitation within the Nigeria political structure. Nonetheless these developments, some ethnic nationalities have little or no respect for upholding the unity of Nigeria. With states creation, consideration of nation of national unity assumed secondary interest (Attoh and Soyombo, 42).

In another development, the history of ethnic agitation in Nigeria has not been free from the manipulative tendencies of the elites of the first generation. This is pictured in the formation of political parties along ethnic extractions. Attoh and Soyombo wrote that "by 1953, the three major political parties in the country namely the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons, Action Group and Northern People's Congress had become associated with the three major ethnic groups -the Hausa, Yoruba and the Igbo respectively" (42).

This reflected an attempt by the regional elites to carve out economic spheres for themselves. The regional elites succeeded in creating the false impression that the political parties were the champions of the interests of various ethnic groups.

Recalling the view of Anugwom, ethnicity is pronounced in societies where the inter-ethnic competition for scarce resources is the rule, particularly when inequality is accepted as a given way of living and wealth is greatly celebrated (67). Also, the unity of the country since political independence was troubled by the propagation of ethno-religious and political uproar dictated on one hand by cultural,

communal and religious differences, and on the other hand by fear of political supremacy nursed by the major ethnic groups (Paul, Alih and Eri, 94). From the foregoing, ethnic agitation is as old as the Nigerian nation.

Hence, the phenomenon of ethnicity, ethno-nationalism or, as it is popularly termed, tribalism, is thus a focal point of national political discourse. Apart from this, ethnicity has been perceived as a major obstacle to the overall politico-economic development of the country (Ekot, 61). Therefore, since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democracy, there has been an unprecedented resurgence and expansion of violent conflicts that are mostly ethno-religious in nature (Omotola, 3).

THE WAY FORWARD

Ethnic equality being a universal concept in social science has been believed to have reached an important stage in the assimilation of dynamism in a political system of a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria. In the conceptualisation of this phenomenon in internal political reality of Nigeria, Akinola posited that:

Nigeria is a state of nationalities but not a nation of individuals. In which case, equating for survival within the state internal system is as important as the balancing between states in the international system. Nigerian state...is in crises because the northern group of nationalities - under the leadership of the Hausa-Fulani nation - enjoys over - balance of political power, which it has used to threaten the security of other nations and nationalities within the system (1).

There is every need for the people to understand the nature and the idea of God creation of the earth with the endowment of mineral resources to be of benefit to all persons and not just a particular group or section of people. To this end, Christians, especially their leaders, should teach and promote these teachings.

Again, since democracy is viewed as the best option for governance, which allows freedom and respect for fundamental human rights, which are also central to Christian teachings of being ones' brothers' keeper, these tenets should be encouraged and sustained by every citizen.

Similarly, Christianity, through her leaders, should teach and emphasized on the idea of the respect for the principles of rule of law is very important in any democratic setting. In this regard, the Nigerian political leaders and the entire citizenry must insist on promoting and advocating for the respect of rule of law as contained in the scriptures if there must be a sustainable democracy.

More so, for democracy to be sustainable in Nigeria, there is a need for democratic principles to be upheld. Leaders, especially, who are vested with the responsibility of formulating and implementing government policies to uphold the biblical principles of democracy so as to drive at sustainable democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following these developments, the paper strongly recommend that:

- i. The call to return Nigeria back to an "Amended Regionalism and Native Authority Systems" should be considered with utmost priority. Essentially, the First Republican form of federalism (1963-66), which empowered regional government and made them independent of federal allocation, developmentally-focused and competitive, needs urgent resurrection contrary to what is now obtainable where the federal government controls virtually all sectors of the economy. Under this situation, interest of the minority ethnic groups should be seriously protected in this situation.
- ii. The National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly should erase the "State of Origin" from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended. It should be replaced with the "State of Residence". This will go a long way in curbing unnecessary tension and agitation.
- iii. There should be decisive federal constitutionalism and law enforcement in Nigeria.
- iv. Inter-tribal marriage should as a matter of fact be encouraged. This factor will practically bring unity in diversity to bear. The hate-speech will be stamped out.

CONCLUSION

The study analysed the contentious tripartite concepts of federalism, resource control and political restructuring from different perspectives and identified some of the reasons for agitation as revenue allocation, centralised nature of Nigeria federal system, environmental degradation, resource ownership, among others. For instance, the South-South position on resource control is that each federating unit should be allowed to control and manage resources found within its territory and pay agreed sum or percentage to the central government. This is also shared by the South-East and South-West. An analysis of the south-south position showed that it is not against revenue allocation but demand for equity in its disbursement, which the region believed could only be achieved within a framework that allowed financial autonomy to the federating units. There are a lot of benefits to be derived from this type of arrangement.

We all have a role to play in countering the voices of divisiveness and the elements who seek to take us down a bloody path. Let us continue to counsel the misguided elements among our youths, who think that ethnic confrontation is a game and that words can be thrown around carelessly without repercussion (Osinbajo 13).

It could be however, regarded that ethnic conflicts exists in a continuum, in which minimal ethnic rivalry may be considered as healthy for the development of the society (Anugwom, 69). Diversity in any society ought to be a pathway to economic growth and buoyancy. It is supposed to be progress and all manner of advancements (Ojo, 21). Though agitations now pervade all the strata of Nigerian ethnic zones, it is believed that remaining strong and united is the only option for development of any geo-political zone. No one who witnessed the Nigerian civil war from 1967-1970 would want such destruction to happen through another war. In it all, the cause of the desire to disintegrate is less about one ethnic group that's deliberately left behind in the scheme of things, but about a nation that has been so amalgamated to unable to deliver the best to all its citizens irrespective of where they come from.

Every part of Nigeria is a victim of perceived marginalisation - the reason why creating another nation out of Nigeria is not the way out. This is represented in the perpetual and strong agitation for states, local governments, and electoral wards/constituencies creation by every ethnic group. As Suberu rightly illustrated, the Nigerian experience clearly shows that the so-called homogeneous, and that intra-ethnic or linguistic groups are internally quite heterogeneous, and that intra-ethnic or inter-linguistic cleavages can be real and as deadly as inter-ethnic or inter-linguistic ones.

Therefore, the current call and clamour for restructuring of Nigeria is not an easy task considering the background and points discussed so far. This is central because regionalism perpetrated the interest of major ethnic nationalities whilst states and local governments did same in another dimension.

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