Inclusive Governance in Ethnically Divided Nigeria since 1999: The Application of the Principle of Federal Character and Power Sharing System

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The realism of how best to ensure the participation of every ethnic group in governance has been a very big political challenge to successive governments since returning to democratic governance in 1999. This is because the exclusion of groups from the political process has made socio-political and economic crises a regular feature of the country. This paper examines the adoption of inclusive governance in Nigeria (federal character and power sharing formula). These principles have helped to ensure the socio-political integration of the various ethnic groups in the country and as well serve as a balancing mechanism over conflicting socio-political demands of every ethnic group.

Keywords: Exclusion, Inclusion, Development, Governance, Integration

INTRODUCTION

Compounding the problem of underdevelopment in poor country like Nigeria is ethno-nationalism, access to resources and allocation of socio-political power, which poses great threat to peace, security and progress of the state. The opening up of Nigeria political space by the return to democratic governance in 1999 has not only raised the hopes of hitherto marginalized or repressed ethnic group but also paradoxically raised the stakes in the competition for access to socio-political power and distributive resources observes Obi (2004). The politics of exclusivism no doubt has made the demands for socio-political inclusion very aggressive among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The reality of this is that socio-political and economic development cannot take place in a crisis ridden environment. Put in another word one of the pillars of development is stability. The ethno-political crisis that resulted into the civil war of 1967-1970 is still very fresh if not a reference case point. Ethnicity no doubt in its negative form negates all forms of development. It becomes a powerful force that leads to socio-political instability that in turn defines the realization of a country's resources. Once the state is controlled by one or more ethnic groups, upward social mobility becomes a preserve of such groups, who use the state machinery for group interest as opposed to ethnic integration and national development. What this suggests is that attempt must be made to create an enabling environment which engenders peace and stability and guarantee the security of the people and the optimal utilization of both human and natural resources leading to improvement, enhancement, elevation and progress of the citizen to mention a few.

When Nigeria’s socio-political and economic failure is examined, one would discover that ethnicity is central to its current under developmental syndrome. It seems to thrive in obdurate and confrontational social and political environments; the endless picture of which is irreconcilable differences and struggles between groups over access to socio-political and economic power and the opportunities that go with it. It is a negative force that is utterly destructive to civil society and consensus building; it negates development, undermines a country’s stability and flouts the rule of law. Adetiba (2012) opines that ethnicity when mobilized and manipulated can be the root causes of internal socio-political problems connected with disrespect to human rights and social justice. On the other hand, if appropriated properly , it could be the ingredients required for the realization of the ideal society, political integration, participation and common good. Glickman (1995) in his contribution believes that despite the persistency of ethnic conflicts in the politics of African states – including Nigeria – significant liberalization and democratization leading to socio-political development is possible. In other words it can be a required socio-political tool for national integration if properly appropriated.
The problem of ethnicity as it emerged under the auspices of colonialism ensures that Nigerians had no control over the central power and often were kept divided into administrative districts. The colonization of Nigeria ensures that peoples of diverse culture were brought together under one country; most of whom were not properly integrated into their new states. The implication of which is the inability of Nigeria state to create an overlapping national interest disregarding parochial and group interest even after many years of independence, hence the instrumentality of colonialism to the politics of exclusivism in Nigeria political system; the product of which is conflicts over the allocation of distributive socio-political and economic resources.

This article is structured as follows: the next section provided a brief historical background of Nigeria. Section three explains inclusive governance in Nigeria with focus on the principle of federal character and power sharing system; concluding that a long period of peace and socio-political stability in multi-ethnic state of Nigeria since 1999 is a function of effective and sincere implementation of the principle of power sharing as a mechanism for unraveling the negative impacts of ethnicity on Nigeria and section four concludes the article.

**Brief Historical Background of Nigeria**

Nigeria no doubt is the most populous black nation in Africa and deeply divided in terms of its ethnic composition. Nigeria today is confronted with myriad of problems among which are the acrimonious existence among the different groups that make up the country; fear of domination of one group or section of the country by another and the sharing of the proverbial national cake among the component units. These problems have resulted in mutual distrust and inter-community conflicts which have hampered efforts at national integration (Adeosun, 2011).

Nigeria is located in Western Africa bordering on the Gulf of Guinea, and lies between Benin Republic and Cameroon. The country has a total of 923,770 square km, 13,000 square km of which is covered by water. The boundaries of Nigeria extended for 4,047 km and countries with co-joining borders include; the Benin Republic (in the South West), Cameroon (in the South South), the Republic of Chad (in the North East) and Niger Republic (in the North West). (Ijeoma, 2010), the three major ethnic groups being Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. There is however other sizable ethnic groups which include Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio, Ogoni, Igbira, Jukun, Tiv etc. Nigeria can thus be described as an assemblage of independent native states. The major religious groups are Muslim, Christian and indigenous beliefs. The official language is English; this is as result of the British colonization that lasted for more than one hundred years, whereas, the other language peculiar to the three major ethnic groups are Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo.

Significantly these socio-cultural differences have consequently separated Nigerians from each other apart from constituting one of the main factors militating against national integration. However Nigeria’s very miscellany may indeed prove to be the guarantee of its stability and moderation if properly managed. Nigeria like India, Canada, Malaysia, Ghana, Gambia; today is one of the countries in Africa that owe her existence to the imperialistic activities of Britain. Notwithstanding Nigeria socio-cultural differences, the British government in pursuit of their economic ambition and expeditions through conquest crystallized in the rather artificial creation called Nigeria in 1914 subjugating people from diverse culture, traditions and ethnic nationalities and organized them to construct the Nigerian state. This union has been described as a forced brotherhood and sisterhood (Adeosun, 2011). Ever since, Nigeria has been confronted with the challenges of accommodating diversity, fostering inclusiveness and promoting national unity among these diverse groups that make up the country.

The amalgamation in effect, produces two Nigeria with different social, political, economic and cultural background and development within the country. Some of the independent nation-states, kingdoms and communities that were thus combined included Kanem Bornu, the Sokoto caliphate, all in the present day Northern Nigeria; the city states of Niger-Delta; the largely decentralized Igbo-speaking people of the South East; the old Benin Empire as well as the Yoruba Empire of Oyo, which had once been one of the most powerful state on the West African Coast. What the imperial government thought to be advantageous to them; today has come to be a major problem towards socio-political development of Nigeria. In other words its artificial origin, coupled with other socio-political and economic factors, had bequeathed it a number of fundamental problems, which has turned to be a challenge to its socio-political and economic development. Nigeria today is beset by strings of socio-political problems which stemmed from the lop-sided nature of the political divisions of the country, uneven economic development and the type of the existing federal system and the spirit in which it operated, hence the question of exclusivism rocking the unity of the country. What this suggests is that the Nigerian federation has been entangled in contradictions, inconsistencies, controversies and crises. These are subsumed in the national question, and social groups of varying ideological leanings cohere on the central issues linked to national unity, local autonomy and self-determination, equitable distribution of revenue, rewards, opportunities and power observe, Anifowose and Seteolu (cited in Oshewolo 2011:1). It is important to state here that the fundamental goal of federalism is the promotion of unity in diversity. Thus, a federal system is not only about uniformity, but also the acknowledgement of diversities.
The post-independence Nigeria was turbulent marked by a succession of socio-political crisis as parties and each ethnic group violently struggled for political power and resources of the center; embroiling the institution of the state in the battle against each other. The first phase of government under the leadership of the then Head of State, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa was prematurely brought to an unexpected end in 1966 when the military assumed control of governance through a coup. The first military government was headed by late General Aguiyi-Ironsi and lasted for six months before it was abruptly sacked by another military coup that brought Gen. Yakubu Gowon to power. Nigeria federalism came under a serious threat with the outbreak of the civil war that lasted for thirty months.

Military governance came briefly to an end in 1979 to give occasion for a civilian government with constitutional provision for American model of presidential system of government. This is a system of government where an executive branch is led by a president who serves as both head of state and head of government. Under this system, executive branch exists separately from the legislature and the judiciary. In a presidential system, the president is often elected directly by the people. This makes the president’s power more legitimate (de-jure) than that of a leader who come into power by force – de-facto. In 1984 the military again under Gen. Buhari (1984-1985) came in. For another period of 15 years, the country witnessed the military governments of Gen. Babangida (1985-1993) Gen. Sanni Abacha (1993-1997) Gen. Abubakar Abudusalam (1997-1999) as well as a brief period of Interim National Government (ING) headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan (August-November 1993). The period, 1985-1999 witnessed the process of subdividing the country into smaller units all in an attempt to ensure a conflict free political system.

Nigeria today is made up of 36 states and 774 local governments’ areas (LGA) with Abuja as the federal capital. For administrative expediency and the sharing of political offices, the country is sub-divided into six geopolitical zones namely: South West, South East, South South, North West, North East, and North Central. Nigeria today is beset by myriads of conflict stemmed from the inability of the state to provide adequate socio-political and economic security for all the ethnic groups. These and other ethnic cleavages and overlapping affiliations of religion has undermined prospects for socio-political and economic development of Nigeria.

In response to this mis-governance, there has been an array of ethnic mobilization such as Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Arewa People’s Congress (APC), Ijaw Youth Movement (IYM), and Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) among others have evolved in the North, West, East and South of the country; to protest against denial of socio-political and economic marginalization. The prevailing ethnic situation in Nigeria seems to have shown that the country is yet to be a united one because of the prevailing inters-ethnic cynicism and destructive rivalry among the various ethnic group on one hand and between north and south on the other hand.

Scholars have argued that some of the communal conflicts in some part of the country are proxy wars engineered and executed by the political class to divide and rule the people. This type of ethnic engineering means; allocating opportunities in employment, education and other life chances to individuals from their tribes or regions. Such policies undermines political, economic and administrative authority that manages the country’s affairs at all levels comprising the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interest, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate differences. Therefore the decline in social, political and economic growth of Nigeria in the last decade despite its enormous human and natural resources can be traced to political actions often dominated by ethnic interests, hence the incessant conflict that has engulfed the country.

In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, ethnicity should be seen as an additional variable in socio-political and economic development over and above those normally present in the more homogeneous societies. Chien (1982) observes that the role of ethnicity in development can be negative or positive; it can be a problem or potentially rewarding. Malaysia is an example of a multi-ethnic community that utilizes its ethnic composition to advance its socio-political development. Here the socio-political strengths of the Malay and non-Malay community have been beneficially utilized. In a way one might express the attitude of the leaders from the various ethnic communities in Malaysia Chien (1982) writes as follows; sharing a country on the basis of an enforced integration imposed by the British colonial government as the umpire. Since there is no practical and humane possibility of dissolution of the union, the only practical way is to make the best out of it. This type of federation may serve as a consensus model to be emulated by Nigeria.

It has been observed that since Nigeria returned to democracy in May 1999, after almost three decades of military rule, and almost two decades of economic crises, the country has been faced with the complex challenges of national reconciliation, national reconstruction and economic reform, and socio-political integration. What this suggests is that the consolidation and survival of Nigeria union depends on the ability of the center to manage the pressures that comes from the socio-political and economic demands of every ethnic group. A major contributory factor to these crises is the undemocratic nature of governance. This is because most of the time the federal government have employed divide-and-rule method in governance and created more ethno-religious divisions than...
the colonialists ever did. Thus the survival of Nigerian federation hinges under proportional control so that the federal government can control and contain ethnic tension by regulating the power mechanisms.

A close observation of Nigeria since the inception of the current political system shows that democratization seems to have rejuvenated long suppressed feelings for far long among the hundreds of ethnic nationalities in the country. Some are pushing for greater participation in the running of the affairs of the Nigeria state, while others are clamoring for greater autonomy. It should however be noted that while conflict is part of every human community, its nature and management severally determines its effects on the society (Okunola, 1998). Ethnic conflicts therefore one would conclude can be a means of identifying the imperfections of a plural society, and of suggesting remedies to remove or solve the problem of inequality, discrimination, internal colonialism, and the misuse of majoritarian democracy and national government observes Otite (cited in Osinubi and Osinubi, 2006).

Managing ethnic conflict in a multi-ethnic state creatively whether by local elites and governments should be seen as a continuing process with no end point or final resolution (Lake and Rotchild 1996). It is also an imperfect process that, no matter how well managed, it will still leave some potential for violence in virtually all multi-ethnic polities. Therefore effective ethnic management seeks to reassure every ethnic group be it major or minority of their socio-political, economic and cultural security. In essence, there are possible ways of managing ethnic conflict such as democratization, power sharing, free and fair electoral system, proportional representation, zoning system. All can produce a good-natured atmosphere for the interdependence of groups, and political participation and prevent ethnic groups from being locked out of government (Glickman, 1995). This means regional autonomy, confidence building measures, promoting the rights of every ethnic group reduces the socio-economic and political factor that produces violence.

Adetiba (2012) opines that ethnic conflict management in multi-ethnic state like Nigeria can take the form of re-organizational approach such as multiparty democracy with the intention of giving the various ethnic groups the room for participation and accommodation thus strengthening the socio-political and economic interest of the minorities in the business of nation building. Such socio-political arrangement may eventually engender the desired socio-political stability. By and large, the impacts of ethnic conflicts on socio-political and economic development are everywhere negative. Apart from loss of lives and property, investible resources are often diverted to security issues and conflict management. Yet, its psychological impact through depression, is agonizingly too traumatizing. The most worrisome element is the gradual re-militarization of the state and society, as against the desired goal of de-militarization in the name of maintaining peace in trouble spots across the country.

**Inclusive Governance in Nigeria**

Africa particularly the multi-ethnic states no doubt has contributed to the waves of inclusive governance with a variety of power-sharing, unity governments and other instruments of inclusive governance since 1990. Eritrea, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria are examples. Nigeria under the government of late Umaru Yar’Adua in 2007 declared a government of national unity. Under this political arrangement all the political parties would be represented in the executive arm of government. As noticed by Aiyar and Tiwari (2009), the key component of progressive socio-economic and political growth can be located in all-encompassing governance as the means of empowering the disadvantaged, with the aim of enabling them to overcome socio-political and economic deprivation. Therefore for accelerated socio-political development that breeds national cohesion in a multi-ethnic state, it is significantly important to hitch the horse of political system to the wagon of inclusive governance.

Put in another word the political mobilization of ethnicity and exclusive claims, significantly is a threat to national integration and emergence of corporate identity in a multi-ethnic state. National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It connotes that though we belong to different social group, religions and regions and speak different languages we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. Therefore considering the implication of ethnicity as against socio-political stability efforts must be made to create a political atmosphere that will boost the confidence of every ethnic group in a multi-ethnic state.

One pertinent question that one needs to ask considering the prevalence of ethnicity in Nigeria political system is whether inclusive governance will impact national cohesion and ethnic integration. This study elucidates the importance of inclusive governance to national cohesion in Nigeria. Inclusion is conceptualized in terms of degrees of representation that legitimately exclude either many or few political interests. On such a continuum, a more inclusive socio-political policy process generates a broader representation of every political interest. Put in another word, inclusive governance will significantly impact socio-political development.

However it’s been suggested that in many cases, inclusive governance is neither associated with actual changes in the traditional behavior of decision-makers, nor explicitly connected with actual decision-making processes. It is often no more than a crisis management tool that is left aside as soon as the crisis is over while
The quest for national unity and ethnic integration particularly after the civil war of 1967-1970 led to a concerted making process is the principle of federal character and power sharing. The Principle of Federal Character

The belief is that such socio-political engineering will help to reduce or even prevent ethnic conflict and engender constructive and mutually fruitful relationship between the various ethnic groups in the country. The assumption here is that inclusive governance will no doubt enhance equitable socio-political and economic growth as well as engender national cohesion. Political inclusion in Nigeria context includes federal character, power sharing and other socio-political mechanisms designed to ensure the participation of every ethnic group in governance.

From the above submission one of the mark of bad governance is exclusivism, which in other words means that exclusive governance breeds fear and suspicion, the height of which is ethnic loyalty and conflict over the allocation of socio-political and economic resources. Explaining inclusive governance in Nigeria political context, it is a process through which every ethnic group and particularly the traditionally underrepresented ethnic group participates in governance. The system seeks participation/representation from every group in a multi-ethnic state thus ensuring socio-political and economic growth of every ethnic group. What informs political inclusion in Nigeria is the degree to which the socio-political interests of some ethnic groups are excluded from governance; the consequence of which is lack of national cohesion. In essence every ethnic group is given the chance to be represented in every sphere of governance either as part of the executive or other arms of government. Significantly, this process will help stem the potentialities of ethnic conflict.

However it's been suggested that there is need for caution in adoption and maintenance of inclusive governance as it may reinforce elite rather than popular understandings of democratic process and as well pose large, unpopular strains on national treasuries. Notwithstanding, inclusive governance will ensure a healthy, constructive and mutually fruitful relationship between the various ethnic groups in the country. The assumption here is that inclusive governance will no doubt enhance equitable socio-political and economic growth as well as engender national cohesion. Political inclusion in Nigeria context includes federal character, power sharing and other socio-political mechanisms designed to ensure the participation of every ethnic group in governance.

The political mobilization of ethnicity, exclusive claims, significantly is a threat to national integration and emergence of corporate identity in a multi-ethnic state. Therefore considering the implication of ethnicity as against socio-political stability; the implication is that for real socio-political development to take place in a multi-ethnic state/political system, efforts must be made to create a political atmosphere that will boost the confidence of every group in the political system, hence the adoption of an inclusive socio-political system that will guarantee the inclusion of the views of every group in the national debate as well as political representation.

Nigeria is no doubt a country with a multi-ethnic complexity; a complex one in terms of socio-political administration. Therefore several political and economic policies have been adopted to manage its ethnic cleavages such as the structural division of the country into 36 states to prevent one ethnic group from dominating others and to ensure the socio-political and economic protection of the smaller ethnic groups. Apart from the structural division of the country into states, other mechanism adopted to ensure the participation of all ethnic groups in the decision making process is the principle of federal character and power sharing.

The Principle of Federal Character

The quest for national unity and ethnic integration particularly after the civil war of 1967-1970 led to a concerted effort at establishing an inclusive institution that will allow every ethnic group to be fully represented at national level. The belief is that such socio-political engineering will help to reduce or even prevent ethnic conflict and engender ethnic balance as well as socio-political and economic development; hence federal character as a socio-economic and political arrangement transcends ethnic loyalty and symbolizes the aspiration for national unity.

Federal character is a distributive principle which is aimed at preventing the domination of government, and its resources by people from only one group or a few, it is geared at guaranteeing every group's access to power and resources. Onyeorzi cited in Adegosun (2011) sees it as a quota system or ethnic arithmetic formula elsewhere. Federal character is an integrative protection mechanism aimed at ensuring equal representation of Nigerians, regardless of their ethnic affiliation in or distribution of socio-economic and political powers among all the various
ethnic groups in the country. Put in another word the principle of federal character calls for equitable representation in all arms of government especially in the executive arm of governance in order to correct ostensible distortions in the Nigerian federal system. These distortions have been apparent in the socio-political, economic, educational, administrative and other spheres of the polity.

However federal character can be viewed in two perspectives; as a concept and as a principle (Osaghae 1988). As a concept, it refers to the complexity of Nigeria’s ethnic composition in terms of language, culture, historical diversities, cleavages that constitute the country. As a principle, the policy seeks to relate the structural integration of every ethnic group through socio-political balancing formula in the composition of government and its various agencies. Considering the reorganization of the old regions into states, it means the unit of distribution of socio-political goods/offices would be the 36 states within the federation. Put in other words, the principle would guarantee equitable representation of every state in the polity.

According to Adeosun (2011), its informal origins date back to the pre-independence era of nationalist struggle for participation in the administration of colonial Nigeria and especially after Nigeria became a Federation in 1954, its informal application was concerned with legislative representation and equalization of inter-regional opportunities in education and appointments at the Federal level. The principle of federal character as defined by the 1979 Constitution, section 14(3), means that the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few state or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies. It also appears in section 14 (3) of 1999 constitution. In other words the principle seeks to ensure that appointments to public service institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the country.

It can be argued here that what informed the adoption and application of federal character principle was partly influenced by experiences of the 1950s through 1960s and 1970s when the county’s socio-political affairs was marred by inequalities in the distribution of socio-political power, wealth and status, and domination and oppression by bigger ethnic groups and other sectional groups and the fact that all ethnic groups no matter how small or big, economically poor or educationally backward needed to be given a fair share of socio-political representation through which national integration, national unity, and a sense of belonging to the country notwithstanding the diversity of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion would be promoted. Undoubtedly, the rationale behind the introduction and adoption of this socio-political and economic strategy is a laudable one. The reason is because it discourage socio-economic and political imbalance within the polity and possibly stems down bias in policy making process.

However the unfortunate thing about this laudable mechanism is the fact that the political class – a relatively small group of people that is aware and active in politics and from whom the national leadership is drawn – have reverted it, incorporating the principles of socio-political strategies for regional, geographical, religious, and ethnic and sub-ethnic balancing at both federal and sub-federal levels. This class in Nigeria has, in a sense, cultivated alliances whose primary interest is their socio-political gains through the manipulation of ethnicity. What has been the bane of the realization of the objectives of federal character has always been the selfish interest of the old major ethnic groups in the federation. This is because the principle seems to have favored the tripartite ethnic groups in the distribution socio-political and economic goods, thus making the policy to be counter-productive in some areas.

The principle of federal character brings to notice the need to put into consideration, the multi-ethnic nature of the country vis-à-vis the equitable representation and ensure the inclusiveness of every ethnic group in Nigerian government. Meaning that just as the socio-political and economic rights of the majority ethnic group is important and needs to be protected, so also the socio-political rights of the minorities in the country needs to be recognized, protected and constitutionally promoted for socio-political sustainability and development. One needs to quickly point out that prior to the re-engineering of the country into its present 36 states structure, it was the dominating forces of hegemonic nationalism which featured politics of exclusion on the part of the regional leaders particularly leaders of the majority groups through which the minorities were shut out of socio-political and economic power in the regions as well as the center that actually made the minorities to resort to disagree with the operation of the political system and to seek for redress in Nigeria polity. In section 147 (3), the 1999 constitution on the principle of federal character, states that the president in conformity with the provisions of section 14 (3) shall appoint at least one minister from each state of the federation.

This explained why every state of Nigeria federation is represented in the executive arm of the government. This has however been criticized on the premise that it will give room for mediocrity in governance and further lead to disunity where a particular group/state is under-represented at the center on one hand and on the other hand, some group may not be contended with the position giving to them. For example the people from the Niger Delta believe they should be allowed to head the petroleum ministry since petroleum is from that part of the country. Notwithstanding, the adoption of the principle has help to curtail conflict over distributive socio-political and economic resources in the country. The table below further explains this submission.

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Table 1: Composition of Nigeria cabinet by zones, 1979-2011

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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>S/W</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The figure for 1979-2004 was adapted from Mustapha (2006: 19) and the figure for 2007 was adapted from The Nigeria Tribune Archive. Available at www.tribune.com.ng (accessed March 26 2010). While the figure for 2011 was adapted from Kalahari Media. Available at http://www.africanoutlookonline.com (accessed April 14 2011). N/W= North West, N/E= North East, N/C= North Central, S/W= South West, S/E= South East and S/S= South South.

Significantly, the administration of federal character has helped in the sharing of socio-political power cum distribution of distributive resources among the various ethnic groups big or small thus preventing the polarization of the country along the tripartite ethnic groups and as well curtail relatively, conflict over distribution of socio-political resources.

The application of the principle also extended to other areas of Nigeria national life; in section 223 (1) (b) of 1999 constitution, it is stated that members of the executive committee or other governing body of the political party shall reflect the federal character of Nigeria. Likewise in section 171 (5) state that the president shall have regard to the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity while appointing persons to such office such as (a) Secretary to the Government of the Federation (b) Head of Civil Service of the Federation (c) Ambassador, High Commissioner or other Principal Representatives of Nigeria abroad (d) Permanent Secretary in any ministry or Head of Extra – Ministerial Department of the Government of the Federation and any office on the personal staff of the President.

The incorporation of the principle of federal character in Nigeria constitution is reflected in the composition of the federal cabinets. For example, by 1960 the North was having 60% of the Federal cabinet while the Yoruba, Igbo, Niger Delta and the Middle Belt had 20%, 13%, 6.7% and 0% respectively. However the situation changed in 2007 with the following pattern North 40.4%, Yoruba 21.4%, Igbo 11.9%, Niger Delta 14.2% and Middle Belt 11.9%. See table 2 below:

Ethno-regional composition of Nigeria cabinet in percentages, 1960-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regimes</th>
<th>Hausa/Fulani</th>
<th>Yoruba</th>
<th>Igbo</th>
<th>Niger Delta</th>
<th>Middle Belt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balewa, 1960</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gowon, 1967</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muritala, 1975</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shagari, 1979</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buhari, 1983</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obasanjo, 2004</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yar’dua, 2007</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodluck, 2011</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The figure from 1960-2004 was adapted from Mustapha (2006:21) and the figure for 2007 was adapted from The Nigeria Tribune Archive. Available at www.tribune.com.ng (accessed March 26 2010).The figure for 2011 was adapted from Kalahari Media. Available at http://www.africanoutlookonline.com (accessed April 14 2011). Under Decree No 34 of 1996, it is an offence for any ministry or government agencies, if the recommendations of Federal Character Commission established in 1996 is not implemented, the commission under
this Decree can take any legal action against any government agencies that fails to follow these principles. It should however be stated here that as good as the system is, the problem of exclusivism in Nigeria political system persists. Fundamentally, the principle has been politicized, thereby encouraging group cohesion and ethnic consciousness.

The functionality of the principle no doubt is to bridge the socio-economic and political gap within Nigeria polity but the policy has been allowed to invade the integrity and standards of governmental bodies normally required to safeguard the country from the ravages of ethno-party politics as well as jettison merit for mediocrity. Therefore the key to dynamic and functional socio-political policy still lay with unfettered democratic and inclusive governance that will incorporate every ethnic group; origin, culture, religion notwithstanding as a prerequisite to the pursuit of sustainable socio-political development.

However there are still problems associated with the application of the principle; scholars have come to agree with the fact that the principle place more emphasis on inter-state relations and not inter-ethnic relations as a result of which the socio-political and economic tensions among the ethnic groups within the states are neglected. The system is also perceived to be discriminatory and since the system is trying to bridge the gap between the various ethnic groups, and for the fact that the sharing of power through federal character is based on state and not ethnicity; the system is thus considered to be inadequate and perceived to be empowering the majority more and more thereby creating wider cleavages between the various ethnic groups.

Federal Character no doubt is aimed at redressing the historical imbalance and integrates the various ethnic groups in the country. It must be stated here that significantly, the operation of this policy has miffed some section of the country particularly the minorities. Adeosun (2011) argued that notwithstanding the laudability of the principle of federal character, the wide gap between intent and actual practices is making it counterproductive. It is interesting to note that the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) has always been headed by the northerners as well as the ministry of defence, interior, mines and power (Adeosun 2011:7-8). This has since reignited the debate about the applicability of the principle of federal character; this is because the appointment tended to tilt in favor of a particular section of the country. More so it’s been regarded as a ploy to ensure the continued safeguard of Northern interest in the scheme of things. To some extent the principle has proved to be inadequate for effective national integration because it discriminates against one group and favor another.

Significantly one can argue here that ethnicity is not in itself a dangerous phenomenon in a plural society but what makes it dangerous is when there is socio-economic and political discrimination against one ethnic group, the result of which is conflict over the allocation of these socio-economic and political resources. Hence the construction of how best to prevent or minimize conflict in the country; thus considering the spread of leadership structure in the country of which one ethnic group is considered to be dominating others and to diffuse the flame of conflict this may generate, the power sharing formula was introduced as a mechanism to balance the socio-political demands of groups and to reduce conflicts in the country.

The Principle of Power sharing

It is significant to note that fifty three years after independence, Nigeria still battles with one of the major fall-outs of federal system, the politics of trying to appease all sections of the polity. It is interesting to note that one part of the country has always had the lion’s share in the political arrangement of the country which has made other ethnic groups to feel embittered. Looking at Nigeria from independence to date one would discovered that out of fourteen heads of states – Civilians and Military – that have ruled Nigeria nine of them are from the North, two from the West, one from the East and one from the South South. Adeosun (2011) argued that the appearance of some southerners as heads-of state was fortuitous. For example Obasanjo came into office in 1976 as a result of the assassination of incumbent head of state (Murtala Muhammed) and Ernest Shonekan headed the Interim National Government in 1993 both from the West. The death of President Musa Yar’Adua led to the emergence of Goodluck Jonathan as president in May 2010 and later elected in 2011.

Without any point of contradiction there have been divisions between the various ethnic groups that constitute the Nigeria state over the allocation of socio-political power. What this implies is that every ethnic group wants to be recognized within the polity. To ensure that no one group dominates the apparatus of government, Nigeria since the emergence of democratic rule in 1999 has adopted measures through which every ethnic group can be accommodated within the polity. Conceivably, one can point out here that the success of conflict management depends solely on institutional apparatus established to manage and regulate inter-ethnic relations which inform us that a system can either be stable or unstable (Olugbade, 1992). Thus political stability or instability can be influenced by the effective or ineffective of the socio-political institutions on ground. In essence the stability of a state is a dependent variable of political institutions on ground. Therefore considering the nature of ethnic pluralism in Nigeria, a well-managed socio-political system adopted, created or modified must be on ground to ensure a result-oriented ethnic relations. This informs the reason for which the system of power sharing has been introduced into
Nigeria political system considering the strings of ethnic groups in the country who would not allow themselves to be sidelined within the polity.

As stated above, in order to diffuse the flame that ethnic loyalty may create or have created within the Nigeria polity, and to ensure a better participation of all the ethnic groups in all spheres of government, the policy of power sharing was introduced. Power sharing can be described as a political formula adopted to ensure the protection, representation and participation of every ethnic identity in decision making process in a multi-ethnic society. Lijphat (cited in Awopetu et al. 2012) sees power sharing as a set of principles that when carried out through practices and institutions provide every relevant identity group or segment in a society representation and decision making abilities on common (socio-political) issues and a degree of autonomy over issues of importance to the group. In essence it is an accommodative strategy. The rationale behind this strategy can be viewed as laudable; this is because it discourages sectional/regional imbalance as well as bias in formulating socio-economic and political policies. The basis for power sharing in a multi-ethnic society if embraced and properly implemented is to minimize as much as possible, democratic competition within acceptable boundaries in order to avoid intergroup violence that would have resulted from socio-political differences, opinions and demands along ethnic lines (Awopetu, 2012).

However the principle of power sharing has been subjected to both academic and political debates. The debate on power sharing can be viewed in two perspectives: conflict management theory or democratic theory (Jarstad cited in Cadeado and Hamela, 2009). From conflict management theory perspective, power sharing is viewed as a means through which ethnic conflict is put under control; if possible, end the conflicts by involving every ethnic group involved in such socio-economic and political conflicts in a government. In democratic theory, power sharing place value on democratic representation of every ethnic group and electoral practices.

A line can thus be drawn here that the two theories lay emphasis on political sphere where value is placed on inclusive government in a multi-ethnic state as an important feature in power sharing. In essence power sharing is a socio-political expression that defines the form a joint government will take in order to prevent the occurrence of ethnic conflict in a multi-ethnic society and also to diffuse the mutual suspicion and fear that one ethnic group would gain socio-political and economic power over others. Informing us that power sharing can be seen as a socio-political arrangement to accommodate these mutual fears and suspicion, Nakabahona (cited in Cadeado and Hamela, 2009) however points out that considering its threat to democracy, the time limit of power sharing is very important. As the case of Nigeria where an elected political office holder particularly the president and the state governors are expected to stay in office for a minimum period of 4 years and maximum period of 8 years. It should however be noted that power sharing is not restricted to political spheres as the case may be in Nigeria; it encompasses non-political spheres such as religion informing us the reason for which a Muslim president always have a Christian as vice and vice versa, hence the recognition of the principle of power sharing as a mechanism for managing ethnic conflict, the product of which is expected to be national cohesion. National cohesion is a binding power of a country; it is considered to be very germane to socio-political and economic stability and governance. Oyovbaire, (1984) conceived that notwithstanding how people came together in the first place or were brought together, national cohesion is simply an acknowledgement of the minimum need to resolve the problems of social existence.

Power sharing formula as seen by theorists is considered to be an ideal strategy for avoiding ethnic conflict and achieving a measure of democratic governance in a multi-ethnic state. What this suggests is that political decentralization gives room for greater political participation. However Keller (2002:22) notes that there is no guarantee that these approaches will work in all cases, but once put in place, administrative and inclusive political institution can be mobilized and manipulated by the political class in an effort to achieve the desired end of civic peace and cooperation, albeit in the context of extreme social diversity. Power sharing is a socio-economic and political formula/mechanism that place value on the accommodation of every ethnic group in a pluralistic society. Meaning that the mechanism can be functional both for sustainability of peace as well as good governance that engender socio-political and economic development depending on the premise for which it is practiced. This is because it encompasses other ethnic groups whose identity cannot be whisked away but also represent potentials for power sharing.

Sisk (cited in Awopetu, 2012) suggests that there are certain socio-political conditions under which power sharing arrangement work out in achieving success towards managing ethnic conflict in a multi-ethnic society which are: the system must be embraced by all genuine political leaders representing each ethnic group, the practices must be flexible and allowed for equitable distribution of resources, the system is indigenously arrived at, not agreed on as the result of too-heavy external pressure or short term, zero-sum expectations of the parties and parties can gradually eschew the extraordinary measures that some power sharing practices entails and allow a more integrated and liberal form of democracy to evolve.

Before the flag independence of 1960, there has been a sort of discourse on this issue, the root of which lies in the administrative federalism and eventual division of the country into Northern and Southern protectorates. The emergence of federalism in 1954 with the Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West and the Igbo in the East.
as the three dominant ethnic groups created an avenue for the minority groups to be dominated politically and economically. For example the population distribution of 1952/53 that produced the division of the country into constituencies gave the North 167 seats out of 312 in the Federal House of Representatives, each of the dominant groups produced ethnically based political parties, the AG in the West, NCNC in the East and the NPC in the North.

This made competition for state power to be controlled and dominated by the three major ethnic groups forcing the minority groups to depend on the majority for survival. In essence the disjointed political nature of Nigeria, ignited various ethnic conflicts through which ethnic biases were produced, the effect of which is still in every facet of Nigerian government socio-economic and political life.

The motive behind the adoption and operation of the principle of power sharing is that the mechanism sees in every ethnic group the platform for which every ethnic group in the country can and have a say in the administration of the country as well as demand for a fair share of socio-political and economic resources. In essence it will make provision for a constitutional platform within which the various ethnic groups in the country can articulate and present their demands.

Before the civil war of 1967-1970, power sharing system was informed by what Lijphat (1968) referred to as consociationalism; an institutionalized form of democratic governance to manage ethnic conflict in a pluralistic society. A system of government that socially, economically and politically accommodates every ethnic group in the country. One major component of consociationalism is grand coalition, an inclusive socio-political system. With this system it means inter-ethnic harmony and socio-political integration can be achieved through unfettered accommodative democratic system even in a deeply divided society like Nigeria. However the designer of such institution must put into consideration and of a necessity recognize the role and importance of each ethnic group as the platform through which social political development can be achieved. In essence, consociational theory regards power sharing as a necessity in an ethnically divided society. However the most serious obstacle to power sharing in ethnically divided Nigeria is the presence of a strong majority that prefers pure majority rule to consociational governance, which informed the reason for which federalism was adopted in Nigeria in an attempt to promote group autonomy but its faulty application has made it a problem to socio-economic and political sustainability of the country.

Group autonomy is viewed as constitutional provisions for group’s management over their socio-political affairs within the legitimate sphere of responsibility to the central government; here the central government performs a supervisory role to ensure the protection of every group, however this could not be properly managed as a result of the over concentration of power at the center.

Thus the principle of power sharing in Nigeria can be considered to be a source of political stability based on the fact that under explodable ethnic cleavages, a majoritarian system may not be applicable, hence preventing the danger of creating a permanent minority groups through the politics of winner takes all. In essence power sharing arrangement has the advantage of ensuring socio-political stability and ensuring that groups that would have engaged themselves in conflict understand each other’s interests, differences as well as develop a socio-economic and political system that will enhance good governance. The argument is that under power sharing mechanism and considering the division of the country into six geo-political zones of North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East and South South; it means that at least the top echelon of Nigeria polity would be shared on the basis that will reflect the unity of the country. This is explained further in table 3.

### Zonal power sharing arrangement in Nigeria from 1979 till date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Obasanjo’s regime</th>
<th>Yar’dua’s regime</th>
<th>Goodluck’s regime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>South West</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>South South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>North Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>South South</td>
<td>North Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate President</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>North East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker H/R</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>South West</td>
<td>South East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>South West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S G F</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>North East</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Service</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td></td>
<td>South East</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Awopetu et al. 2012: 15. S G F = Secretary to the Government of the Federation. Obasanjo was the president between 1999 and 2007; Yar’Adua occupied the position from May 2007 to February 2010. Goodluck constitutionally became the president after the death of Yar’Adua and was elected as president in 2011.
This can be explained further by looking at the zoning formula adopted by the ruling party (Peoples Democratic Party) in the country as an instrument of ethnic conflict management. Nigeria no doubt is a federation and also a divided society. The only known practical and political formula that accommodates its ethnic division and diversities is the power sharing/zoning formula. Through zoning formula the problems of divided society can be averted. Zoning formula is a political strategy through which political offices are shared in such a way that all ethnic groups would be involved in governance. This strategy has since been used effectively since 1999.

Simbine (cited in Awopetu et al. 2012:12) notes that zoning formula seems to fit into the heterogeneous and federal nature of Nigerian state, thus helping to accommodate all groups as much as possible and therefore reducing complaints of domination and marginalization. In essence, it makes the political system more inclusive instead of it hitherto exclusive nature. Awopetu et al. (2012) observes that the importance of zoning in Nigeria political system is informed because it is a phenomenon used to ensure the continuity and socio-political integration of the various ethnic groups in the country. The formula no doubt serves as a balancing mechanism over conflicting socio-political demands of every ethnic group. Significantly, the zoning strategy has in no small measure stemmed down the struggle for political offices to intra-ethnic affairs and no longer making it inter-ethnic business. Therefore a long period of peace and stability in multi-ethnic state of Nigeria is a function of effective and sincere implementation of the principle of power sharing as a mechanism for ethnic management in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria like India, Canada, Malaysia, Ghana, Gambia; is one of the countries in Africa that owe her existence to the imperialistic activities of Britain. The pursuit of British economic ambition and expeditions through conquest crystallized in the rather artificial creation called Nigeria subjugating people from diverse culture, traditions and ethnic nationalities and organized them to construct the Nigerian state. The artificial origin Nigeria coupled with other socio-political and economic factors, bequeathed it a number of fundamental problems, which has turned to be a challenge to its socio-political and economic development. On one hand, Nigeria has since been battling with the socio-political problems which stemmed from the lop-sided nature of the political divisions of the country; and on the other hand the uneven economic development and the type of the existing federal system and the spirit in which it is operated, hence the question of exclusivism rocking the unity of the country.

Nigeria returned to democracy on May 29, 1999, after almost three decades of military rule, and faced with the complex challenges of national cohesion and ethnic integration. Although the political game has changed from the rule of the gun, to the rule of the vote, the long shadow of winner takes-all politics continue to loom large over the political process, fuelling frustrations and provoking ethnic violence over the allocation of distributive socio-political and economic goods. Each ethnic group within the polity seeks for the political space where they can exclusively lay claim to the socio-political and economic gains to the exclusion of others, an action which has been a distinct feature of the unfolding socio-political crises in the country. What this suggests is that to maintain a sustainable socio-political development in a multi-ethnic state every ethnic group and political parties as well; for peace needs to be included in governance.

Significantly, the contestations between various ethnic groups in a context of rising demands for political participation as well as socio-political goods where they have been excluded have largely led to communal, ethnic and even religious crises. This has shown that Nigeria is not only ethnically divided but also divided along religious lines with Muslims dominating the north and Christians dominating the south. Since 1999, the nature of inclusive governance has been a subject of debate considering the heterogeneity of the state. Even though the principle of federal character first came in through the 1979 constitution, its implementation since 1999 by successive administration relatively has helped to stem the exclusivity of the minority ethnic groups from political process. More so, the adoption of the principle of power sharing and zoning formula has helped to guarantee the continuity and socio-political integration of the various ethnic groups in the country. The formula no doubt serves as a balancing mechanism over conflicting socio-political demands of every ethnic group. Significantly, these strategies have in no small measure stemmed down the struggle for political offices to intra-ethnic affairs and no longer making it inter-ethnic business. Essentially, the adoption of these principles has shown that Nigeria’s very diversity may indeed prove to be the guarantee of its stability and moderation if properly managed.

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