

**“NATION AT COLLAPSE”: A REAPPRAISAL OF
NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA, 1967 - 2003**

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ABSTRACT

The concern for Nation-building as a policy of government to promote state development in societies with heterogeneous ethnic and religious divisions, characterized by political instability, conflict, underdevelopment, insurgencies and human development challenges is crucial. This study examines “Nation at collapse”: A Reappraisal of Nation-building in Nigeria, 1967 - 2003. This paper interrogates various policies and programmes targeted for achieving nation-building, failures, and challenges in Nigeria. Secondary data and historical method of analysis were used in this study. The paper argues that corruption, marginalization, mismanagement, inequalities, weak states, repression, exclusion; the illegitimate and lack of implementation of nation-building policies by the various past governments in promoting national growth and integration are the problems of nation-building in Nigeria. The study concludes that nation-building in Nigeria has proved to be an ambitious undertaking, which expectations are far from being realized. Thus to overcome this quagmire, the legitimate aims, and goals of nation building in Nigeria should be re-examined.



Key words: Nation at Collapse, Nigeria, Ethnicity, Leadership, Nation-building

INTRODUCTION

The vibrancy of socio-political and economic system as well as the educational institution of every society are dependent on the basic structures instituted in place. These structures are sensible and reasonable through the dynamic transformations traceable to good policy measures for nation-building process. In a sense, the performing institutions and the development of nations, though, varied according to socio-political and economic environment peculiar to them cannot be over-emphasized. Nigeria as the most populous black African country with heterogeneous society, enormous human and natural resources is undoubtedly found in the art and science of nation-building planning stultification/doldrum.

Nation-building in Nigeria is plagued with myriad of unavoidable shortcomings orchestrated within the nation's domestic environment. The business of nation building started and rests automatically in the hands of the Nigerian people since her independent in October 1, 1960, and republic in October 1, 1963. The prime concerns of the political leaders of Nigeria, among other things, were how best to manage the various institutions of government and the three major ethnic groups including the minority groups inhabiting the territory called Nigeria for sustainable development. For want of competence, efficiency and effectiveness, the independent Nigeria directly or indirectly allied with her erstwhile colonizer for technical, administrative and strategic supports and viability.¹

The post-independent politico-economic and social terrain of Nigeria produced much of distrust, suspicion and ill-feelings among the political leaders. The agreement or disagreement that accompanied post-independent Nigeria cumulated and climaxed in the outbreak of Nigeria's civil war. After the civil war, the desire to live together necessitated the 3R (Reconstruction, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation) for nation building.² More



entities that are corporate have been created and today, Nigeria has thirty-six (36) States and seven hundred and seventy-four (774) Local Government Councils.³ With more corporate units created, Nigeria now faced with the challenges of national cooperation and integration. The need for national growth and development coupled with the management of the varied ethnic groups in Nigeria necessitated the introduction of various programmes or policies encapsulated under the concept of nation building. However, Nigeria has lost its traction for nation building and exaggerated her efforts to actualize national development due to politics, socio-economic inequalities, ethnicity, corrupted process of recruitment of leaders, decision-making, self-egoistic, problem of leadership, bad governance, among others.

Therefore, looking at nation building in Nigeria, this paper shall be focusing on the ongoing introduction, the conceptual and definitional meaning of nation building, historical discourse of nation building, issues, problems and challenges of nation building, towards a dynamic approach to nation building and conclusion.

Definitional and Conceptual Meaning of Nation Building

Etymologically speaking, in discussing nation building, it is relevant to understand the meaning of 'nation' as a concept. The definitional concept of nation has attracted different meaning to different scholars to the extent that there is no generally accepted definition to the concept. According to Anthony and Ositadinma, a nation is a body of men, inhabiting a definite territory, who normally are drawn from different races, but possesses a common stock of thoughts and feelings acquired and transmitted during the course of a common history.⁴ In the definition above, different races to the concept of nation is suspicious of the understanding of a nation. To Polycarp, it is an organized body politic usually associated with a particular territory and possessing a distinctive cultural and social way of life.⁵ Arguing on the concept of nation, J. I. Elaigwu states that nation may be referred to three categories of human groups:



Firstly, it may refer to a stable, historically developed community of people with a territory, economic life, distinctive culture and language in common. Secondly, it may refer to “the people of a territory united under a single government; country, or state”. Thirdly, a nation may refer to “a people or tribe”.⁶

Consequently, a basic definitional statement by Ifidon is that nation is an aggregate of persons that have history, language and culture in common and are aware that they indeed have these features in common and act towards other aggregates on the basis of these commonalities, that is, “recognizing positive value among them”. He further asserts that the primary element in the concept of nation is the existence of a feeling of solidarity of peoplehood.⁷ Thus, nation as a concept is better described than defined. From the position of all the scholars to the understanding of nation in above, one could see territory, people and culture commonly observed. It is on that note that nation as a concept is involved with the feeling of affinity, shared identity and common destiny within a particular territory. It is therefore through the processes of nation-building concept that Nations set their goals, invariably achieved the goals and experienced better transformation.

Nation building in essence is the enhancement of the capacity of state institutions, and the building of state-society relations conducive for dwelling. In Western political science literature, nation-building is seen as the process whereby people transfer their commitment and loyalty from tribes, villages or petty principalities to the larger central political system.⁸ The aforesaid Western political literature’s position has been criticized by one profound non-Western political scientist. According to Elai gwu:

The process of nation-building does not involve the transfer of ‘commitment and loyalty’ from narrow or parochial level of ethnic groups to larger political units such as Nigeria; that you are an Ibo, a Yoruba, Efik, or a Kikuyu is a matter of identity. You cannot transfer it. You cannot cease being an Ibo or a Hausa



or a Kikuyu or an Efik simply because you so declare. For us, it involves the widening (rather than transfer) of horizons of identity of parochial units to include larger units such as the state.⁹

In conceptualizing the ‘transfer of loyalty’ as regards to nation building, Elaigwu further posits that nation-building has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension of nation-building is the progressive acceptance by member of the polity of the legitimacy and necessity for a central government, and the identification (as a result of widening horizons of parochial loyalty) with the central government as a symbol of the nation. On the other hand, horizontal dimension of nation-building involves the acceptance of other members of a corporate nation – a recognition of the rights of other members to a share of common history, resource, values and other aspects of the State paraphernalia which signified the sense of belonging to a single political community.¹⁰

Nation-building encapsulates the feeling that members of the polity are entitled to a share of ‘sweet’ and the ‘bitter’ in the process of political development. It is the widespread acceptance of the process of State-building, and the creation of a political community that gives a fuller meaning to the life of the State. By the strong sense of nation-building in which Nation has been explained, it simply means the process of reduction of the diverse groups within a State into one.¹¹ In the modern era, nation-building is conceptualized by the efforts of the recently independent nations, notably the nations of Africa to redefine the populace of territories that had been carved out by colonial powers or empires without regard to ethnic, religious, or other boundaries. It includes the creation of national identity such as flags, anthem, national days, national theatres, national stadium, national airlines, national myths etc.¹² The idea of national identity if deliberately constructed will assist in molding different ethnic groups and chauvinism into a State especially in a country with ethnically heterogeneous population like Nigeria.



Egharevba and Iruonagbe argue that nation building is all about promoting the collective well-being of the people through meeting their needs, interests and aspiration. While its hallmarks are the pursuit of liberty, social justice, progress and prosperity for the people by government and its institution; a product of conscious statecraft built by men and women with vision and doggedness, and not mere dreaming. They added that, nation building is always a work in progress: a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and reinvention.¹³ However, they conceptualized nation building into three categories:

Firstly, it is about building a political entity that corresponds to a particular territory based on some generally accepted norms, rules, and values, and a common citizenship. Secondly, it is about building institutions that symbolize the political entity- institutions such as the bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, civil service and civil society organizations. Thirdly, the quality of leadership hinged on transparency, accountability and openness

...¹⁴

Nation building in Nigeria is the application of adequate measures to rationalize the fact of history that Nigeria is a heterogeneous society composed by people with different ethnic, religious and cultural background but into achieving a formidable single political front and unity. In this sense, nation building is synonymous with national integration. National integration refers to the process of bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of a national identity. More so, it presumes the existence of an ethnically plural society like Nigeria in which each group is characterized by its own peculiarities and qualities but operate with the same territorial nationhood which overshadows/eliminates subordinate parochial loyalty.¹⁵ Ifamose on conceptualizing nation building and national integration states that both can be described as a conscious effort to wield together a



plural society so as to enhance development without necessarily jeopardizing ethnic identity.¹⁶

Since nation building or national integration captures the process of unifying a society without necessarily dissociating the existence of ethnic identity, it therefore means that nation building is a 'benign appeal' towards a collective social existence, progressively to co-ordinate an action in order to achieve some certain or agreed common goals with increasing degree of trust, predictability and the spirit of Nigerianism. But a question must be asked; does nation building necessarily involve the homogenization of socio-cultural and political identities? The answer is no, because, any attempt at simple replacement of the primordial ties and identifications by any one is sheer impossibility. However, compromise of adjustment is relevant to primordial influences so that the running of government can proceed fully without threatening the cultural framework of individual identity.

Consequently, nation building is an instrumental concept employ by the State to play a vital role in constructing and structuring vibrant institutional framework in the Country. Nation building of a particular note refers to the process of harmonizing a shared sense of identity and common destiny usually, to overcome ethnic, sectarian, or communal differences and to counter alternative sources of identity and loyalty.¹⁷ Its aims revolves within the attainment and achievement of unification – mainly on the people within the State so that there will be a politically stable and viable Nigeria.

Historicising Nation Building in Nigeria: A Discourse

As earlier observed, Nigeria at independence was bequeathed with politico-social and economic structure of sub-national affinity and loyalty. The Country's greatest challenge was how to wield together a unified national entity from the disparate communities whose members retain primary loyalties to smaller units and whose leaders see these ethnic and other divisions as an advantage to themselves and their followers. From independence to the



collapse of the first Republic, inept leadership, ethnic chauvinism, nepotism, favouritism, sectional discrimination and domination, various forms of corruption and the politics of winner-takes-all mentality facilitated by the institutionalization of ethnic political parties characterized Nigeria's political scene.¹⁸ By this period, nation building was a mere contemplation to Nigeria's leaders, however, if at all nation building existed, it was just like a fairy-tale.

The response of the first military government, under General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi and its promulgation of Decree NO.34 of May 1966 which replaced the federal system of government into unitary system of groups of provinces was greeted with violent criticism especially from the northern part of the country and many called for breakdown of the country.¹⁹ The demise of Ironsi brought General Yakubu Gowon into power. The disagreement between the Federal Military Head of State and the administrative military governor of the Eastern region caused the former to replace the Four-region structure in 1967 to twelve States. Supporting the creation of the Twelve States, the Federal Government argues as quoted by Ifamose:

With the creation of twelve states in Nigeria, the fundamental problems that threatened to dissolve a political association of over 30 years have been solved. It is clear that the States represent a successful attempt to reconcile conflicting interests of the ethnic communities with their desire to participate in the Federal process as one people. The new structure of States will provide the basic for wielding together the heterogeneous communities of Nigeria into a nation. The internal structure of the new States will curb the excesses of any ethnic group and ensure peace and stability.²⁰

The creation of states by Federal Government in part satisfied minority communities yearning, however, it did not solve the problems of nation building in Nigeria. It was partly due to the skewed management of the political, economic and social affairs of



the Country in connection to the nation building process that sparked off the attempted secessionist Biafra which eventually culminated to Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967-1970.

In line with nation building, the Federal Government after the war called for reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction (3RS) and reintegrated the secessionist Biafra into the Federal system of Government, thus revitalizing the sense of belonging and oneness. Following this step, a new currency (the Naira) was introduced, and de-regionalization of university education, which was formerly regionally based. Ife, Nsukka and Zaria universities were taken over by the Federal Government. The introduction of Unity Colleges across the nation as well as national sports festival boosted the spirit of unity in the nation's sporting activities that involve a lot of passion and concern of patriotic feeling among Nigerians.²¹

Considering States creation in 1967, the Federal Government has used 1967, 1987, 1991 and 1996 state creation as a tool for restructuring and creating some relative balance in the course of nation building in Nigeria. Mohammed/Obasanjo military regime set up the Justice Irikefe Panel in 1975 to study and afterward recommend on the question of state creation. By the panel recommendations, Akwa-Ibom and Kastina were created on 23rd of September, 1987. On 27th August 1991, the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida also created more nine states. General Sani Abacha through the committee on state creation headed by Arthur Mbanefo announced the creation of six states on October 1, 1996 that brought the number of States in Nigeria to thirty-six(36) and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. The justification for state creation was argued to base on the need for balanced federation, bringing government closer to the people as well as achieving evenness in development, and balancing the old principle of North-South dichotomy. Thus, the created states were spread across the six(6) geo-political zones in Nigeria namely; North-Central, North-East, North-West, South-East, South-South and South-West.²²



However, state creation manifested the low level of integration among the various peoples and communities that make up Nigeria. The contradiction inherent to state creation in Nigeria is far beyond the original aims and objectives by which the policy of state creation was initiated in the first instance. The policy target argues that:

Creation of states should seek to establish an institutional framework which would ensure rapid economic development among all ethnic groups, increasing participatory democracy as an insurance against political instability, promote and institutionalize a balanced and stable federation, and finally remove the fear of domination of the minorities which had tended to slow down economic and political development of the Country.²³

The continuous quest for participatory government and nation building necessitated the policy adoption of 'Federal Character Commission(FCC)' which has the 1979 constitution as its legal backing.²⁴ The FCC principle was hailed as an important Nigerian contributory policy to the search for inclusiveness and democratic stability of nation building in Nigeria. FCC principle stipulates and recognizes; the use of power-sharing mechanisms and practices to promote inter-ethnic inclusiveness, or discouragement of sectional imbalance and bias in decision making. It further provided that the composition of the government of the federation or of any its agencies, and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from any groups in the government and its agencies.²⁵ Furthermore, the commission according to Ifamose was empowered to promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principle of proportional sharing or distribution of all cadres of public positions and socio-economic service, amenities and infrastructural facilities throughout the federation.²⁶



As relevant as the policy of Federal Character Principle was proved to be through its aims and objectives, marginalization clamour continued to manifest day by day. The Northern elites alleged that the Yoruba and the Igbo dominated the civil service, central bank of Nigeria, and the presidency and they do not seem to be contented. They appear to be supplanting erstwhile British imperialism with ethnic domination.²⁷ Despite how laudable the FCC policy was captured in the nation building process, the policy was criticized by Nigerians owing to the politicization of the policy and unavoidable practice of favouritism apparent in the system.

In an attempt to achieve nation building and the reduction of the tendencies for sub-national loyalty, the promotion of wider interaction, cooperation and national cohesion after the Nigerian Civil war which ended in 1970, the Federal Military Government established the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) under Decree 24, May 22, 1973.²⁸ By the NYSC scheme, all young Nigerian graduates from 30 years and below are enlisted in a compulsory national service in a state other than the one they come from. This was targeted at national integration and conceived as a nation building initiative. However, the implementation of the scheme has been mired by favouritism in postings, selective treatment of corps members/discriminatory practices in post-service year employment opportunities in those states. Recently, there are outright hostilities, violence and murder of corps members to the extent that there are strident calls in the public domain for a rethink of the scheme or a need to revisit the NYSC enabling law to restrict their postings of enlisted graduates for national service to states within their zones or regions, but not to their state of origin. Predicated on these narratives, the NYSC scheme as a policy option for achieving nation building requires closer examination, as corps members experience outside their “states of origin” alienates them, instead of building loyalty to the Nigerian state.²⁹

Closely related to the effort towards nation building is the establishment of Unity Schools known as Federal Government Colleges (FGCs). The idea behind this is that young pupils in



formative and impressionable years from different parts of Nigeria with diverse ethno-linguistic and cultural backgrounds are admitted into these schools to learn, interact and understand one another and ultimately develop a sense of a truly united country.³⁰ It is important to observe that the utility or effectiveness of Unity schools as agencies of national cohesion and integration requires thorough scrutiny. Like the Quota system and the FC principle, the irregularities and in-built discrimination in its admission standards (different scores or cut-off marks for different states, especially lower marks for some states in Northern Nigeria regarded as educationally disadvantaged) has hamstrung the effectiveness of the programme. Based on that, there is need for strong appeal in contemporary Nigeria for greater commitment, objectivity, and unflinching resolve to the application of merit on the part of the governing and bureaucratic elites for the optimization of the potentials for nation building in this policy instrument. This becomes clearer and appreciable in the light of the truth that “... state elite who preside over these policies are breeders of nepotism and tribalism rather than patriotic and universalistic to Nigerian nation-state eagerly expected”.³¹

Still on course for nation building process in Nigeria, Justice Akinola Aguda’s Panel recommended for the relocation of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) from Lagos to Abuja on 12 December, 1991. The panel justifies its reason/s of relocation as follows:

- *That Lagos is incapable of performing a dual role as a federal and state capital due to the problem of inadequate space for development commensurate with its status.*
- *That the city is identified with predominantly, one ethnic group and by implication does not provide equal access to Nigeria’s great diversity of cultural groups.*
- *That a new capital is desirable that would be secured, ethnically neutral, centrally accessible, comfortable and healthful and possess adequate land and natural*



resources to provide a promising base for urban development, and

- *That a new capital is needed as a symbol of Nigeria's aspiration for unity and greatness.³²*

Literally, the decision for the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) location in Abuja was meant to enhance nation building. The federal government explicitly asserts that, “one way of forging ahead the idea of unity of nation is by building a capital city which will belong to every Nigerian, where every Nigerian will be rest assured that he has opportunity to live in parity with every other Nigerian and where no Nigerian will be regarded either in law or on the fact as a native foreigner”.³³ Unfortunately, FCT relocation was castigated as an indirect Northernization of the territory against the backdrop that Abuja was the name of an existing Northern emirate now called Suleja. It was alleged therefore that since FCT came to Abuja, all the ministers of the FCT are from North.

Nevertheless, many programmes and policies have been put in place for nation building process in Nigeria. Programmes like; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1979, FESTAC'77, War Against Indiscipline(WAI) of 1984, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure(DFFRI) of 1985/86, Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) of 1987, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2000, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) of 2003, Better Life for Rural Women, Vision 2000; Vision 2010, Vision 202020 , NEED, SEED to mention but a few.³⁴ Efforts for nation building also endeared Nigeria to embark on campaign considered as a genuine way to re-orientate Nigerians towards believing on themselves and to change the perception of the Country locally and otherwise. Recognizing and instituting democracy, rule of law, and equality among citizens will entrench nation building. Dora Akunyili as quoted by Olaniyi states that:

The campaign targets to re-orientate Nigerians to changing the negative attitudes of Nigerians, making



Nigerians to believe in themselves, inculcating optional spirit of patriotism on Nigerians and at the same time, celebrating our very best before the comity of Nations, returns to the cultural values of Nigerians as a people ...³⁵

Furthermore, Akunyili posits that re-branding is an appeal to Nigerians, particularly the media to highlight the achievements of most Nigerians who had excelled in various fields. Re-branding to nation building at this point manifestly implies that the successes and downfall of building a greater Nigeria is the responsibility of every well-meaning Nigerian.

Issues, Problems and Challenges of Nation Building in Nigeria

The concern for dealing on the broad issues, problems and challenges of nation building as a policy to promote societies with multiple ethnic and religious cleavages, characterized by underdevelopment, political instability, conflict, insurgencies and human development challenges like Nigeria is critical. Supporting the above statement, S. P. I. Agi aptly observes that:

one of the shortcomings of nation building in Nigeria is undisputedly traceable to what is described as a “tri national state structure”, ... the competition for control of political, and socio-economic power featured with different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, and heterogeneous minority groups agitations have mired the achievement of nation building.³⁶

In response to nation building, states were created in 1967, 1976, 1987, 1991 and 1996, however, state creation developed new majorities and minorities in the political space of Nigeria. The new majorities did not in the view of the new minorities behave differently from the existing Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba rhetoric instead, it went on to jeopardize nation building.³⁷

Nation building in Nigeria has been bedeviled with inept leaders and politicians who lack strong patriotic and clear-headed leadership expertise. For example, Tanzania had Nyerere and has



maintained him in power even in death; China has Mao tse-Tung who provided the ideological focus for Chinese people for nation building; South Africa is proud of Nelson Mandela who was still been revered even in death; In Zambia, there was legendary Kenneth Kaunda; Singapore will never forget Lee Kwanyao; Ghana respected Kwame Nkrumah; India held Jawaharlal Nehru in a position of near saint.³⁸ Regrettably, in the case of Nigeria, some may say that it had Murtala Muhammed as an embodiment of discipline, prudence, patriotism and leadership. But, apart from having tribal lords whose contributions were only regarded by their groups, very little they did outside their tribes, with due respect to their contributions. Nigeria's leaders and politicians are bereft of ideas on which direction nation building can be actualized. Politicians are envious of one another, hostility and vendetta dominate the political landscape instead of being adventurous and creative in their undertakings. This attitude, in turn, adversely affected the unity in diversity and purposeful development in terms of nation building.

Effort toward achievable nation building in Nigeria is impeded by the absence of "practical core national values and ideology". Nigeria's domestic policy failed to reflect the social needs and aspirations of an individual, group, class or culture. The ideology of moving Nigeria forward which would have anchored on ethics and powered by moral considerations proved otherwise; it is unfocussed, shifty, irrelevant, undetermined, self-serving, unproductive and dehumanizing. At the political level, the ethics and moral considerations of equity, justice, compassion, truth, respect and care for humanity that ought to be the guiding principles for the survival of Nigeria remain an instrument of political maneuvering. Hence in the context of modern-day Nigeria, the concept of nation-building unnecessarily failed to incorporate a form of revolutionary idea to a new ideology of cooperation, integration and partnership in the vanguard between the leader and the led such that the governors and the governed are seen as partners in the national project of governance and



societal development.³⁹ With the above points, Nigeria is inevitably found in a threshold to overcome its nation building challenges.

That Nigeria has no official working ideology, is an open secret that brings much worries to any meaningful Nigerian. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that Nigeria's core value shall be "unity in diversity" enshrined in justice and fair play.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the absence of practical national values is another bizarre challenge facing nation building in Nigeria. In effect, the question is, to what extent does the Federal Character Commission, Affirmative Action and Quota System reflected on the core national values which one of them is "unity in diversity" for the process of nation building in Nigeria? Ojie and Ewhrudjakpor assert:

The pursuit of the federal character principle has proved inadequate for effective nation building. It is argued to be at the heart of corruption among high office holders who see their appointments as privilege, not responsibility, and are primarily concerned about enriching themselves and their people. ...it subverted the principle of justice and fair play to the individual citizen, and sacrificed national progress and development on the altar of ethnic sectarianism as mediocrity took precedence of meritocracy in the conduct of nation building affairs.⁴¹

The Federal Character Principle failed to eliminate ethno-regional conflicts in the polity and this obviously affected nation building process in Nigeria.

Another related area of concern to nation building centered on federalism. Federalism is a system of national government in which power is divided between a central authority and its component units (states) with delimited self-governing authority.⁴² The constitution provided for federal system of government but federalism has faced stiff adherence. The issue of fiscal federalism has thrown some problematic and challenging questions such as, what is the appropriate and just basis for



sharing revenue? Should the federal government have the right to deduct monies due to states without their permission? Should states governments continue to control local government allocation? There is no clear consensus on the nature of federalism on whether one should define states unsentimentally or ethnically, just as some are demanding for more states for their groups, while others are satisfied with the existing 36 states, yet, others are arguing that the number of states should be reduced ...⁴³ Therefore, the principle of federalism that would have laid some contributory foundation for the federating units to capture a tangible infrastructural development unwittingly set the stage for the quasi-federal structure in Nigeria, where the centre is preponderant in authority, finance and control of resources hampers nation building. ⁴⁴

N. L. Njoko argues that resource control/revenue sources in a federal system of government like in the United States where states such as Texas, Oklahoma, Alaska, etc are free to use its oil production for its development and pay royalty to the federal government meant a lot for nation building. Unlike in Nigeria, the reverse is the case, where what is obtainable is resource allocation instead of resource control, and the federal government allots what it deems fit. The federal government wielded enormous powers that the states rather than being financially autonomous are appendages to the federal government.⁴⁵ Njoko further put forward that in as much as the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defined Nigeria as a federation consisting of States and a Federal Capital Territory underscores coordination not sub-ordination status of the federating units. Yet, inexplicably, the same Constitution went ahead to assign virtually all powers to the centre, leaving the units with a peripheral subordinate status.⁴⁶ Such lopsided federal structure of government in Nigeria is an aberration and can hardly promote the attainment of nation building.

Arising from the foregoing, inter-regional inequalities, intense competition for political power by the elite, weak states, politics of repression, exclusion, marginalization, widespread



mismanagement, rampant corruption and democratic governance deficits provoke discontent at the centre, which ultimately breeds resistance, violence and civil wars on the periphery. All these forces undermine nation building, undercut state construction, hinder national development and increase system collapse. In other words, failure of nation building occurs when the cultural projection of a nation is no longer convincing to many; there is no consensus on the cultural traditions, customs, symbols, rituals and the historical experiences- there is no 'usable past'. Nation building failure thus describes a process in which the requirements of normal politics, the social substratum essential for the acceptance of the majority and redistribution decisions disappeared. Nation building failure exists when the underlying willingness of the population to accept rules, decisions and measures adopted by a common government changed.⁴⁷

Nigeria has tried different political systems, implemented numerous economic measures, adopted various educational policies and evolved varieties of transformation efforts to facilitate the process of nation building over the time. However, the drawback development inherent to Nigeria in the form of increasing poverty, conflict, corruption, poor governance, materialism, weak institutions, political misbehaviour, general indiscipline and infrastructural weaknesses, among others, militated against genuine programmes targeted at nation building. The growth and development level of Nigeria due to its structure has continuously failed to correlate with the quantum of resources allegedly expended over the years. Arguably, the very slow progress being experienced in the country's nation building process reflected on the very factors mentioned above which include; disregard for ethics and morality in governance, leadership impunity, disrespect for agreements, bureaucratic dishonesty and self-centred attitudes. Such unethical behaviour and negative values have exerted serious consequential problems and challenges on the country's nation building expectations. Consequently, sixty years after independence, the country is still far from the point where trust and confidence between the people



of Nigeria could vouch for their country both internally and internationally.⁴⁸

Nation building in Nigeria has been affected by the identity politics. Identity politics that limited political, social and economic activities to a particular group with common aspiration, values and norms has derailed the policy programmes of national integration, thereby dislocated the concept of nation building that tries to diversify common identity and loyalty to sub-nationality. However, the introduction of Federal Character Commission, National Youth Service Corps, and Unity Schools etc to harmonize and promote nation building became more or less unimportant on the face of identity politics. This is because every Nigerian in the course of filling any official form usually identify with his or her state of origin. The filling of such form reinforces the issues, problems and challenges of identity crisis. The effect of identity politics is also made obvious on the operational activities of the Federal Character Commission, National Youth Service Corps, and Unity Schools, etc where the commission is bedeviled and overwhelmed by nepotism, favouritism, mediocrity, bribery and corruption.

Towards Dynamic Approaches and Strategies for Nation building in Nigeria

It is clear from the foregoing that there are some critical factors needed to be achieved for successful nation building in Nigeria. One of it is 'responsible leadership' anchored on the pursuit of a democratic development project. It is acknowledged that nation building has attempted to manage ethnicity for achieving vibrant political and socio-economic growth against differences and the perpetuation of insecurity, unrest, violence and conflicts in the country. The political class or elites in government are consistently required to manage the affairs of the nation and its resources in terms of providing the people with better living conditions.⁴⁹ They should adequately address the key fundamental issues that permeate the Nigerian State which include matters such as state creation, federalism, federal character principle/quota system,



devolution of power, minority rights, the conditions of tenure of public offices, revenue allocation/resource control, the form of government, balance of power between the three levels of government, among others.

Nigeria's existing democratic structures are not yet effective. There is urgent need to transform its extractive political and economic institutions that do not create incentive for the citizens to save, invest, and innovate. Power and wealth should not be concentrated in the hands of those controlling state apparatus. In other words, only those in control of or connected to those in political power are benefitting from the system. Effective law, order and economic incentive will encourage conducive environment. Since mankind's physical environments define their actions, attitudes, and beliefs, it should be expected that they cannot remain in a dysfunctional environment and expect good outcomes in what they do. As the "physical environment" affects the "physical life", so also will Nigeria's environment affect the quality of attention that its people will give to their actions. The system which is corruption-charged will undergo reforms, and that will affect the "nation building enhancement."⁵⁰

Leaders of developed nations are known to have continually shown their knack in managing difficult situations by crafting functional strategies that align with the culture of the society or organization they lead. When a society, a person, or an organization has a problem, the first instinct will be to find a solution(s) to the problems. A well-designed strategy is a symbol of action that will enable the authorities to achieve the desired goal, whether it is changing the behaviour of a people or engineering a social change. A strategy is a "game plan" to achieve one or more goals. It is a plan, a "how" and "a means of getting from here to there". Strategy is a solution to move from where you are now to where you want to be.⁵¹ Consequently, nation building should be seen as an engineering strategy by concerted effort of the intellectuals for under-development emancipation in Nigeria.

As mentioned earlier, Nigeria is facing a myriad of social, political, and economic problems. The fundamental causes of



Nigeria's failure of nation building are poor leadership and governance that have contributed immensely to non-functional infrastructure and institutions, low quality of education, and lack of practical skills and knowledge to drive the economy. There is no discernable change of attitude on the part of the leaders to address the shortfalls in the system; they are not willing to put their egos aside and listen to the people. They are mired in what has been branded "ego-system awareness".⁵² The political leaders appear to worry about the realities in the system only when there are serious national issues that threaten their own well-being such as the Corona-virus pandemic. Based on the aforesaid, the leaders should appear to have the skills and knowledge to design and implement effective strategies to resolve the issues. For instance, they should be able to tackle the infrastructural and institutional problems, improve the nation's standard of education, and rebuild the economy. The nation's system of education and that of the economy must align to make a difference in the life of the people. The political leaders should flip the lens around a little to work out ways to serve the public good. They should collectively "develop cross-sector platforms of innovation and leadership" for positive change in the country Nigeria needs a leader who is committed to leading the society to a bright and bold future. This is because political stability in any country comes with the development of the institutions and infrastructure that drive the economy, create employment, and take care of the people's needs.⁵³

In particular, Nigeria's nation building developers should not accommodate political and economic institutions that have concentrated political and economic power (or the wealth of the nation) in the hands of the corrupt politicians who are controlling the state machinery. In addition, Nigeria's democracy and the type of policies that come out of it should be designed to benefit the ordinary people, not only the political elite and their cronies, leaving the masses to make ends meet on whatever they could find. Thus, politics in Nigeria should create a level playing field that gives the people a voice in government and open the society up for constant social, economic and political awareness.⁵⁴



Related to politics and democracy is the issue of functional constitution. The civilian government should establish constitutional democracy instead of using some aspects of the constitution crafted by the military. This document lacks true democratic principles; it has limitations on the use of political power as well as the distribution of power in the society, and vests absolute power on the corrupt political leaders. Therefore, the basic political structure should discard the military mentality and the absolute power structure in Nigeria. Thus, with true constitutional reform, the diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups in the society should honestly come together to achieve a common purpose, that is, to create a positive socio-political change for the benefit of every group. Without this, the livelihood of the millions of ordinary Nigerians who are stuck in abject poverty will not change and Nigeria will remain underdeveloped.⁵⁵

It is equally pertinent to emphasize that nation building process cannot succeed under distorted value system and social structure. Social structure, according to social science literature, is the way a society is composed or organized, including the “social web of relations that regulate human interaction”. Nigeria’s national values in section 23 of the 1999 Constitution includes; discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism.⁵⁶ The social structure and values of a society determine its economic system and wealth distribution patterns, the effectiveness of its legal system and people’s quality of life. Also, the value system and social conditions determine the people’s attitude toward public resources and their social values. Thus, values are conceptions that guide the way individuals act and react to issues, evaluate people and events, and explain their actions. In addition, social values determine what people believe in (good or bad). However, values vary according to groups (religion, tribes, and ethnic groups). A person’s (or an organization’s) values define its “structure and purpose” and enable the individual or organization to determine what is important and meaningful. Some people, however, believe that social structure develops naturally, while others think the elites



who seek to control the economic system or institutional structure of a society socially create it.⁵⁷

Institutionalization of value system and social structure should spur the pace of nation building. Nigeria's social structure and skewed value system that appeared to have contributed to the failure of the many reforms agenda and visions in the society should be repositioned to capture the trend of development in Nigeria. In particular, the Vision 2020 and the re-branding campaign embarked upon some years ago, which gulped a huge sum (but had nothing to show for it) stands as critical example for re-examination of Nigeria's value system.⁵⁸

Another important aspect of nation building in Nigeria is the quick recognition to technological advancement. No society has become an industrialized nation without investment in technological development. The Asian Tigers could not have become what they are today without investment in technological development.⁵⁹ Any person who thinks that Nigeria can be transformed into an economic giant or power-house without technological capability must be living in a different planet. Therefore, Nigeria should not be an exception, hence, there is need for technology education. Nigeria cannot develop without advanced technological capability to spur innovation and increase individual and national productivity. This is to say that inclusive institutions will lead to the emergence of new technologies. Technological development is the engine that drives economic development as it engenders creativity, create employment and innovation, and thus economic growth and development.⁶⁰

Extrapolating from the above, and in a nutshell, to move forward, the politicians should shift their mental models, create inclusive institutions and develop the courage, political will, and commitment to enthrone positive change in the society. They should also give the people a voice in the political process. The political leaders of Nigeria should, therefore, create a unity of purpose and shared vision to move the nation forward. The quality of a government, and thus that of its leadership, determines the quality of its policies and how they enhance the quality of the lives



of the citizens. To prevent the rising discontent in the society from reaching a boiling point, Nigeria needs a political leader with an open mind, an open heart, and an open will to transform the education and health care systems and invest in functional infrastructure and inclusive institutions. All these will combine to empower the people and enhance individual and national productivity, without which the nation will remain perpetually underdeveloped, with its attendant social unrest and political instability. That, unfortunately, is the case with Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria has undoubtedly faced a myriad of political, economic and socio-cultural challenges in her nation-building process. Lack of implementation of policies, recalcitrant approaches to administrative functions and service delivery, corruption, lack of articulation of viable programmes, inequalities, leadership ineptitude have forestalled the advancement of nation building. The pervading multi-ethnic vices such as allegiance to ethnic groups, inter-ethnic antagonism, hostility, and aggression have drastically devastated various efforts at nation building. Thus, Ojie and Ewhrudjakpor affirm that:

Ethnic diversity has become an albatross, profoundly disenabling the realization of equity, impeding socio-economic and political development of nation building – such omen are characterized by conflicts of subordination, rebellion and hegemony, usually struggles for autonomy and freedom from exploitation, example Niger Delta.⁶¹

However, Nigeria introduced and underwent different measures such as regionalism, federalism, unity schools, FCC, NYSC, WAI, OFN, and other policies in her effort towards the realization of formidable nation building. Nonetheless, some factors and forces inherent to Nigeria's environment truncated much of her ingenuous policies and programmes at nation building since independence. Based on that, Nigeria may be said to have not attempted nation building process. What we have achieved at large



is “forced unity in diversity”, in other words, people unified by demonstrated unalloyed commitment for forced indissolubility. Nevertheless, all hope is not lost. There can be no gainsaying the fact that with those far- reaching recommendations highlighted above, if properly implemented, will serve to cement the unity and peace in Nigeria while on the other hand, ensuring that the “one Nigeria” mantra does not become a pure sarcasm.

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