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RESTRUCTURING NIGERIAN FEDERALISM FOR NATIONAL UNITY: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT: The calls for independence of Biafra in the South East, the struggle and restiveness for resource control in the South-South, the movement for Oduduwa republic in the South-West, the continuous killing by the Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram militancy for Islamation of Nigeria in the North, and the agitation by the Middle Belt for true federalism are all indications of the weakness of Nigerian federalism and its failure to address the interest of various ethnic nationalities and geopolitical zones. There seems no justification to proceed further as a federation hence the need for restructuring. This study is aimed to show the benefits and challenges of restructuring Nigerian federalism. Using secondary sources of data, the paper employs qualitative method of data analysis and utilizes theory of federalism as espoused by K.C. Wheare as its explanatory tool. The paper establishes that restructuring Nigerian federalism will usher in the opportunity of peaceful co-existence, national unity, power devolution and regional autonomy, economic development and good governance. The paper equally reveals that unwillingness of both the executive and legislative arms of government, ignorance of what restructuring entails as well as primordial interest are the major challenges thrilling restructuring in Nigerian federalism. The paper recommends urgent restructuring of Nigerian federalism to address the interests and aspirations of all the various ethnic nationalities and geopolitical zones in Nigeria for national unity.

Keywords: Restructuring, Federalism, Ethnic nationalities, Geopolitical Zone, National Unity.

Introduction

Nigeria is a federal state with over 250 ethnic nationalities (Mimiko & Adeyomi, 2005, p. 55). It comprises 36 States and 774 local governments federal structure including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. In this arrangement, arguably, there is imbalance and inequality. Iwuanyanwu (2017, p. 37) argues that it is the North who are the major beneficiaries of the injustice, imbalance, inequality in the system and they are the ones that want to maintain the status quo. According to Nwolise (2017, p. 14) the principal reason for a federation is probably to guarantee socio-economic and political expectations of the various ethnic nationalities and to ensure national unity, integration and cohesion. "When these gains are not coming over a period of time, the tendency may arise for them to pull out of the union especially when impunity, arrogance of power, injustice, exclusion, deliberate

neglect, marginalization, oppression and suppression are manifested by those in power". This scenario, as Ifesinachi (1998) posits is prevalent and continuous where there is absence of truly acceptable constitution and the inability of political leadership to come up with consensus political direction and policy capable of managing regional differences and conflicts. This is probably the reason why Pakistan broke up (with Bangladesh quitting), Ethiopia broke up (with Eritrea quitting), Yugoslavia broke up (with Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina et quitting), Sudan broke up (South Sudan quitting) (Nwolise, 2017, p. 14, Moghalu, 2017).

Regrettably, living up to the ideal of a federation has been so difficult in Nigeria. Some of the reasons for this are over centralization of powers, functions, and concentration of resources of the state within the custody of the central government. For instance, Nigeria's vertical federal revenue sharing formulae by levels of government shows that the central, state government and local governments receive 48.5%, 24.0% and 20.0% respectively with the remaining 7.5% left for special fund (Emeregini & Anere, 2010). The above imbalance in the revenue sharing formulae undermines the concept of resource control and makes it extremely difficult for strong federalism to thrive in Nigeria.

The perceived absence of strong federalism in Nigeria informed the National Political Reform Conference and Sovereign National Conference of both former Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan, respectively, to address many of the contending issues in Nigerian federalism. The implementation of the recommendations of these conferences have been neglected as intense agitations have continued to emanate from various sub-nationalities in different manners for negotiation of Nigerian federalism to reflect the aspirations and expectations of all groups and their states or zones. This is the essence of restructuring. However, Ogbuagu (2017, p. 6) avers that for Nigeria to achieve unity and peace in diversity and get higher values in the polity, restructuring is clearly a necessary condition as it will make for equality, equity and justice in the socio-economic and political spheres of the state.

The continuous clamour for restructuring of Nigeria has attracted divergent applications and implications among various ethnic nationalities and geopolitical zones. For instance, the South-East is pushing for a confederation; the South-West wants a restructuring that will reflect the previous regional federal arrangements, the South-South is asking for resource control, whereas the preponderant opinion in the North indicates sustainability of the status quo with insignificant amendments in the constitution. The disagreement among these ethnic nationalities makes restructuring imperative to address the structural deformities and defects in the Nigerian federation. On the basis of the above, this paper will focus on the benefits and challenges of restructuring Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The continuous agitations from various ethnic nationalities and geopolitical zones in Nigeria against the structural institutional and constitutional arrangements of Nigerian federalism are indications of the fact that Nigerian federalism is faulty. It falls below the ideals of strong

federalism as enunciated by Wheare (1953) and Nwabueze (1983). The greater centralization of power and concentration of resources at the centre is highly detrimental to the existing federating units and the sub-nationalities (Atiku, 2017). The problems relating to fiscal federalism, power sharing, resource control, state police, citizenship matter, seriously question the justification for the existence and relevance of Nigerian federalism. And the failure to address these issues has resulted to ceaseless agitations threatening Nigerian peaceful co-existence. Until these contradictions are resolved, the desired federalism would remain a mirage in Nigeria.

Most of our political leaders, who probably for their selfish reasons have been indifferent and reluctant on the clamour for restructuring of Nigerian federalism, would popularly sing that Nigeria's unity is not negotiable as if anybody negotiated its disunity (Nwolise, 2017). Hence, restructuring Nigerian federalism is a practical step to negotiate and discuss among the ethnic-nationalities and their respective geopolitical zones so as to reflect their aspirations, interests and expectations in Nigerian federalism for sustainable national unity.

Objectives of the Study

The research would be guided by the following objectives:

- i. To determine the benefits of restructuring in Nigeria.
- ii. To identify the challenges associated with restructuring Nigerian federalism.

Research Questions

The research questions include:

- i. What are the benefits of restructuring in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the challenges associated with restructuring Nigerian federalism?

Methodology

The paper employs documentary methodological framework. It utilizes secondary sources such as textbooks, journals, internet/online sources, among others. In reviewing related materials, it provides an incisive insight into scholars' dispositions on the subject matter. Qualitative analysis is made from the inferences drawn from the extant literatures.

Restructuring: A Conceptualization

Restructuring is a concept which has gained popularity in national discourse. It does not lend itself to a cheap explanation. It is vague in meaning and omnibus in interpretation. As acknowledged by Adeyemo (2017), restructuring is subject to different interpretations just as it is difficult to agree on what is to be restructured in Nigeria. In this vein, Adeoti (2017, p. 33) remarks that restructuring wears various faces, labels, tags and togas and means different things to different people.

Be it as it may, Bello (2017) avers that restructuring is more of a political concept. In this sense he sees it as:

A strategy used to reframe the power perspectives of the institutions and levels of government – the federal, state and local government. It covers issues ranging from creating and merging of state/local governments, resource control, regional autonomy, power devolution etc.

From the above definition, it is apparent that restructuring entails reordering of the federal structures in Nigeria based on issues relating to devolution of power, resource control, regional autonomy or autonomy of the federating units (States and Local governments). It, therefore, implies change of the status quo to pave way for equitable sharing of governmental powers (political, financial, administrative, legal, security etc) among the federating units in a manner that will reflect the aspirations and expectations of the ethnic-nationalities.

Similarly, Abubakar (2017) explains that restructuring within Nigerian context, means:

Effecting changes to our current federal structures to bring it closer to what our founding leaders erected in order to address the very issues and challenges that led them to opt for a less centralized system. It means devolution of powers to the federating units with the accompanying resource and greater control by the federating units of the resources in their areas. It would mean by implications the reduction of the powers and roles of the federal government to that it focuses only on those matters best handled by the centre such as defence, immigration, customs and excise, foreign policy, aviation as well as setting and enforcing national standards on such matters as education, health and policy.

Abubakar's definition seems to be informed by the knowledge of the 1960s and 1963s federal constitutions which presupposes reasonable autonomy by the constituent units in a federal state. The 1960 and 1963 federal constitutions as emphasized by Nwabueze (2017, p. 41) created appropriate platform or fora to renegotiate suitable governmental structures for the pursuit and realization of our common needs for development, good governance and national transformation. According to him, restructuring implies thus:

Reform of our governmental structures and to make a new beginning under a new constitution approved by the people at a referendum, a new political-legal order that will cleanse the country of the rottenness that pervades it and enable to chart a roadmap for its destiny.

The remarks above recognize the referendum as a good platform for a federal state. It equally recommends for a negotiable new constitution that will address the peculiarities of various groups and federating units.

From the foregoing discussion, restructuring presupposes a holistic reorganization and rearrangement of the existing structure of a political system for the growth and development of the polity. It is a strategy to reconcile differences among the ethnic-nationalities and address the injustices that are prevalent in the Nigerian federation. Restructuring connotes increasing the capacity and powers of the states or regions and their responsibility, and greater level of devolution of governmental powers in order to ensure a new political order. It is also important to note that the divergent opinions of scholars in restructuring Nigerian federalism have been classified into ten by Bakare (2017), which include (i) The Conservatives (ii) The Economic Structure Reformists (ii) The Non Structural Constitutional Reformists (iv) The Political System Reformists (v) The Devolutionists (vi) The State Creation Advocates (vii) The Resource Control Activists (viii) The Regional Federalists (ix) The Regional Confederalists (x) The Secessionists.

Table 1: Ten schools of thought in the restructuring debate

	The Schools	Arguments/Views	Proponents
1	Conservatives	Sustaining the systems and structures of governance advocates attitudinal adjustments	Olusegun Obasanjo (former President of Nigeria), Muhammadu Buhari (Current President of Nigeria), Tanko Yankasai, Abdullahi Gamdivje, (Kano State Governor) Aminu Masari, (Katsina State Governor).
2	The Economic Structure Reformists	(a) Restructuring the systems and structures of economic governance, (b) Diversifying the economy (c) Reduction of the size and Bureaucracy of government and (d) Promoting private sectors	Oby Ezekwesili (Former Minister, and Chief Campaigner of Bring Back our Girls (BBOGs)
3	The Non-structural Constitutional Reformists	(a) Amendment of the selected sections of the constitution (such as affirmative action, age reduction qualification into certain political offices, removal of Land Use Acts etc).	Mainly youths and women.
4	The Political System Reformists	(a) Advocates for constitutional changes in the governance process (such as the type of government, Kind of legislature and judiciary).	Chukwemeka Ezeife (former Anambra State Governor), Atiku Abubakar (former Vice President) Prof. Attahiru Jega (former INEC Chairman) Ibrahim Babangida

			(former military Head of State), Gen. Ike Ekweremadu (Deputy Senate President), Bola Alhmed Tinubu (former Lagos State Governor), Emeka Anyaoku (former Commonwealth Secretary), Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu (Politician/Elder Statesman)
5	The Devolutionists	(a) Makes case for ceding more powers to the federating units (like states and local government) (b) Resource control by the federating units.	South-East Leaders at the National Conference under Goodluck Jonathan administration.
6	The State Creation Advocates	(a) Canvassing for the creation of more states under regional arrangements, (b) Equitable allocation of both political and economic resources, (c) Advocates regionalism with multi state strategies	
7	The Resource Control Activists	(a) Outright resource control, (b) Total devolution and self-determination where necessary	Niger Delta Militants, like Avengers, Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND)
8	The Regional Federalists	(a) Advocates for integration of states along geopolitical zone lines for economic viability, (b) Strong federating units with adequate power.	Afenifere, Chief Edwin Clark (A foremost Ijaw Leader), Alhaji Balarabe Musa (former Governor of Kaduna State), Chief Olu Falae (former SGF)
9	The Regional Confederalists	(a) Regional or geopolitical zonal arrangement, (b) Strong regions and weak centres, regional autonomy	Dim Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu (Late Biafran Leader), Femi Fani Kayode (former Minister of Aviation), Ayo Fayose (Governor of Ekiti State), Prof. Ben Nwabueze and Senator Abaribe
10	The Secessionists	(a) Existence of sectional and socio-cultural identities, (b) Self determination (intensified by perception of marginalization, exclusionism and neglect).	Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (Leader of IPOB), Asari Dokubo

Source: Compiled by the authors and partly from the works of Tunde Bakare (2017).

Theoretical Framework

This work benefited from the theory of federalism. Kenneth Clinton Wheare is often regarded as the originator of the modern concept of federalism (Okoro & Nna, 1998). According to Wheare, federalism is the method of dividing powers so that the central and regional or state (component) governments are each within a sphere coordinate and independent. Federal government exists where the powers of government for a community are divided substantially according to the principles that there is single independent authority for the whole area in respect of some matters and that there are independent regional (state) authorities being coordinate with and not subordinate to the other within its own prescribed sphere (Wheare, 1963).

The foregoing note suggests the sharing of governmental powers between the central authorities and the regional governments (or federating units) in a manner that none is superior to the other. They are coordinating units all put together. Giving credence to Wheare's theory of federalism, Nwabueze (1983, p. 1) agrees that:

Federalism is an arrangement whereby powers of government within a country are shared between a national (nationwide) government and a number of regionalized (i.e. territorially localized) governments in such a way that each exists as a government separately and independently from the others, operating directly on persons and property within its territorial area, with a will of its own and its own apparatus for the conduct of its affairs and with an authority in some matters exclusive of all others.

The above implies that both the central and federating units are autonomous, separate and independent in their affairs unlike in Nigeria where we see the superiority of the federal government over the federating units. Hence, one basic character of a federal state as posits by Ekwonna (2012) is a clear cut division of power among the units.

Furthermore, Wheare (1963) writes that constitution is the basis of a federal state and should contain the terms of agreement which establishes the general and regional governments, and which divides powers between them and also binding upon these general and regional governments. The constitution is for logical necessity of the federal framework. In this direction, federalism is based on the constitutional division of power and responsibilities between the central and regional governments and each not being able to modify the division of authority unilaterally.

Applying this theory to our study, it is important to state in the light of the foregoing that the theory of federalism recognizes a clear constitutional share of power between the levels of government or devolution of power to the federating units. Lack of this is a source of dispute and conflict and can lead to breakaway or secession by the units of the union. This is the major cause of agitations for resources control, regional autonomy and threat of secession by

some aggrieved groups or ethnic nationalities. This underscores the need for restructuring Nigerian state which is hoped will guarantee an acceptable federal structure that will reflect the interests, aspirations and expectations of the different federating units and their ethnic nationalities.

According to Watts (1999, p. 110-111):

The function of the federalism is not to eliminate intense differences but rather to preserve regional identities within a united framework. Their function, therefore is not to eliminate conflicts but to manage it in such a way that regional differences are accommodated. But how well this is done in practice depended often upon the particular form of institution adopted with the federation.

It follows to say that restructuring Nigerian federalism will not only make for the recognition of the aspirations and expectations of various ethnic groups but will also create a balance between local identities and national unity, peace, stability and cohesion.

Besides, the theory of federalism has been criticized as legislative, fixed and static by scholars like Livingstone, among others (Ekwonna, 2012). That notwithstanding, it has remained an important theoretical lens for the understanding of principles of federalism.

Empirical Studies

The study carried out by Ayodeji (2018) examined the politics of restructuring and democratic stability in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The paper argued that restructuring is a product of post-colonial state and part of nation building process to ensure democratic stability. The paper further maintained that the recent clamour for restructuring by almost all geopolitical zones of Nigeria and the dimensions it has taken are indicative of the state of the general dissatisfaction with the institutional arrangements that have failed to meet the aspirations and expectations of the citizens. The study discovered that although the clamour for restructuring has been seriously politicized, the unresolved issues and contradictions in Nigeria show the dysfunctional nature of political and economic structure of Nigerian federalism which continuously threaten its democratic stability since the advent of the fourth republic. The paper recommended the resolution and peaceful address of various agitations through restructuring process. Again, it called for the anchoring of the restructuring process by the National Assembly and focus on devolution of power model as a way forward for promising Nigeria.

In another development, Atiku (2017) articulated the need for restructuring Nigerian federalism. According to him, the structure which Nigeria inherited was changed towards greater centralization of power and concentration of resources at the centre at the expense of the federating units. He argued that people have a constitutional right to peacefully agitate for restructuring as long as they have identifiable reasons. Furthermore, he argued that

although it is normal to have different positions on restructuring and restructuring will certainly contribute to national cohesion and good governance through power devolution, greater accountability and competition among the federating units, as well as promote fairness and bring economic development.

Similarly, El-Rufai (2017) looked at what restructuring connotes and the essence of it. The study observed the need for restructuring Nigerian federalism in view of the agitations and dissatisfactions among Nigerians different groups and states. He argued that Nigerian federalism is a historical phenomenon but the imbalance was created by the many years of military in power. After a careful review of All People Congress (APC) roadmap on restructuring and the key issues for debate, he agreed that Nigerian federation is unbalanced and in dire need of structural rebalancing and not wholesale abandonment of the existing political structure. In this case, El-Rufai made case for the preservation of Nigerian federalism with amendments and moderations of the constitution.

The work carried out by Ebiziem and Onyemere (2018) which was aimed at examining the Nigeria structure of federalism and identifying the factors affecting incessant agitating and determining for good governance argued that the calls for restructuring is borne out of some perceived levels of injustice, inequality and discontentment witnessed by Nigeria society as a result of bad leadership and faulty federalism which has brought myriads of socio-political and economic problems resulting to incessant fallouts between various regions, ethnic groups and federal government. The paper, based on its findings recommended for discussion, negotiation and consensus building in reconciling differences so as to ensure good governance through structural balance, nation building and national unity.

In the same vein, Moghalu (2017) examined the need for restructuring Nigeria in the light of Biafra's agitations. He argued that the present Nigerian federation makes nation building very difficult to attain. He further posited that the incidences of Biafra uprising and Boko Haram rebellion are indications and manifestations that restructuring Nigeria is inevitable. He concluded that ensuring true federalism through the process of restructuring will usher in greater accountability and transparency in governance, promote devolution of powers, economic transformation and development as well as prevent extreme ethnic and sectional chauvinism.

In line with the above, the former Vice President of Nigeria, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar forcefully argued that the present federal structure is a faulty unitary federalism structure which was created through military fiat thereby creating gross lopsidedness and inequality. He argued that it is only through restructuring that these anomalies could be resolved hence he recommended a federal structure that will ensure fair representation of all ethnic groups in an indivisible Nigeria, and autonomy to the federating units to decide on their priorities and peculiar challenges to ensure peace and unity (Obongo, 2018).

Another work carried out by Nwosumba and Ibiam (2017) critically looked at federalism and national question vis-à-vis restructuring Nigeria. According to them, restructuring Nigeria is expediently imperative as it is the only peaceful means to address national

question. They further argued that considering the turbulent and contradictions that engulfed Nigerian federalism, Nigeria is very due to be restructured to ensure that her federalism serves as an instrument of national integration, unity and development as it is obtainable in some other federal states, hence, they called for restructuring on the bases of equity, justice, inclusiveness, fair play and posterity.

Okafor and Obiorah (2017) examined regional agitations and the problem of national integration with focus on the need for state restructuring. Their study sustained the argument that the concentration of power at the centre is detrimental to the regions that feel that they have the lowest voice in determining political process. This is the major cause of regional agitations amounting to political instability. They discovered that the present structure of Nigerian federalism has remained a political instrument by the holders of power over the years in advancing their common interest. Based on their findings, they recommended among others balanced political atmosphere, state resource control and true fiscal federalism via restructuring.

In his work titled the way forward for Nigeria (2005), Olu Falae posited that restructuring reminds Nigerians the need to go back to independence constitution that was a product of the negotiation between the Nigerian leaders of the three regions (East, West and North) in Nigeria and British between 1957 and 1959 which gave considerable autonomy to the regions. He, however, called for the discarding of the Nigerian constitution in use which was made by General Sani Abacha and the military that favoured only one part of the country.

Background to Federalism and Restructuring Agenda in Nigeria

The evolution of Nigeria began with the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914 by Sir Lord Lugard who began with a unitary system of government. Like Lord Lugard, Sir Hugh Clifford perfected the unitary administration through his 1922 constitution. While the Richards Constitution (1946) recognized the diverse nature of Nigerians and the need to ensure unity and preserve their various principles and beliefs, it introduced regionalism into Nigeria through the constitution. The Macpherson Constitution (1951) elaborated the regional arrangement in Nigeria, granting greater autonomy to the regions, thus introducing quasi federalism into the country. However, the federal principle was consolidated into the country by the Lyttleton Constitution (1954) as it introduced three legislative lists – exclusive, concurrent and residual.

Prior to the Independence of Nigeria, the Northern Nigeria feared and criticized the Nigerian federal arrangement through their leader, Sir Ahmadu Bello who pushed for regionalism with semi-autonomous units. The consideration and implementation of this demand allowed each region to concentrate in the control of its resources and development of her region (Asuzu, 2017 cited in Ayodeji, 2017). This is a pointer to the fact that restructuring is important to ensure that federalism takes into account the peculiarities and circumstances of the ethnic-nationalities.

The ethno regional suspicion, dissent, intolerance, conflicts and differences that characterized Nigerian federalism in the pre-independence era which did not foster the expected national unity and integration informed the assertion of Obafemi Awolowo that Nigeria is a mere geographical expression, a mere country and not a nation. Against this background, he called for restructuring of Nigerian federalism to ensure a new Nigeria.

In 1960, Nigeria obtained independence with three regions: Northern, Western and Eastern regions. But contrary to the principles of federalism, the North was deliberately made larger than the East and West combined. In 1963, a fourth region – Mid West was created following agitations from the various ethnic groups within the area. This brought Nigeria to four regions federal structure.

The independence and republican constitutions of 1960 and 1963 respectively provided what Nwabueze (2017a) refers to as “a true federal structure”. This is because, both the federal and regional governments were coordinates in powers and none was subordinate to the other. In this direction, Ogunna (2003, p. 348) observes that:

The power and functions were shared in such a manner that the constituent units (regional governments) got a substantial share of powers, functions and financial resources of the federation. Each region had adequate powers to exercise enough government functions to discharge, and derived and appropriated fully the revenue resources from its area and jurisdiction.

In Continuation, Ogunna (2003, p. 141) avers that “the federation of Nigeria came under military rule for the first time under Aguiyi Ironsi. His regime was popularly known for the Unification Decree No. 34 of May 1966. This arose strong feelings of suspicion, fear and distrust in the Northern regions as they labeled it an-unlawful act and sought for a change in the federation through a referendum”.

The premature exit of Aguiyi Ironsi from power through a bloody coup d’etat brought in Yakubu Gowon on July 29. His administration sparked off the political crises that culminated in Nigerian civil war. As a strategy in the war, Gowon created 12 states (from the four regions) federal structure and gradually and systematically centralized the powers, functions and financial resources of the federation, leaving the states with little powers, functions and financial resources. This arrangement was consolidated through “Military Decrees No. 13 of 1970, which collected the bulk of the federally collected revenues to the federal government to deal with the post war problems, and “Decree No. 9 of 1971”, which gave the federal government alone all the offshore royalties and rents (Ogunna, 1999, p. 318). These Decrees marked the beginning of centralization of financial resources of Nigeria which in itself violates the principles of true federalism and a departure from the ideals of 1960 and 1963 constitutional federation arrangement. The 12 States federal structure created by Gowon was increased to 19 by Murtala Muhammed administration which was concluded by Olusegun Obasanjo, following the death of Murtala Mohammed in a bloody coup d’etat.

The first constitution immediately after the civil war was the 1979 Constitution. The constitution which was made under the watchful eyes of the military did not represent the ideals of federalism as the federating units were made weaker than the latter for the fear of attempted secession by any ethnic-nationality.

The 19 States structure was increased to 21 in 1987, and 30 in 1991 by Babangida's administration, and was later increased by Abacha to 36 States in 1996, whose administration ran between 1993 and 1998. Because of the experience Nigerians had from Babangida's administration and the fear that Abacha may succeed himself without any political transition programme, the clamour for restructuring became very high and championed by pro-democracy groups like National Democratic Coalition (NEDECO), the Pro-National Conference Organization (PRONACO) and the Patriots (Bakare, 2017). The frontline individuals of these groups emerged mainly from the Southern part of Nigeria including Chief Rotimi Williams, Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Chief Anthony Enahoro. Others included Prof. Ben Nwabueze, Prof. Wole Soyinka, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Ndubuisi Kanu etc. The pressure from these groups and some ethnic-nationalities eventually resulted to the National Constitutional Conference of 1994/1995 leading to the division of the country into 6 geo-political zones, although this federal arrangement was never incorporated into the constitution. By 1998, rather than continuing from where the 1995 Draft Constitution ended, Abdulsalemi Abubakar administration reverted to the 1979 constitution and concentrated power at the centre more than before. Thus, the 1999 Constitution has 68 items on the Executive list and 30 minor ones.

Today, Nigerian federalism is structured along 36 States and 774 local governments. Out of the 36 States of the federation, the South has 17 States, the North has 19 States. While the north controls 420 local governments including FCT – Abuja, the South has the remaining 254. Again out of the 360 House of Representative seats and 109 Senatorial seats, North has 189 House of Representative seats and 57 seats in the Senate, while South has 171 and 52 respectively, with the south east having the least of all these political resources (Durueburuo, 2016; Azom & Nwoke, 2017).

Commenting on the inequalities above, Anam-Ndu (2003) observes that “the 1999 Constitution is a blueprint of unitarianism in a country that is supposed to be a federal union of states. It is, therefore, the best meant to consolidate power in a hegemonic coalition of major ethnic groups and thereby impose the hegemony of one ethnic group on the rest of the country under the cloak of multipartisan”. The agitations emanating from these imbalance and inequalities have remained a threat to national unity and have spawned southern based campaign for regional power resource control and restructuring of the federation (Suberu, 2005). These among others are the major reasons for the National Political Reform Conference and Constitutional Conference organized by former Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan administrations respectively, whose recommendations have been jettisoned by the present administration under Muhammadu Buhari.

The Benefits

Restructuring presents a lot of benefits for Nigerians and the various ethnic-nationalities. For Nwabueze (2017b, p. 11) “restructuring would ensure an acceptable reformation of governmental structures to meet the needs and wishes of the people and ensures that the immense diversity of ethnic-nationalities comprised in the state will continue to co-exist together in peace, prosperity and progress as citizen of one country united by common interest, common aspirations and a common destiny. He further posits that restructuring Nigerian federalism will equally present a platform for people of different ethnic nationalities to renegotiate suitable governmental structures for the pursuit and realization of our common needs for development, good governance and national transformation”.

Nwabueze is impliedly making a case for peaceful coexistence, national unity, national integration and cohesion which are very fundamental for nation building. Put differently, a federation that does not reflect and represent the various interests and expectations of different ethnic-nationalities would not succeed.

Similarly, Abubakar (2017), corroborating with Nwabueze argues that restructuring Nigeria would devolve more powers to the federating units and transfer more resources to them. This will lead to decongestion of the centre and enhancing greater manageability, efficiency and accountability. There will be more clarity in the division of powers and responsibilities between the centre and the federating units and there will be reduction in the attention paid to the centre. In this arrangement, the federating units would have greater resources, authority and capacity to tackle localized problems with national impact. This would generally breed good governance and “help to evolve better culture and quality of leadership and foster competitive development (Moghalu, 2017) as it was in 1960s Constitutions.

The argument from the foregoing is that restructuring will present the opportunities of power devolution, regional autonomy, resource control, efficient administration and good governance as well as promote competitive governance and development.

The proponents of restructuring project in Nigeria have emphasized the need for regional autonomy and competition, particularly among the various ethnic-nationalities as each will try to do better than others. In other words, through restructuring, every region or zone of the country will be able to develop more thinking time, conceptualization of research, exploration and analysis to its mineral and agricultural resources, with a view to developing an economic value-chain from them (Odumakin, 2017). However, healthy competition among the federating units would encourage diversification of economic revenue that will enable regions to be dependent on their tax yield (Ogih, 2017).

The cannel of the argument above is that restructured federalism will encourage regional autonomy and economic development. In 1960s, during the first republic, the three regions of Nigerian federation were able to develop their economic resources at their own pace. While the North concentrated on the production of groundnut, the West and the East built their economic fortunes from cocoa and palm oil respectively.

Restructuring is the surest way of changing the deformities of Nigerian federalism to pave way for nationhood, curb over centralization of power in the centre, reduce corruption, promote harmony and unity and make the country metamorphose into a nation. In like manner, Ikoku (2017, p. 33) argues that “restructuring will terminate the culture of government of loothocracy and embezzlement”. By this, it implies that it will reduce the cost of governance as more money will go into development than consumption. Adding his voice to this, Cardinal Okogie argues that if we do not restructure the system under which the country is governed, the exploitative tendencies will run the country down and the country will crash.

Major Challenges

Restructuring Nigerian federalism is made difficult by certain barriers. The most important of these barriers is the unwillingness and non readiness of members of the legislative and executive arms of government to accept to the call for restructuring. In respect to the National Assembly, Ikoku (2017, p. 32) avers that “they would only agree but insist that until they finish their tenure”. Similarly, there were reports that the refusal of devolution of powers to the states by the National Assembly constitutes serious impediment to the clamour for restructuring (Guardian, 2017). Hence, Prof. Pat Utomi argues that the only reason why the lawmakers are not agitating for restructuring like other Nigerians is that “it might rob them of what they consider their share in the oil wealth of the nation”. He further argues that the National Assembly cannot make a constitution for Nigerians because they do not have right. This is because the law which the National Assembly operates and protect is unconstitutional and lied as it says “we the people of Nigeria”, whereas it was only made by the military hierarchy.

While Nwabueze (2017a, 2017b, 2017c) support the calls for a new constitutional framework through a referendum, he summarizes that the position of the National Assembly in restructuring has become the obstacle to restructuring Nigeria. The National Assembly insists on the amendment or alteration of the 1999 Constitution. This makes a big obstacle in the way of restructuring.

President Muhammadu Buhari has asked the agitating and aggrieved persons and groups on the structure of Nigerian federalism to channel to the National Assembly and the Council of State as the only available constitutional avenue for making peaceful change possible and violent change inconceivable. This seems to suggest lack of courage and political will to midwife the structural, institutional and constitutional solutions demanded by Nigeria’s historical and present circumstances (Bakare, 2017). From this view point, President Buhari’s assertions and address to the Nation on August 21, 2017 suggests that the President is opposed to restructuring as perceived by some stakeholders. In his national broadcast on August 19, 2017, when he came back from his medical trip, he referred to those calling for restructuring as “irresponsible elements” and “political mischief makers” (Akinnaso, 2017). This further shows his ignorant of, and his non dispositions to restructuring of Nigerian federalism.

There is also the factor of carryover of military administrative behaviour and attitude to civil rule. When military administration ended in May 1999, the civilian administration that followed got the form of carryover of administrative behaviour to civil administration (Ogunna, 2003). The most important of these are authoritarian leadership style, non-tolerance of opposition, centralization and non-observance of the constitution. Based on these, therefore, the military created new breed politicians who do not see themselves as civilians in their mentality. The former President Olusegun Obasanjo and President Muhammadu Buhari who argued for attitudinal adjustment rather than systematic structural changes belonged to this class (Bakare, 2017). Their conservative approach to the issue of restructuring is a measure to continue to control the political arena (Oluwaajuyitan, 2017). Surprisingly, the late call for restructuring by some retired military officers such as Ibrahim Babangida, T.Y. Danjuma, Ike Nwachukwu, Tunde Ogbeha and Alani Akinrinade probably seemed that they wanted to purge themselves of the military behaviour. The same military powers that restructured Nigeria are now asking to undo some of the changes they made during their 29 years in power.

There is another argument that the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria will make it difficult for restructuring to succeed. For instance, the sharp divisions, controversies that characterized the nature of Nigeria which emerged during the National Political Reforms Conference are reflections of divided character of the Nigerian state. During this conference, there are extreme irreconcilable positions on issues of resource control, derivation and national presidency among others (Ajayi, 2005). Ajayi posits further that the conference exacerbated primordial and sub-national loyalty which has since derived the nation of needed sense of loyalty and nationalism. Hence, national loyalty is undermined by the presentation of regional and sectional agendas in the conference. In this regard, lack of consensus and resolutions of opinions among the various ethnic-nationalities in Nigeria is a danger to restructuring Nigeria. Unlike the controversies surrounding the National Political Reform Conference, the latest National Conference organized by Goodluck's administration, though criticized by many stakeholders including El-Rufai (2017) as being unlawfully constituted and having hidden personal and sectional agenda was able to organize a successful peaceful conference.

However, restructuring Nigeria in terms of ethnic-nationalities for national integration may be contestable. For instance, Somalia, a nation with over 90% homogeneity in terms of language and religion has been politically unstable over the years. In contrast, Switzerland which consists of 3 major languages (German, French and Italia) with no single mineral resource, yet has been politically stable and economically rich. Beside, Nigerian's case is very peculiar, and its prevailing circumstances call for urgent change.

Concluding Remarks

The preceding analyses have shown that opinions are divided among the federating units and ethnic-nationalities on the concept of restructuring on Nigerian federalism. The pro-restructuring proponents argue that it is a measure to ensure a strong federation that will encourage devolution of power, resource control, regional autonomy and negotiable

constitution that will reflect the interest and aspirations of different ethnic-nationalities and their states/zones leading to national unity. The anti- restructuring groups presents that Nigerian federation should maintain a stronger centre in terms of governmental powers, functions and financial resources to prevent break up and disintegration. This argument contradicts the ideals of federalism. However, the agitations and protests from many ethnic-nationalities remain ceaseless as the study reveals that:

- The faulty and dysfunctional structures and institutional arrangements in Nigeria were the aftermath of the long reigns of military rule.
- The federating units and the ethnic-nationalities never participated, nor consulted for the Nigerian federal framework which failed to accommodate their respective peculiar interest, aspirations and expectations.
- The present federal structure possesses the attributes of inequality and imbalance. This makes peaceful co-existence among the various ethnic-nationalities difficult. Consequently, national unity and integration remains unsettled issue vis-à-vis the various ethnic conflicts and agitations for strong federalism and secessionist movements. These developments reflect the dysfunctional and deformed character of Nigerian federalism which contradicts the tenets of federalism (See Egwu, 2001).

Against the foregoing, the paper calls for a restructuring that will guarantee a new constitutional order and allow fair and equal social, political and economic rights for all the ethnic-nationalities and their respective states or zones.

The restructuring process should emphasize on regional or geographical autonomy, fiscal federalism and resource control by their owners based on the ideals of federalism.

As a corollary to the above, restructuring of the Nigerian federalism through a sovereign national conference is a sine-qua-non. This is a pre-requisite for national continuity.

Lastly, the organ and institutions of government should muster stronger political will to fundamentally restructure Nigerian state based on sound principles of federalism. It is, therefore, hoped that the implementation of the above recommendations will significantly reflect the interests and aspirations of the respective federating units and ethnic-nationalities.

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