

Nation Building in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Nation building is a complex task that requires addressing the challenges that retard national development efforts. With the return of civil rule in 1999, it was expected that the country would witness rapid socio-economic transformation. It is worrisome that almost two decades after the return of democratic rule, the country is still beset with problems such as ethno-religious conflicts, electrical violence, poverty, corruption and poor leadership. The basic thrust of this paper is to examine critically some of these challenges that militate against nation building process. The paper is qualitative in nature and relies on the use of secondary data as its source of information. The paper recommends that government should endeavour to address the problems of insecurity in the country, convicted officials should not be allowed to hold public office, adequate attention should be paid to provision of basic infrastructure and the government should introduce those policies that will facilitate poverty alleviation.

Keywords: Nation building, National development, transformation.

Introduction

The emergence of nation-states as a unit of political discourse in the contemporary times has made social science scholars to pay serious attention to nation building. Nation building is a dynamic process that can be punctured by many challenges. The inability of any country to arrest these challenges drastically slows down the nation building process. Since attainment of independence, Nigeria has been witnessing series of challenges such as ethno-religious conflicts, electoral violence, lack of basic infrastructure, poverty, poor leadership and corruption. These problems have been stumbling block to political, economic and social transformation.

With the return of democratic rule in 1999, it was expected that the new democratic dispensation would address the above mentioned challenges and thus accelerate nation building process. It is worrisome that almost two decades since the return of civil rule, the country is still infested with some of these challenges. The 2010 poverty index has indicated that 60.9% Nigerians now live in absolute poverty (Baba Ahmed, 2012). The poverty levels by zones in Nigeria as at 2008 shows that South-South has 35.1%, South East 26.7%, South West 43.0%, North Central 67.0%, North East 72.2%, North West 71.2% as well (Soludo 2008). The conditions of Nigerians roads are pathetic. The roads are full potholes and filth which creates a lot of problems for the motorists. Ethno-religious conflicts and electoral violence have been on rise since 1999.

The involve of Nigerian political leaders and top bureaucrats in massive corruption has crippled economic and social progress of the country.

Therefore the main thrust of this paper is to examine critically those challenges that retard political, social and economic transformation of the country. The study is based on qualitative analysis which relies on secondary data as its source of information. These include: books, newspapers, journals among others.

Conceptualizing Nation Building

Nation Building refers to a process of constructing a nation out of a nation or nationalities in which people see themselves as a community of people who feel that they belong together by virtue of some common historical, political, emotionally attached and bond together by a common destiny for all despite their inherent differences (Audu, n.d.).

Nation building refers to the processes of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. This process aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. Nation building can involve the use of propaganda or major infrastructure development to foster social harmony and economic growth (Akinnimi, 2015, p. 22).

For the purpose of the study, nation building is addressing the challenges which militate against political, social and economic transformation of a state such as ethno-religious conflicts, electoral violence, lack of basic infrastructure, poor leadership, corruption and poverty among others.

The Ideal Theory of the State -A Synopsis

The ideal theory of the state was premised on the belief that the state is necessary for the highest development of the individual, and thus should be constructed in such a way that would make possible the good life of all. In view of the above, Plato argued that the individual should subordinate himself to the state, which is only but a means through which each individual could reach his most perfect development. He believed that the good of each man was tied with the good of the group, and that laws were necessary because some people refuse to co-operate with the good state. Hence, laws are therefore meant to bring such unco-operating people in line.

Plato equally argued that only the best man and the finest minds should rule in the ideal state. For him these people formed a class of ‘philosopher-rulers’ whose authority should not be questioned by the rest of the group. He believed that since they were wise men, their rule would be good and just. They could understand the right thing to do, and would do it without question. The rest of the members of the state are placed in classes snuffed to their talent (Frost, 1942).

Among these groups, Plato preferred the last group which are the guardians whose intelligence qualifies them to establish the laws and policies of the state. Although Plato never advocated for democracy in his ideal state but (Lawhead 2003) he strongly advocated for the governance of the intelligent and knowledgeable people which he called the “philosopher kings”.

The idealist philosophers including Hegel thought that the individual reason is not trustworthy because it is particularistic and moved by temporary and relevant

considerations. This makes the state a necessary entity for the satisfaction of the people's needs and welfare. In other words the state is an end in itself.

The summary of the ideal theory of the state is that the state is a permanent institution which outlined individuals and it serves as the producer of goods and services that are required by the people to live a more fulfilled life. The ideal theory of state has often been criticized as placing the cart before horse. It has also been accused of being unrealistic. Liberal theorist wonder at what good the state should be of if it does not exalt its individual member's interest above its own. Laski (1996) rightly thinks that the idealist theory of the state is a formulation of a conceptual state in abstraction rather than the state as we know it.

Applying this theory to our study, it is imperative to state that man outside the state may not be able to accomplish a better life hence the state has the ultimate duty to provide those basic necessities that the individuals need. This is the basis of nation building. It is therefore when the state addresses the socio-economic and socio-political problems of the state that the individuals should inculcate the patriotic spirit leading to nation building.

Challenges of Nation Building in Nigeria

Nigeria is faced with many challenges which is detrimental to national building process. Some of these challenges are:

1. Ethno-Religious Conflicts: Ethno-religious conflicts are serious threat to economic, social and political development of the country. The crisis have rise to a dangerous dimension since the return of civil rule in 1999. An analysis of incidents of ethno-religious conflicts between May 1999 and July 2012 shows that the crisis are worrisome development which militates against unity and integrity of the country. For example, one study listed twenty two major conflicts between May 1999 and July 2002. Yet another study listed as much as forty incidents of ethno-religious and communal clashes between January and December, 2010. There have been steady increase in ethno-religious conflicts between January 2010 and July 2012. (Iheanacho 2012 p. 72). The most destructive and violent of these conflicts occurred in the cities of Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Damaturu, Lagos, Ibadan, Jos, Shagamu and Maduguri (Iheanacho, 2012).

The activities of Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen have also posed a serious challenge to nation building in Nigeria. The crisis is assuming dangerous proportion. The inhuman activities of the Islamist sect (Boko Haram) have unsettled the Nigerian Nation to the extent that ample time and socio-economic cum political resources that ought to have been channeled to the development of the entire country is being wasted in the various efforts geared toward checkmating and possibly annihilating the insurgency in the North-East geopolitical zone (Awortu, 2015, p. 213). The recent killing of 73 persons by the Fulani Herdsmen in Benue State has further undermined peaceful coexistence of this country. Commenting on the activities of Funali Herdsmen, the Catholic Bishop observed:

Our beloved country appears to be under siege from many forces. Repeatedly, innocent citizens in different communities across the nation are brutally attacked and their sources of livelihood mindlessly destroyed. Property worth millions of naira, including places of worship, schools, hospitals and business enterprises are torched and turned to ashes. (Leader, 2018, p.1.)

The analysis of the security situation has revealed that our efforts to build a strong and united country is facing a serious challenge.

2. Electoral Violence: Electoral violence could be regarded as elections-motivated-crisis employed to alter, change or influence by force or coercion the electoral behaviour of voters or voting patterns or possibly reverse electoral decision in favour of particular individual, groups or political party (Okafor: 2015:3). It is a sad commentary that since the return of democratic rule in 1999, the electoral process in Nigeria is beset with irregularities and malpractices. All elections conducted between 1999 and 2015 were marred with electoral violence. The security agencies such as the police and military connive with the electoral body to rig the election in favour of a particular candidate. Some of the issues that have characterized election in Nigeria are: electoral violence, political intimidation, manipulation of the electoral commission and security agencies, multiple voting, hijacking of ballot boxes, vote buying (Haruna, 2003, p. 7).

A serious implication of electoral violence on nation building is that it results in electing those leaders that are not credible which would be detrimental to the entire polity. Election of unqualified leaders into political offices in Nigeria is a launching pad to poor leadership that cannot drive home the vision of the country (Okafor, 2015 p.3). Poor leadership which has contributed massively to underdevelopment of Nigeria is as a result of electoral violence. The election of unqualified leaders who work against the interest of the masses is a serious challenge to nation building.

3. Lack of Basic Infrastructure: Nigeria is bedeviled with dilapidated road network, epileptic power supply. The British High Commissioner in Nigeria, Richard Groney rightly observed “President Obasanjo’s aggressive diplomatic shuttle to attract foreign direct investment has not yielded the expected result because the country has not put its act together in the area of infrastructure. So long as the nation’s energy sector remained in comatos, Gray said, prospective investors will continue to seek countries where they will spend less capital on provision of energy (This Day cited in Iheanacho, 2014, p.56). Again, the conditions of Nigerian roads are in very bad shape. The World Bank estimated that 50% of the Federal roads have deteriorated in the last six years to the extent that it cost more to send goods from Lagos to Maiduguri than to send them to Europe (Iheanacho, 2014). Due to the poor conditions of roads, 33,600 people died in road accidents from year 2001 to 2005, while 34,200 people sustained various degrees of injuries during the period (Eneh, 2011,p.313). Although there is an overdose of natural water in Nigeria, citizens groan daily under the weight of lack of safe domestic water. The average urban resident who cannot to sink a borehole resort fetching water for domestic purposes from shallow wells or from streams up to 3-hour walking distances away (Njoku, cited in Iheanacho 2014). Therefore lack of basic infrastructure has hampered development efforts of the country.

4. Corruption/poor leadership: The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) defined corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. It encompasses unilateral abuses such as embezzlement and nepotism, as well as abuses linking public and private sectors such as bribery, extortion, influence peddling and fraud. It can be petty and grand organized or unorganized (USAID, Hand-book, 1999).

The involvement of the Nigerian political leaders and top bureaucrats corrupt practices has hampered development efforts of the nation. Corruption has been a pervasive social phenomenon.

Illicit misappropriation of privileges and opportunities in public and private sector for personal aggrandizement particularly those in position of authority is sin qua non to Nigeria (Iheanacho, 2014, p.57). Both military and civilian governments have plundered the national treasury making the economy unattractive to both local and foreign investors (Ologbenla, 2007,p.107).

With the return of civil rule in 1999, there was expectation that Obasanjo's led administration would address the menace of corruption in the country. In this first budget speech to the National Assembly in 1999, President Obasanjo revealed that in the period proceeding transition, about \$20 billion had been stolen and taken out of Nigeria and only \$1.2 billion of this amount had been recovered at that time (Ibrahim, 2003 p. 26). On assuming office, he signed anti-corruption bill into law and established Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Despite these measure corruption continues unabated in Nigerian political system. It continues to permeate and pervade every facet of national life.

The National Assembly has been noted for its corrupt tendencies. Senator Chuba Okadigbo was fund among other things that he was involved in the inflation of street light project to the tune of 173 million Naira: Okadigbo also authorized the payment of 372 million naira to furnish his residence with a sum estimated above N25 million naira and equally installed and commissioned a 100 KVA generating set of the Senate President residence at an inflated amount of 15 million naira (Ogundiya, 2012). Similarly Senate President Adolphus Wabara was also guilty of receiving bribe of 55 million naira from professor Osuji (Former Minister of Education) to inflate the budgetary allocation to Education Ministry.

Another serious case of corruption in the fourth republic is the allegation of abuse of office by the former Inspector General of Police Mr. Tafa Balogun. Over N17.7 billion was received from the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun by the EFCC.

Balogun was found to have colluded with several governors and high government functionaries to cover up tract of serious crimes. For instance Balogun was alleged to have collected N250 million from former governor of Anambra State Dr. Mbardinuju to cover up the murder of the former chairman of Nigerian Bar Association: (Anambra State) Mr. Igwe and his wife in September 2002 (Ologbenla, 2007, p. 111).

The incidence of corruption is also pervasive at the state level. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has mentioned 24 governors for corruptly enriching themselves with public funds. The most contentious of these were the cases of Pleatua and Bayelsa State governors. Governor Jushua Dariye between 2001 and 2005 looted the treasury to the tune of billions of naira. Some of the Dariye's loot include N273 million, N240 million, ₦6 million, N1.16 billion (from the Ecological Fund allocated to Plateau State). ₦176 million, ₦1.18 million, ₦10 million, ₦25 million, ₦103 million, ₦4.48 billion (all representing suspicious withdrawals from the Plateau State Government (Vanguard cited in Ologbenla, 2007, p. 111).

The arrest of Diepreye Alamieyesigha, the Bayelsa State governor in London climaxed the classical cases of treasury looting by Nigerian political leaders. Alamieyesiegha starched away £420,000 found in different accounts belonging to him as well as asset worth £10 million. Alamieseigha, also diverted public funds to facilitate his

acquisition of ₦1billion shares in Bond Bank Plc and the purchase of Chelsea Hotel Abuja for N2 billion (Ologbenla, 2007).

It is beyond doubt that the prevalence of corruption in our economy had undermined all aspects of national development. It has been a stubbing block to economic and social transformation of the country. Hence militates against nation building.

5. Poverty: Although Nigeria is blessed with mineral resources, Nigeria is the worst (in terms of poverty) in sub-Saharan Africa. UNDP Report (2001, p. 65) shows that the inescapable picture of Nigeria as one of the poorest countries in the world is not in doubt... she is the worst today than the 1980's. In 1999 and 2000 UN Development Report, Nigeria had degenerated further as 87% percent of the population were below poverty line and rated 154 on the world's marginal poverty index out of 172 countries (Ekpu, 2004). According to Amugo (2003, p. 1) "The official statistics released by the Federal Office of Statistics shows that the National Poverty Date is projected at 70% amounting to 80 million people as poor in Nigeria. This is very bad for the country as two thirds of the population is poor and is detrimental to Nigeria's socio-economic and political development. The high unemployment rate unaffordable basic education, inequality, insecurity, depreciation of fundamental human rights, freedom liberties and basic needs of human survival and crisis arising from constant agitation for resource control are evidence of poverty. UNDP Report (2001).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nation building is a complex task that requires addressing challenges that undermines national development efforts. We have critically examined some of these problem such as ethno-religious conflicts, electoral violence, lack of basic infrastructure, poverty, corruption and poor leadership. The paper however makes the following recommendations to address the challenges of nation building in Nigeria. This will result in rapid political, economic and social transformation of the country.

1. Since Nigeria is a secular state, where there is no state religion, the government should endeavour to make policies that will guarantee the secular nature of the country.
2. The government should massively embark on the provision of infrastructural facilities such as good roads, sound railway system, safe drinking water and adequate power supply. This will accelerate economic and social development.
3. The government at all levels should embark on poverty alleviation programmes and provide employment opportunities to unemployed people. This will discourage the youths from joining ethnic militias and other militant groups.
4. Since corruption has become pervasive social phenomenon in Nigeria, it is imperative to address the menace of corruption. This can be achieved by ensuring that all convicted public officials should not be allowed to held public office again.
5. The political leaders at all levels of governance should spread the message of national integration. They should strive to inculcate the spirit of patriotism among Nigerians instead of making statements that would arose religious sentiments.
6. The politicians should conduct their campgains on the basis of issues instead of attacking their opponents or raising religious and tribal sentiments. The

- campaigns should focus on proper implementation of national political economic and social programmes.
7. The government should empower the security forces with modern weapons and other necessary logistics to curb ethno-religious conflicts and electoral violence.

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