

**POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING AND SUSTAINABLE
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN
POLITICAL SYSTEM AND STRUCTURE, 1999-JULY 2021**

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Abstract

Nigeria inherited an unbalanced federal structure from her colonial master, Britain, leading to persistent agitations to better the lives of the masses. The paper gave conceptual explication of restructuring and sustainable development. It adopted the structural functionalist theory as theoretical framework and collected data from secondary sources. Furthermore, the paper pointed out some issues that needed to be restructured in Nigerian federalism as contained in the constitution. It was discovered that the Nigerian federalism is devoid of nationalism and patriotism at the national level. The research unearths some abnormalities in the Nigerian federation. On that note, the paper recommended imperative restructuring of the federal system and change of constitution anchored on the premise that political structure and system are seen and used as the engine and agent that drive the entire nation. Underdevelopment as seen in Nigeria today is as a result of bad federal structure that has led to bad governances, giving birth to corruption, tribalism, friction, marginalization, agitations, insecurity and other anti-social vices. Development will be a mirage in an atmosphere of insecurity and friction. The asymmetrical imbalances in the federal system are

responsible for poor governance and leadership style, leading to other factors that have quagmire national unity and development. The political system, including the constitution, needs to be restructured and amended to accommodate all the issues that have been on the front burner for equity and justice, considering the pluralistic and heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian nation. Restructuring will be like a rebirth if properly done. People should be called for renegotiation and dialogue on how they wish to be governed and live together, or the contrary. Agreement will not lead to friction and dissatisfaction; rather, it will produce a healthy united nation where peace and development can be achieved and sustained. The paper concluded that there should be reorientation and sensitization of the people about restructuring and practice of true fiscal federalism that will guarantee national unity and national development through restructuring.

Keywords. Restructuring, sustainable, national, development

Introduction

The issue of development has been of serious concern to any responsible government anywhere in the world, either in a developed or developing nation. The abundance of both natural and human resources in Nigeria is not reflected in terms of national development. This has led to agitations about marginalization from some ethnic nationalities. In response to that, government has engaged in the establishment of one board or another and adoption of development policies, initiatives, reforms and development plans from the attainment of political independence till date.

Despite all these, development has been elusive, as Nigerian is tagged the headquarters of poverty in the whole world (Poverty Index 2019).

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There have been a series of agitations, sequel to the attainment of political independence, for good governance, proper representative and participatory government, equitable distribution of resources and justice, from one group to another, all claiming one form of marginalization or another from the federal government. This has snowballed into friction, insecurity and the formation of strong ethnic groups to champion the cause for freedom either in Nigeria or a call for secession. The Nigerian civil war of 1966- 1970 was fought because of the above reasons.

Restructuring has remained a prominent concept in Nigerian political lexicon and has attracted national and international debate, mostly in the current fourth republic that started on May 29, 1999 till date. There have been issues bordering on restructuring before the attainment of political independence and steps taken to address it by the federal government, with cosmetic approach, such as constitutional change and amendment, electoral reforms, creation of states and local government, establishment of one ministry or the other. All these remediation has never helped the nation, as there is increase in incessant agitations and complaints from almost all the ethnic groups alleging cases of marginalization and neglect by the federal government.

Nigeria's political system is anchored on federalism as the driver that will usher in national development. Sad to note that for over 60 years of its existence, Nigeria is engulfed by underdevelopment and its excruciating features, like insecurity, poverty, unemployment, high death rate, infant and maternal mortality, nepotism, low income per capital, illiteracy, population explosion, to mention but few.

The federal system of government as practiced in Nigeria seems to be different from what is practised in other civilized federal states like the United States of America, Swaziland, India, Canada. Federalism is

a system that allows for the autonomy and development of the components states, regions and units under a central government with less responsibility, operated with a federal constitution. In a federal system, powers are shared to other component units that make up the federation. The sharing of power in a federal system is backed up with responsibility and autonomy enshrined in a written rigid constitution. The uniqueness of Nigerian federalism is ostensibly seen in the way powers are shared. The Nigerian federalism is unitary and military in nature, supported with a military constitution where the federal government controls almost everything with stringent condition of amendment. There are many flaws in the federal system which have hindered the nation from development, promoted idleness and ushered in friction, ethnicity, nepotism, insecurity and other anti-social vices in the nation.

The call for correction of the above-mentioned abnormalities that have enveloped Nigeria is what is called restructuring. Restructuring is an embedded concept that connotes so many things. Etymologically, restructuring simply means that there was an existing structure that could not or is not meeting the needs and yearnings of the people that need to be corrected. The current federal system has failed woefully, with the federal constitution. Nigerian federalism was British-created, which undermined the interest of the people, their pluralistic, heterogeneous and different population sizes of all the ethnic nationalities. The forceful unification of all the tribes, nations and ethnic groups in 1914 witnessed calls and clamors for restructuring in a very low tone. As event progressed, it continued to resurface gradually, which later led to the civil war in 1966-1970 and other anti-social behaviors in the current republic.

The study interrogated the relationship between political restructuring and sustainable development. Why is Nigeria still underdeveloped, despite all her human and natural resources? What are the forces against restructuring? Who are the beneficiaries of the current structure? Are there consistent contentious issues that need to be

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addressed in Nigerian federal system and the constitution? In the same vein, the paper examined the nexus between restructuring and sustainable development. These and many more the paper addressed and made recommendations on way forward to attain sustainable development.

Conceptual Explication

Restructuring: philosophically and etymologically speaking, to restructure means that there is an existing structure that has failed to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the masses that need to be addressed or restructured. The sporadic clamors and calls for restructuring by almost all the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria are a glaring evidence that the existing structure has myriads of problems which, if not addressed, might lead to friction, if not total disintegration of the geographical entity called Nigeria.

Restructuring is a construct that needs other concepts for proper explanation, as seen in Nigeria's political scenario. It means different things to different people, according to the way individual authors viewed it. For instance, Okonkwo (2019) posited that to restructure is to change an existing status quo in order to make it more functional. Global Publisher Time Knowledge (2020) defined political restructuring as a transition from a lopsided federal political structure to a true federalism characterized by political inclusiveness, people-oriented constitutional amendment, resource control, electoral processes, political representation, sharing of offices, citizens rights, protection of lives and properties and building of enduring political infrastructure.

Amechi (2019) stated that there are different types and shades of meanings to the issues of restructuring being agitated. Some are clamoring for eco-political restructuring, while others agitate for social restructuring; others believe we need geographical

restructuring, while some believe it is constitutional restructuring, and others systemic restructuring. From above definition, it is obvious that the entire system needs to be overhauled for positive output and for development to be achieved. It connotes that the concept is multifaceted and multidimensional, covering all areas of human endeavours.

Epelle & Nweke (2019) submitted that political restructuring connotes sustained clamor for true federalism by some federating states and ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. It entails a radical attempt by certain ethnic nationalities and federating states in Nigeria to question their continuous existence in the political configuration and the entity called Nigeria, in which they were forcefully impeded to live among a people with perceived irreconcilable differences by the instrumentality of the British-imposed federal constitution. They also maintained that political restructuring is a radical movement by ethnic and state nationalities to unbundle the no-go areas in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended, with the sole aim of devolving power to the component units, comparable to other developed federations globally.

According to Soludo (2018), political restructuring is a movement that promises to ensure socio-political and economic autonomy of the federating units (that is the states, geographical zones, or regions as the case may be) in the country.

From the above definitions of restructuring, it is obvious that Nigeria inherited a defective and lopsided federal system whose super and substructures have refused to yield any benefits to the people. The agitations, calls, complaints, movements to correct all the lopsidedness, abnormalities, aberrations, asymmetrical imbalances, centrifugal and centripetal forces inherent in the current federal system by individuals, corporate organizations, states, ethnic groups and the society in order to meet the required standard of true federalism as practiced in other civilized nations of the world are

restructuring. This definition etymologically means that there is already an existing system and structure which is the current federal system in practice. It has been established that the current federal system has failed and needs to be reexamined, reevaluated and restructured, if the nation must witness development or continue to exist as an entity. Other civilized nations of the world that have similar pluralistic and heterogeneous nature are yardstick for measurement and assessment of the Nigerian federalism. Although federalism evolves, but there are basic features to all functional federal systems that have led to speedy development of component units at its pace, such as Canada, USA, India, Australia, to mention but few.

Sustainable Development

Stoddart (2021) viewed sustainability as the efficient and equitable distribution of resources intra-generationally and inter-generationally within the operation of socio-economic activities within the confines of fitness ecosystem. Thomas (2015) posited that sustainability brings into focus human activities and their ability to satisfy human needs and wants, without depleting or exhausting the productive resources at their disposal.

Tjarre & Zenite (2016) averred that sustainability is a concept relating, connoting, improving and sustaining a healthy economic, ecological and social system for human development. Bein-Eli (2015) sees sustainability as a dynamic equilibrium in the process of interaction between the population and the carrying capacity of its environment, such that the population develops to express its full potential, without producing irreversible adverse effect on the carrying capacity of the environment upon which it depends.

Furthermore, DESA-UN (2018) stated that the ultimate objectives of the concept of sustainability in essence is to ensure appropriate

alignment and equilibrium among society, economy and the environment, in terms of the regenerated capacity of the planet's life-supporting ecosystem.

To understand the duo concepts, sustainable development was best conceptualized by UNO (1987). Their definition is the most comprehensive and widely accepted by the World Commission on Environment and Development (UNO) in 1984. Under the chairmanship of Gro Harlem Brundtland, in October, 1987, it submitted a report which contained the definition of sustainable development. In that report, it defined sustainable development "as the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs".

This definition is measurable and focuses on two main points, namely; the environment and human beings. In qualifying and quantifying growth and development, the two must be taken into consideration in terms of developmental projects, programmes or policies aimed at improving the life of the people and have a better natural environment for the present, with the future generation not put in jeopardy Chinnah (2019).

Methodology

This study made use of secondary data, which include textbooks, journals, periodic publications, newspapers and other relevant documented literature, both soft and hard copies, while content analysis was used to analyze data objectively.

Theoretical Framework

Structural functionalist theory was adopted for this study as the theoretical framework. It views society through a macro-level adjustment based on social structure and social functions that work in harmony to shape the whole society. This theory centered on

exploring and maintaining order, stability and cohesion based on independency, socialization and systemic change.

Spencer (1899), Durkheim (1916), Mahnowski (1922), Powson (1939), Marton (1949), Radcliff-Brown 1935 and other political scientists too numerous to be mentioned theorized on structural functionalism. They introduced structural functionalism theory into political science and public administration in comparing and analyzing political systems. Offiong (1997) opined that structural functionalist theory is an offshoot of system theory.

The theory states that each organ/sector within a system must perform their respective functions effectively for the betterment of the general political/economic system. Performing a function in a ruptured and fractured system will be an action in futility. The system controls the function in any given society. Sustainable development can only be achieved in Nigeria, if all the ethnic nationalities, groups, states, geographical zones, local government areas, other components and subordinate units within the Nigerian federalism function in a restructured system that can usher in peace, growth and development, as restructuring is imperatively needed if the nation must grow.

Functions and duties can be performed by all and sundry when there is unity and equity, with authority and responsibility delegated to all the components and units in the federation. This directly connotes the devolution of powers to all the units with from the over centralized federalized system. When justice and equity are at play, obedience is not solicited but surfaces naturally, not forcefully orchestrated. It will overtly swallow and get rid of all agitations, clamors and insecurity, and above all, usher in development.

The basic thrust of structural functionalism includes:

4. Society consists of both structures and functions that are interconnected and interdependent and ultimately, focus on maintaining or mediating society equilibrium (Red-Cliffe Brown, 1935).
5. Social systems consist of both structures and functions that are necessary for the ongoing health or survival of that system (Chilcolt, 1998).
6. The structural exists to meet the functional needs of a society (Merton 1949).
7. Systemic functionality across and within structural services to reinforce and maintain the stability of the system's structures in the content of an ever-changing complex and unpredictable system.

The practical application of the structural functionalist theory in Nigeria is that all system structures, sub-structures and super-structure must perform their respective functions efficiently and effectively for the betterment of the entire society. There must be cordial and mutual relationship, interaction and interdependence of all the structures and functions for the benefit of the society. All the ill-functional structures must be restructured through restructuring via dialogue and mutual agreement. This can only be achieved through mutual dialogue via restructuring and general overhauling of the fragile, tensed and fractured system Chinnah (2019). A bad structure cannot produce good output, no matter how efficient and effective is the input. The rotten structure must get input infected to produce bad output. It is a vicious cycle (Chinnah, 2021a). Structural functionalism is seen as an offshoot of system theory.

Issues that Need to be Restructured in the Nigerian Constitution and Federalism

There are many abnormalities in the Nigeria federalism and constitution that need to be restructured, if the nation must move forward and witness substantial growth and development. A faulty

foundation can never hold a big edifice, as a faulty federalism cannot guarantee good governance and sustainable development.

In an attempt to solve the issue of agitation for restructuring, the government in 1995 created six geo-political units and the zoning/rotation principle introduced, apart from the creations of states adopted by past military heads of state, the National Political Reform Conference of 2005, the National Conference of 2014, and the All Progressive Party Committee Report on true federalism. The federal government set up a committee on restructuring in 2018 under the chairmanship of El-Rufai. The committee raised the following contentious issues:

- Creation or merger of states and the framework and guidelines for achieving that
- Derivation principle, bordering on what percentage of federal collectibles revenue from mining should be given back to sub-national from the commodities extracted
- Federating units; should Nigeria be based on regions, zones, or retain the 36 states structure
- Fiscal federalism and revenue allocation
- Devolution of power. What items on the exclusive, legislative list should be transferred to other list, especially states and community police, prison, etc
- Forms of government, (parliamentary or presidential)
- Independent candidacy
- Land tenure system
- Local government autonomy
- Power sharing and rotation of political offices
- Resource control
- Type of legislature –part time or full time, unicameral or bicameral

The above points were identified and raised as contentious issues by the Report of APC Committee on Restructuring (2018). The irony is

that nothing was done to address all the issues raised, based on the existence of the same failed and fractured federal system, which is a pointer that there are people that are against restructuring. Those people are benefiting from the current structure.

Furthermore, Epelle & Nweke (2018) posited that some of the issues that featured consistently in the quest for political restructuring include, but not limited to, the following: reviewing the non-justifiability clause contained in the fundamental objectives and directives principles of state policy of the constitution, need for independent candidacy in election, need for rotational presidency among the six geopolitical zones, financial autonomy of the state Houses of Assembly, removal of joint state/local government account, removal of ambiguities for state creation, creation of at least six more states, one from each geographical zone, recognition of the six geographical zones as administrative units in the constitution, removal of the immunity clause, scrapping of the bicameral legislature, franchise for Nigerians in Diaspora, single tenure of six years for president, governors and their deputies, uniform tenure of three years for local government areas, rotational governorship among all the senatorial districts, at least 20% derivation, 50% -10% resources control for the state, scrapping of presidentialism for parliamentarianism, inclusion of role of traditional rulers in the constitution, need for state police and abrogation of the obnoxious Land Use Act, etc. All these are important considerations for Nigeria to extricate herself from the quagmires and clutches of centrifugal forces and appendages that have continued to undermine the peaceful co-existence of the country, exacerbated by her years of military rule and difficulty in breaking through the rank of majority-dominated federal government and the National Assembly.

Pam (2021) posited that Lagos and Kano States are almost of the same population and their economy is nearly the same; while Kano has 44 local government areas and 24 members in the House of Representatives, Lagos has only 20 local government areas and 10

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members in the House of Representatives. This is a clear case of marginalization that has led to calls for restructuring; democracy is a game of number. All these and many more abnormalities must stop if the nation must move forward on the path of progress.

Ifesinachi (2006) noted that poor federal practices had engendered consistent agitation for justice, consultation, opening of political space, re-negotiation of the Nigerian pacts and now restructuring. He went further to say that political restructuring is orchestrated by the separatists and irredentist aspirations against perceived structural defects, institutional deformities, injustices, functional inequalities, vexacious transition processes and controversial constitutional review and reforms in Nigerian federalism. These points are seen and noticed everywhere in Nigeria, hence the need for restructuring.

Other issues include, religious matter, such as the practice of Sharia in some states, as against Nigeria being a secular nation; minority agitation; boundary dispute and adjustment; problem of secession; favoritism; ethnicity; dominance by major ethnic groups, minimum wage for Nigerian workers.

They perceived intolerable imbalances in the federal structure as currently constituted, imbalances in appointments and imbalances in the distribution of resources. They equally perceived the system of governance in practice as unitary, contrary to their yearning for federalism.

The agitation for restructuring has lingered so much because there are people benefiting from the current system, mostly the Northerners. The Hausa/Fulani have directly and indirectly appropriated Nigeria as their personal ATM card. The military unitary constitution gave them express advantage over other ethnic extractions in so many things as enshrined in the constitution. Imagine how many times Allah and

Sharia are mentioned in the constitution in a secular nation. The number of local government areas in Kano State alone is more than three states put together in the southern Nigeria. Democratically what do you expect from the National Assembly, if restructuring motion is raised. All the resources from the south are used to develop places like Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Gombe, to mention but few, to the detriment of where the crude oil is gotten from. A call for resource control or true fiscal federal will always fall on deaf ears, because all the states in the north are not economically viable to stand on their own without allocation from federal pause.

Summary

The study argued strongly that restructuring is urgently needed as the nation can be described as a time bomb waiting for explosion which might not be too good for her corporate existence. The current nature of corruption, insecurity, herdsmen killings, banditry, cattle rustling, kidnapping, militia group formations, calls for secession and other agitations against marginalization, all over the country, is a clear indication that restructuring is imperative. The current federal arrangement or structure is only beneficial to few Northern aristocrats and their southern cronies that have been fortunate to be in power. They have prebendalistically appropriated our patrimonial wealth to themselves, their children and the unborn generation, leaving the masses to the vagaries of nature and a state of survival of the fittest. The marginalized, pauperized and deprived masses have resorted to self-help by forming militia groups, groups for secessions, and groups in perpetrating one heinous atrocious crime or the other, leading to high insecurity and palpable fear all over the country.

The paper submitted that to curb all the vices and anti-social behaviours and to achieve development, and even sustainable development, there is need for restructuring. This must start from political restructuring.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations: that there is an imperative need for restructuring for cooperative existence of Nigeria and for sustainable development.

There should be mass campaign, orientation and sensitization on the meaning of true fiscal federalism and the need to adopt it as a form of government. Political restructuring, through a thorough sensitization and orientation, can easily lead to mind and attitudinal restructuring. Human beings by nature are naturally created to learn, unlearn and relearn every day.

All the ethnic nationalities should meet to dialogue and harmonize all the identified issues that need to be restructured, and take a concerted and united decision based on justice and equity.

The pursuance of good governance and sustainable development starts from restructuring. To change the structure and rewrite the narrative from underdevelopment to development, restructuring seems eminent and imperative.

The constitution must be reviewed and be rewritten to accommodate all ethnic groups and religions, irrespective of population and size. Federal, states and units, including institutions, should be strengthened with some level of autonomy and independence, as seen and practised in other civilized federal nations.

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*Political Restructuring And Sustainable National Development: Analysis Of
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