

# Assessing Issues in Constitutional and Institutional Principles for Managing Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria: The Federal Character Principle and Power Sharing Formula in Focus

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## Abstract

The Nigerian state has been bedeviled with the challenge of managing its convoluted and discombobulated inter-group relationship. Governments in Nigeria have deployed certain principles to manage the nation's heterogeneous ethnic composition. Therefore, the thrust of this paper is an appraisal of the institutional and public policy mechanisms put in place to integrate the convoluting federal system. The paper is divided into a number of sections. With an introductory overview, the paper proceeds to dwell on the contending paradigms in the extant literature on constitutional and institutional principles deployed to manage the plural and deeply divided Nigerian state. The study went on to analyse the provisions of quota system and federal character principle as enshrined in the constitution on management of inter-group relations in a Nigeria. The study further examined how this constitutional principle has helped since returning to democratic rule in 1999 how beleaguered the polity has been since then. The study also critique the problem associated with this principle and infers with the observation that federal character principles and other similar accommodative and integrative policies in our institutional designs have been directed mainly at the elite, ignoring the masses of the people simply because this approach is more hinged on Western bourgeoisie theory of social stability and elite stability, not institutional or state stability. Whereas, the masses of the people too; needs to be targeted for conflict resolution when crafting the principles of law to address the problem. This study's ultimate conclusion and recommendation of this article therefore is that the federal character principle in our constitution needs to be rejigged to actually meet the need of the masses of the people for it to achieve communal stability which is badly required in the Nigerian state today.

**Keywords:** Constitutional and Institutional Principles, Inter-group Relations, Federal Character Principle, Power Sharing Formula

## Introduction

In order to achieve social stability, peace, national integration and social equality as a response to the civil war of 1967-1970, consistent effort was made towards adoption of constitutional policies that will provide equal representation, create an egalitarian society and sense of belonging among the people regardless of tribe as a tool for achieving national economic development. This is the federal character principle and/or quota system at a constitutional level.<sup>1</sup> The need to revisit this issue in this article is with the view to rethink the underlining issues and principles behind the emergence of federal character principle in our constitution, consider the basis for its application and implementation, and examine how well it has addressed the problem it sets out to mitigate in the Nigerian state. It is also to appraise the reasons for the success or otherwise of this constitutional principle within the context of the perennial quest of the Nigerian state to guarantee inclusiveness and manage inter-group relations, which hitherto has been largely elusive, leading to the emergence of various conflagrations along ethnic and regional lines since return to democratic dispensation in 1999.

## Issues in Intergroup Relations and History of Ethnicity in Nigeria

It has already been observed that as an area of study, intergroup relations appear to be one of the recent themes in African historiography. Behavioral scientists like M. Sherif and C.W. Sherif<sup>2</sup>, rationalized inter-group relations from the social psychology perspective put one of such insights forward. They conceptualized intergroup relations as "states of friendship or hospitality, cooperation or competition, dominance or subordination, alliance or enmity, peace or war between two or more groups and their respective members. Furthermore, they view a group as a social unit consisting of a number of individuals who stand in role and status relationships to one another and who possess a set of values or norms of their own to regulate their behaviour towards each other in matters affecting them. Also, in his assessment of the Igbo and their neighbours,

<sup>1</sup> Which section of the constitution

<sup>2</sup>Sheriff. M &Sherif, C.W, (1969) *Social Psychology*: Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, USA.

A.E Afigbo<sup>1</sup> offers another important theoretical formulation on intergroup relations. According to him: "Intergroup relations presupposes contact and interaction between groups each of which has an identity, to make some inputs into the relationship, in short, each of which has some scope and area of autonomous action." This raises a number of fundamental conceptual issues regarding the phenomenon of intergroup relations that should be clarified. The first is that intergroup relations entail contact and interactions between groups. This ordinarily implies that it is the logical consequences of contact between people, in which case, it deals with human beings and is therefore a social phenomenon. Furthermore intergroup relations "refer to the interactions which take place between members of different groups and societies who come in-contact with one another. It pertains to the symbolical or face-to-face interaction between different societies"<sup>2</sup>

The significance of this is that wherever and in whichever form it manifests (whether as inter-ethnic, inter-racial, inter-religious, inter-class, inter-generational, cross-gender, international or supra-national relations) intergroup relations reflects human actions which are also part of the process of existence channeled towards economic, political and social development. However, inter-group relations cannot be perceived solely from the social-cultural perspective without putting into consideration the various applicable laws put in place to set the necessary limits and maintain social order by avoiding conflicts.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is instructive to note that though sometimes these relationships took the form of war and enslavement, they also expressed themselves through diplomacy, treaties, agreements, moral suasion, the visits of wandering scholars, the borrowing of techniques and above all, trade. Consequently, regardless of the fact that each ethnic group has its unique identity and occupies a distinct contiguous territory, there was and has always been considerable contact between groups which antedates contact with Europe. From the above examinations, one can infer that intergroup relations can emerge both in the form of immediate interactions of the representatives of various groups as in the case of the Nigerian peoples, and in their own extremely mediated impersonal forms.

Historically, ethnicity predates the emergence of the Nigerian state which became an independent nation from the British colonial administrators in 1960. Ethnicity has different definitions. Every scholar defines the construct from his or her own point of view. However, most of the definitions accept the fact that ethnicity is an identity. Accordingly, an ethnic group is a group of people whose members identify with each other through a common language, culture, religion, ideology or geographical area. It is pertinent to note that ethnicity is difficult to define in the context of Africa, including Nigeria, because many scholars have viewed it from different perspectives. Ethnicity as a concept has come from the Greek word *ethnos* formerly posited on the foundation of national and cultural identity.

Because Nigeria is a heterogeneous state, one form of inter-group relation principle or another has been the hallmark of maintaining peace in the region prior to the arrival of colonial masters. The people were used to making necessary compromise to archive peace and stability. The geographical location now known as "Nigeria" is a nation of people from diverse ethnic groups with well over 370 ethnic groups having their unique traditions, cultures, religions, languages and ways of life, engaging in necessary dealings even before the advent of colonialism.<sup>4</sup> There are major ethnic groups which have larger population and stronger leadership under which submission of minority groups have been coerced prior to colonization. The Benin empire for instance exercised leadership and control over tribes like Igala and Nupe within its locale, who were submissive to the Oba of Benin paying royalties and tax as agreed. Likewise the Oyo empire in the west which had influence on Ilorin, nupe and ebira land; and the Hausa speaking states which had engaged in prolonged clashes before their unification by Othman dan Fodio under islamic religion. In the south-south the Efik and Ibibio on one side and the Uroboh and Itsekiri on the other side had been engaged in age unending clashes. As a result of the age-long lingering rivalry among these tribes coupled with the complex socio-cultural diversity which makes it seemingly impossible to achieve peaceful coexistence and social stability and its resultant residual effect on national development, the 1914 amalgamation has been described as a forced union.<sup>5</sup>

However, the ulterior motive of economic benefits and political control which underlined colonialism led to the outright neglect of need for vertical integration among the people. Fear of having the people unite against the colonial administration accounts for the adoption of the "divide and rule" policy with the effect of group struggle for economic dominance. By the time intergroup relation principles were eventually included in the 1979 constitution, the genuine spirit of nationalism had already been destroyed and replaced by corruption and greed among political elites. As such the various inter group relation principles were manipulated to the benefit of political and bureaucratic elites, to the detriment of the masses. In response, various groups spring-up within

<sup>1</sup> Afigbo A.E (1980) *The Igbo and their Neighbours: Intergroup relations in South Eastern Nigerian history*, Ibadan: Heinemann Education Bks.

<sup>2</sup> Lohor, S. A. (1998) *The Chadic politics of Jos, Plateau and their neighbours: A study of intergroup relations among Jos Plateau* In Sherif, M & Sherif, C.W. (eds.) *Social Psychology*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, USA.

<sup>3</sup> Russell Hardin (2001), *Law and Social Order Philosophical Issues*, 11 62-85.

<sup>4</sup> Otite, O., (1990) *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria*: Shaneson, Ibadan.

<sup>5</sup> Folarin, S, "Ethnicity and Power Politics: From June 12 to Boko Haram" National Mirror, August 15, 2012.

the country, take-up arms and resort to all forms of criminal activities as a means of expressing their discontent over lack of equal representation and opportunities.

The recent *Boko Haram* insurgence in north-east Nigeria which culminated into the abduction of over 200 girls, as well as recent resurgence of Fulani herdsmen who engaged in killing and kidnapping, coupled with the militancy activities in the Niger Delta area resulting in the blowing up of oil pipelines thereby reducing government revenue, thus contributing to recent economic recession currently being witnessed in the country goes to show that the nation is yet to get it right with legal, social, and political framework to curtail various group conflagrations on going in the country. The existence of strong tribal, ethnic and religious ties, which causes the Nigerian people alienation from the central administrative powers, undermines the rhetoric about peace by government and religious groups. This is because despite attempts in religious and governmental circles' to promote peace in Nigeria, the local people's affection for their religion and ethnic groups displaces any love for central government. This type of ethnic and religious composition in Nigeria appears to be making the development of a national identity almost impossible. It can also be argued that it contributes to underdevelopment in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>.

Building a national identity is a daunting task in Nigeria. The three major ethnic groups -Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo- and the numerous minority ethnic groups owe their allegiances to their tribes and faiths. These large and divergent cultures as well as an unimaginable sense of tribal cohesion<sup>2</sup> make it impossible for Nigeria to claim a unified nationality. The effort to achieve national unity has often triggered social discord and conflict within the country. The reason being that the ethnic groups in society often have the feeling, or belief, that they are being dominated by other more powerful groups. The level of mistrust and fear of domination that is inherent in the ethnic groups which drives them to believe that they do not get proper representation at a national level or that they get a fair share of the national cake<sup>3</sup>. For instance, many Southerners maintain that the British colonial administration disadvantaged the Southern province in favour of the Northern Province<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, the tradition of maintaining the notion of referring to some members of the communities as settlers or aliens and others as natives, more often than not, triggers intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflict. The 'so-called' settlers, notwithstanding how long they have been in a community, are continually treated as strangers. For example, they were, and still mostly precluded from complete ownership of land, social and political position nor have a say in society unlike the natives of the communities. This often leads to the "fear of domination and marginalization within the communities"<sup>5</sup>. This has created a situation where the Nigerian Constitution provides for an underpinning that hinders national unity, the integration of citizens, and a sense of belonging among citizens. The aliens are not only discriminated against in terms of land ownership but are in some case mandated to pay extra taxes and are also not allowed to settle in particular areas of the community.

### **Federal Character and/or Quota System Principles**

Federal character is a distributive principle serving as an emblem of national unity aimed at creating an egalitarian society where all ethnic groups enjoy equal political representation and fairness in resource allocation. It has been viewed as "a quota system or ethnic arithmetic formula".<sup>6</sup> In Nigeria, federal character is used as a tool for ensuring that no group is marginalized in political representation, resource allocation and accessibility of social-amenities. As reflected in the socio-political, educational, administrative, economic spheres of the society. Federal character may be viewed as a concept or as a principle.<sup>7</sup> The concept of federal character describes Nigeria as a pluralistic society made up of diverse ethnic groups with different language, culture, tradition and historical antecedents. While the federal character principle refers to the administrative policy adopted by government to achieve socio-political balance in the composition of government and its agencies, it ensures that every state of the federation and tribe enjoys equal representation in policy making and implementation.

Historically, the federal character principle under the Nigerian constitution is traceable to the recommendation of the 1976 constitution drafting committee, which, according to the CDC's report of the 1977, Federal Character refers to:

the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to

<sup>1</sup>Salawu.B (2010). Ethno-religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies *European Journal of Social Sciences* 13 (3), 345-353

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup>Albert. I.O (1999) *Community Conflict in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation*. Ibadan: Spectrum.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup>Adetiba T.C and Rahim .A (2012). Inclusive Governance in Ethnically Divided Nigeria Since 1999: The Application of the Principle of Federal Character and Power Sharing System *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, 5.99.

<sup>7</sup>Osaghae E.E (1988) *Cripple Giant: Nigeria Since Independence* London C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd.

the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.<sup>1</sup>

The principle arose out of the need to reduce ethnic conflict arising out of competition for political power, government appointments, citing of public industries and institutions, employment into public organizations etc.<sup>2</sup> It was first incorporated into the 1979 constitution<sup>3</sup> and later restated under the 1999 constitution as follow:

The composition of Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and also command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few state or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in the government of the federation or in any of its agencies.<sup>4</sup>

This constitutional provision requires that public appointments shall reflect the equal representation of the diverse ethnic groups in the country. The provision was necessitated by the antecedents of the pre-independence and early post-independence era when major ethnic groups dominated the socio-political space sidelining minority groups in political appointments and wealth distribution. Hence the federal character principle was adopted to end the oppression of minority groups by facilitating equal representation and therefore achieve national integration. When unity exists among the people, this will eventually foster socio-economic and political balance as well as equal representation in policymaking and implementation.

In conformity with the above constitutional provision and to reflect the federal character principle as adopted by the nation, the president is expected to appoint at least one minister from each state of the federation, such minister must be an indigene of the state and the representative of the state within the executive arm of government.<sup>5</sup> The federal character principle is to be further applied in the periodic election of members of political parties, principal officers and members of executive committee.<sup>6</sup> The appointment of members of executive committee and other governmental bodies must also reflect the federal character of Nigeria.<sup>7</sup> Also, presidential appointments into certain offices shall be carried out with cognizance to the federal character of Nigeria to promote national unity. These is inclusive of the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Head of service of the Federation, Ambassador, High Commissioner and other principal representatives of Nigeria abroad, Permanent Secretary in any ministry of head of Extra-ministerial department of the government of the federation and any office of the personal staff of the President.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the numerous constitutional provisions requiring a reflection of the federal character principle in elective and appointive posts, implementation of this principle has rendered it unproductive. The ruling class who is basically politically active but small group of people who hold leadership positions manipulate this principle by incorporating socio-political tactics which involves consideration of regional, ethnic, sub-ethnic and religious factors in its application, to the detriment of the masses. The federal character principle is also more favorable to the majority ethnic groups in the country, as they end up holding major positions. Application of the federal character principle is also to be reflected in the composition of the officer and corps and other ranks of the armed forces of the federation.<sup>9</sup>

In order to facilitate effective implementation of the federal character principle, Section 153 of the 1999 constitution established the federal character commission as an executive body empowered to monitor the implementation of the federal character clauses which includes:<sup>10</sup>

derivation of a fair formulation for the tenure office of public service of the federation and states, the armed forces of the federation, the police force and other security agencies, companies and parastatals owned by government, subject to the approval of the National Assembly to promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principle of proportional sharing of bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all level of government to take legal measures including prosecution of the head of staff of any ministry, government body or agency which fails to comply with the federal character principle or formula prescribed by the commission and as approved for under Section 8(3) of the schedule. Notwithstanding any provisions in any other law or enactment, the commission shall ensure that every

<sup>1</sup> Ammani A.A (2014), The Federal Character Principle as a Necessary Evil. Available: [www.gamji.com/article/800/news8603.htm](http://www.gamji.com/article/800/news8603.htm) (20 August, 2014) 43 - 49

<sup>2</sup> Edigin L.U (2010). Federal Character and National Stability in Nigeria 1979 - 2000. *Journal of Research in Nation Development*. 8(2) 23 – 34

<sup>3</sup> Section 14 (3) 1979 constitution.

<sup>4</sup> Section 14(3) 1999 constitution.

<sup>5</sup> Section 147(3), 1999 constitution.

<sup>6</sup> Section 223(1)(a), 1999 constitution.

<sup>7</sup> Section 223(1)(b), 1999 constitution.

<sup>8</sup> Section 171(5), 1999 constitution..

<sup>9</sup> Section 197(2), 1999 constitution.

<sup>10</sup> Section 8(1) of the Third Schedule to the 1999 constitution empowers the commission to carry out the above listed functions.

public company reflects the federal character in the appointment of its directors and senior management staff.

The efficiency of the federal character principle in bringing about social-economic cum political balance through equal representation has been an issue of serious academic discourse. It has been argued that the principle adversely affects the efficacy and standards expected of government institutions rather, it has been an instrument for encouraging ethno-party politics and substitution of merit for sentiments.

An observable pattern in the application of the principle is the emphasis placed on inter-state relations as against inter-ethnic relations, which is the primary purpose of its adoption; this leads to inter-ethnic tension and sectional conflicts within the state. The system is discriminatory since power sharing is state based and not ethnic based, certain ethnic groups are eventually unrepresented, and the issue of fair representation also arises for those groups who are represented. The system is thus considered to be discriminatory and more favorable to major ethnic groups. For instance, leadership of the federal capital territory and ministries of defense, interior, mines and power was in the north for several years.<sup>1</sup> It has also been argued that in a plural society, ethnicity is not inherently dangerous rather the danger is posed by the socio-economic and political discrimination against ethnic groups which result in conflict over the allocation of political positions, offices and resources. Thus, regardless of the adoption of the federal character principle, the predominance of political offices by certain groups and the resultant sidelining of minority groups still poses extreme danger to national integration, peace and unity.

### **Between the Quota System and Federal Character Principles: The Dilemma of Application and Implementation**

In Nigeria, lack of equal representation has been a major cause of increased rate of insecurity, ethno-religious crises and armed violence in the country. Emergence of groups like the Niger-Delta militants, Boko-Haram Insurgents, and most recently the Niger-Delta avengers is traceable to absence of adequate representation and marginalization of certain groups in the administration of the state. The various attacks by these groups has been extremely detrimental to the socio-economic development of the country, displaced several Nigerians and continuously caused huge loss of lives and properties.<sup>2</sup> The Federal Character Principle which is aimed at representation and participation to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation irrespective of the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion have not been able to achieve this objective. The implementation of the principle has mired the nation's potential for greatness. It has aggravated the North - South dichotomy, undermined merit and allows mediocrity.

Like the contentious Quota System applied when processing admission into federal educational institutions, the Federal Character principle amplifies the diverse configuration of Nigeria as a nation along ethnic (majority or minority), religious (Christian-Muslim mainly) and other lines, such as the educationally advantaged and disadvantaged. The perceivable differences have never ceased to task past and present governments on how best to ensure the country's corporate peace, stability and, indeed, existence under a system acceptable as fair to all the federating units. Attaining this singular objective has, however, remained elusive, with incessant cries of marginalisation and other grouches coming from virtually all constituent parts whenever they feel their interests are threatened. While the quota system came into being before the country's independence in 1960, according to reports, the Federal Character Principle became officially recognised in the 1979 Constitution as a vehicle for ethnic representation in the public sector. Today, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) is in place, established as a federal executive body by Act No 34 of 1996 to implement and enforce the Federal Character principles of fairness and equity in the distribution of public posts and socio-economic infrastructures among the various federating units. The provisions of the 1999 Constitution (as altered) in Sections 14 and 153 consolidated the establishment of the FCC. The commission now deploys its officials to physically monitor all federal recruitment exercises and ensure that they substantially comply with approved guidelines.

As noted earlier, first enshrined in the 1979 Constitution and retained in the current 1999 Constitution, the federal Character principle has been subjected to a deliberate abuse, misunderstanding and misapplication. One of the most common mistakes is to confuse it with a quota system. There are, though nominal, but fundamental differences in what constitutes the goals of a quota system and the goals of a 'federal character' principle. A quota system suggests a result that is pre-determined and inflexible. For example, as noted earlier, our Constitution provides a ministerial slot for each 36 states of the federation. This is what a quota system appears more like. Federal character on the other hand, if a careful examination of the intendment of the drafters of the provisions of the constitution in this regard will be considered, it is aimed at creating a concerted and cohesive

<sup>1</sup>Adeosun A.B (2011). Federal Character Principle and National Integration: A Critical Appraisal *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, (2.4), iv.

<sup>2</sup>Asaju.K (2015). Democratic Governance, Federal Character Principles and National Development in Nigeria *Review of Public Administration and Management*, 4(8)

developmental drive in the country. It is the taking of deliberate steps to ensure that appointments at federal levels and the distribution of amenities reflect the diversity of the country. The eventual establishment of Federal Character Commission in 1996 to pursue, implement and enforce the Federal Character principles lends credence to this assertion.

What may appear as another erroneous view of the notion of ‘federal character’ is the wrong assumption that it is an instrument to ensure proportional representation. It was never the intention of the federal character principle that the staff strength in each federal parastatal must reflect the population strength of different areas of the country or that there must be state, regional or ethnic parity in the workforce of each federal government ministries, departments, agencies and parastatals. Again, equating the ‘federal character principle’ to the affirmative action philosophy as practiced in the USA or positive discrimination as practiced in the UK is also an aberration. For instance while affirmative action is used mainly to correct perceived historical wrongs such as the historical discrimination against Blacks and women, there is no such thing as the correction of any historical injustice through the federal character principle. The philosophy behind it was simply to provide every part of the country the proverbial sense of belonging that unity in diversity gives. Consequently, it may be safe to say that The ‘Federal Character’ principle is more of a statement of goals and not a call for quota, proportional representation or an instrument for redressing historical wrong. It is instructive to note that apart from Ministerial appointment where the Constitution explicitly made the states the unit of representation, the unit of representation under the federal character principle is not stated in the constitution and the interpretation act.

The controversy over the years, however, has been that with Federal Character and Quota System taking the center stages in admission, recruitment, promotion and appointment processes, the advancement of the country’s public institutions, which ought to be the drivers of development, is neither based on merit nor competence. It is against this backdrop that critics insist that the nation urgently needs a review of her educational policies and an extensive educational infrastructural development to accommodate its growing student population. This seems to be the point a distinguished senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Ben Murray-Bruce reiterated when he said Federal Character Principle was drawing the country back. The senator said:

Nigeria must make progress though tribe and tongue may differ. The only way to do this is by saying goodbye to ethnicity and hello to merit...consider the progress that Nigeria made before the quota system (1960-66) and the retrogression we have made since 1960 till date. The difference is clear. Federal character cannot make an electrical power station work, it can’t make refinery work. Only merit can ensure this. As a result of federal character..... Nigeria Airways went from 30 aircraft to bankruptcy and a debt of over \$60m by the year 2000. Quota system and federal character lead to a sense of entitlement in beneficiaries and resentment in others. Merit is a better way of life.<sup>1</sup>

The setbacks were compounded by the selfish, carefree, manipulative, exploitative and dishonest attitudes of subsequent leaders. A fraction of the dilemma presently would include the 10.5 million children reported to be out-of- school in the North alone, as well as the insurgency in the North East that has compounded the problem. This may take decades if not centuries to overcome. How ready are Nigerian leaders to enthrone an educational system that would produce competent drivers of development nationwide in the foreseeable future? How ready are leaders to depart from rendering insincere, unpatriotic, corrupt, and self-serving leadership; and help Nigeria conquer the pangs of illiteracy, mass poverty and joblessness, avoidable diseases and death? Federal Character and Quota System are merely cosmetic solution to a chronic cancer.<sup>2</sup> The need to redefine Nigerian federalism and the entire political system to ensure that ideal democracy and true federalism can be achieved through building virile institutions where merit, credibility and justice would prevail over the application of Federal Character principle is more important now than ever if this nation will ever survive the onslaught of a possible disintegration.

### **The Power Sharing and/or Zoning Formula Practice of Political Parties**

Achieving equal representation has been one of the most challenging problems of the Nigerian state even among the major ethnic groups, as one ethnic group has been domineering in the administration of the state to the detriment of others. From 1960 till date, out of the 14 heads of state that have ruled the country, 9 of them are northerners, 2 are from the west and one each from the east and the south-south. The two leaders from the west and the one from the south-south were not originally elected rather they were replacements who assumed office upon the demise of the head of state.<sup>3</sup> Allocation of socio-political power among the various ethnic groups has been a major controversial issue in Nigeria. Socio-political measures and institutions have been put in place to

<sup>1</sup>Eniola.T (2015) Federal Character Drawing Nigeria back. [Online] Available <http://www.punchng.com/politics/federal-character-drawing-Nigeria-back-murray-bruce/64-72> (May5, 2016)

<sup>2</sup>Eniola. T (2015) Federal Character Drawing Nigeria back. [Online] Available <http://www.punchng.com/politics/federal-character-drawing-Nigeria-back-Murray-Bruce/> (September 3, 2015) 64 - 72

<sup>3</sup>Adeosun A.B (2011) Federal Character Principle and National Integration: A Critical Appraisal *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, (2,4), iv.

prevent one ethnic group from dominating all others, this is the rationale behind the introduction of power sharing formula into the Nigerian politics. The power sharing principle aims at inhibiting ethnic politics and promoting equal representation in the administration of the state. It helps to secure protection, equal participation and representation of every ethnic group in the decision making process of government.

The power sharing principle can be viewed either as a democratic theory or as a conflict management theory.<sup>1</sup> As a conflict management theory, power sharing principle is a tool for curtailing and possibly ending ethnic conflicts by creating an avenue for every ethnic group that was involved in the conflict to participate in the administration of government. While as a democratic theory, power sharing principle emphasizes equal representation of all groups in the state polity. Application of the power sharing principle can extend beyond the political terrain to other spheres of life, however in the political sphere; it is a useful tool for ensuring the existence of political balance and avoiding national cohesion. The effectiveness of power sharing principle however depends on it been accepted by all political leaders representing each ethnic group, it must be flexible enough to facilitate equal distribution of resources, it must be indigenous to the people and adopted with a liberal democracy.<sup>2</sup>

Power sharing principle in Nigeria is traceable to the pre-independence era when the country was divided into Northern and Southern protectorates, which later deepened in the post-independence era. Power sharing in Nigeria is aimed at promoting social stability, by preventing the permanent tagging of certain group as minority group rather sharing political offices and preventing the winner from occupying all positions. In lieu of the power sharing principle, Nigeria has been divided into six geo-political zones namely North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East, South-South to ensure that national unity is reflected in the composition of the top political offices. To a very minimal extent, the zoning system appears quite innovatively suitable for the Nigerian heterogeneous system as it helps to accommodate the previously sidelined ethnic groups. It has facilitated a more inclusive political system and curtailed vicious and deadly struggle between ethnic groups for political offices.

So far in this article, we have attempted to demonstrate and significantly illustrate the importance of National cohesion and integration as a non-negotiable tool for attainment of nation building that will stand the test of time. We have also shown the futility of the constitutional provisions on Federal Character principles along-side the establishment of the Federal Character Commission; saddled with the responsibility of pursuing and ensuring adherence and implementation of the laid down constitutional provisions by various organs of government. Clearly, political- power sharing asymmetry in the country negatively affects whatever could have been the positives of the principle in mitigating the challenge posed by ethnic diversity. There is no gainsaying the fact that the reason for its introduction appears to produce some fruits in that it corrects imbalances and foster national integration by giving some measure to douse various factors that have propensity towards mutual mistrusts and rivalries amongst the different ethnic groups in Nigeria. However, its implementation has left some parts of the country with sore feelings and distastefulness for the principle. Consequently, there is need for a rethink of the Federal Character Principle by all stakeholders to chart a way forward on the management of ethnic groups demand in Nigeria because, its inclusion in our constitutions is more of a manifestation of heinous attitude by the elite which has left the nation grappling with more challenges as a result of it. Despite the obvious defective implementation of federal character principle in Nigeria, there is a possible antidote to this defect in the application true federalism, which today still remains one of the best political frameworks for governing a pluralist state. As mentioned earlier, rethinking them in such a way as to enhance national integration, cohesion, stability and development in Nigeria Is the way to go now

We may also need to look at the following possibilities in proffering a lasting solution to this challenge. First, our political elites must manifestly speak and act as statesmen that promote ethnic accommodation, integration and unite the people and not as ethnic jingoists that rather manipulate religion, tribe, language or place of origin for their political gains. Of a true, several pluralist nations of the world exist and progress without consideration for these dividing factors and Nigeria can do the same. Second, Federal character principle's ideals are not out rightly bad in its consideration for appointment or employment in public services, etc., but merit should come first before consideration of factors such as which ethnic group an individual belongs to.

Furthermore, to revive a country in dire economic and political need as ours, it is extremely of importance to bring on board people willing and ready to serve with credibility and possess requisite mental aptitude to get the job done. No one questions result because your place of origin, the language you speak, your religious and other social cultural inclinations becomes of no use when you get result that advances the country's goals and aspirations for its people. Again, central to this process is the need to galvanize our system towards the evolution

<sup>1</sup>Cadeao.C and Hamela.H(2009) A suis generis case of power-sharing in Mozambique.*Peace and Development Research Project of CDAS, IDRC and World Bank.* 1 (1-55) ,[Online] available at <http://www.siteresources.worldbank.org>.

<sup>2</sup>Awopetu.A and Oluwashakin.A (2012). Zoning Formula and Party Politics in the Nigerian Democracy: A Crossroad for PDP in the 2015 Presidential Election *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(4).

of virile institutional framework that will nip in the bud sectionalism, religious bigotry and tribal sentiments. As noted earlier in this chapter, we have seen right from 1967 till date that our leaders keep thriving on attitude that are counter-productive to the growth and development of the country in promoting the “grab-I-grab mentality”, that results in everyone competing for his supposed share of the national cake without recourse to the common good. For example the reckless creation of more states which was claimed by its promoter that it will solve the problem of national integration did not take us long to know that it was a statutory way of getting the resources into the purse of very few. Right now, we have all come to see the menace these states are causing to the Nigerian polity with more than half not viable and could not even meet their pay roll obligations to their staffs.

Consequently, retuning to regional structure, which has been made easier now with the six-geopolitical zoning arrangement that crept into our political discourse may well be a way to go, considering how well, or so it appears, it worked during the first republic with just three regions then. The only thing left uniting this nation is the economic, political and traditional elites’ interest which is purely to pillage our common patrimony for their personal gains. This is because both the indigenization and privatization policies of our governments moved our resources into the hands of a wealthy few to the utter deprivation of the majority who are poor. Because, how best can one explain the sales of public infrastructure to private persons (most of them in government or formal public officials who get people to front for them) with the view of bringing efficiency into the sector, but the results is the same, and in some cases worse.

Another issue here is the general underlining principle of our constitution. Our constitution as it is today somewhat hinders development. There are no quick fixes to our constitution for now that is capable of redressing the errors. It may also be safe to say that there seems to be no political will to promote a holistic constitutional review right now. May be the weariness that have come from the futility of the past efforts as discussed in one of the later chapters in this book explains this challenge. But if the constitution is reviewed such that it significantly grant constitutional autonomy to states as well as local governments, it will reduce the tension at the center, thus taking out the problems and abuses bedeviling the implementation of the federal character principle at promoting integration. This will undoubtedly reduce tension at the center because the different tiers will have shared responsibilities. For years Nigeria has been practicing quasi federalism meaning that a shift from the status quo would either require constitutional amendment or sovereign national conference which will permit autonomous and independent status in decision making for the continuation (or not) of Nigeria state.

In recent times, corruption and immorality, sometimes breed by the misapplication of the Federal Character Principle, is celebrated thereby promoting more heinous crime with impunity in the country. Value orientation will help re-shape the attitude of Nigerians particularly the elite who are the prime beneficiaries of the Federal Character Principle. Good moral value, has been touted of our President Muahammadu Buhari, may engrain national patriotism rather than ethnic patriotism/ primordialism, fairness rather than sentimentalism/bias. Although, the extent to which the president has demonstrated that is above board in all these is yet to manifestly seeing going by the disparity in the appointment of key members of his cabinets as they are constituted at the moment.

The Federal Character principle was crafted and enshrined in our constitution by the ruling political elite with the intent of facilitating inter-ethnic cohesion or intergroup relations in the Nigerian body polity. Like virtually all other multi-ethnic societies, in all regions and climes, Nigeria has exhibited very high propensity of conflict for quite a long time. Thus, the political elites have been trying to forestall a collapse of the system. However, considering various legal and institutional designs to so far by different regimes, before and after independence, there is the under-lining conceptualization which informs them all. According to Emmanuel O Ojo<sup>1</sup>, this conceptualization derives from the employment of Western bourgeois theory of social stability and elite stability. Two outstanding contributors to this perspective are worthy of mentioning. They are Martin D.G and Morrison Stevenson.<sup>2</sup> They opined that stability in any political system depends on the elite which they identified as the middle class. In this respect, the stability of any plural society is a function of the state of development of the middle class. If the societal segment dubbed the middle class is well developed and fairly thick in terms of population and in terms of strength the more cohesive, the more stable the polity will be. Also, if there is cordiality of ideas, or put differently, if there is ideological consciousness among the middle class, this is likely to engender stability that will affect the political system positively. They argued further that instability within any polity is elite instability or communal instability. Elite instability for them occurs when the competition among the elite is too keen on resources that are too few. Communal instability however, is grassroots in its outlook and it is usually caused by elite instability, carried to the grassroots level. This is the

<sup>1</sup>Ojo, E. O, (2013)“Mechanisms for Conflict Management in Plural and Divided Societies: the Nigerian Experience”, *IFRA Special Research Issue*, Vol. 2.

<sup>2</sup>See Morrison, D.G, and H.M. Stevenson, (1971) Political Instability and Independent Black Africa: More Dimensions of Conflict Behaviour Within Nations *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 15, . 3, and DG Morrison (1972) Cultural Pluralism, Modernisation and Conflict: An Empirical Analysis of Sources of Political Instability of African Nations, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*.V, 1.



phenomenon that has bedeviled the Nigerian political landscape since amalgamation in 1914 and same fate befell the federal character principle.

Furthermore, federal character principle has been a subject of abuse and misuse just as every other similar ideology to manage Nigeria's plural structure. This study noted that the ideology of federalism is rooted in the trouble or trauma of ethnicity orchestrated by colonial tactics of divide and rule and that the applicability of the Federal Character Principle has raised fundamental challenges that has grievously defeated its objective. Consequently, the perennial and seemingly intractable violent agitation among diverse ethnic groups who daily speak out against what they perceived as marginalization and exclusionary activities of government at different levels is a pointer to the need to rethink the federal character principle. Consequently, our study submit that going by recent resurgence of acrimonious acts by different interest group in Nigeria, the rejigging of certain constitutional provisions, advocacy for value re-orientation, enshrinement of rotational presidency in the constitution and address other issues that bothers on privileges of Nigerian people, distribution of power and resources. If these can be considered, the integrative and peace-building intention of the legal and institutional structure in this regard will be better welcome as an integrative mechanism. Any principle and provision of law that deny one individual its right to self-actualization and provided advantage for the to aspire towards self-actualization cannot at best be a good law intended for cohesion and consensus building among the parties involve. It must be a win-win in its outlook to provide such premise for constructive and productive engagement.

### **The Inextricable Linkage between Management of Inter-group Relations and Other National Issues**

It is an established fact that a direct causal link cum band-wagon effect exist between poor management of inter-group relations, and other subsisting national issues including group conflicts/clashes, insecurity, terrorism, poor governance, ethnic inequality, poverty, unemployment and general under development. This necessitates the urgent need for re-evaluation and reform of inter-group management mechanisms as a precursor for proffering workable solutions.

Although Nigeria has heterogeneous ethnic composition, there are majority and minority ethnic groups within the constituent. Basically, there are three majority ethnic groups Hausa 20.9%, Yoruba 20.3% and Igbo 16.6% accounting for over 56% of the national population. By implication, the nation has a tripod ethnic structure with each of the major ethnic group wielding hegemonic power which compels the minority groups to form alliance with them for the purpose of having a recognized political voice.<sup>1</sup> This further compounds the problem of inter-group relations in the country, as the lack of trust among the three majority ethnic groups heightens as each entertain the fear of marginalization and dominance by the other. Hence the unhealthy competition for political positions, distribution of developmental assets, access to social amenities, national income, and promotion of group ideologies which accounts for most deadly clashes in the history of Nigeria. This is an unlikely situation in a country like Tanzania where there are no majority ethnic groups, in-fact no ethnic group constitute more than 12% of the nation population hence formation of political alliances is the order of the day and no group wield threatening hegemonic power.<sup>2</sup>

The challenges of management inter-group relations in Nigeria is further compounded by the existence of sub-groups and alliances creating several cleavages including the division between the majority and minority ethnic groups (eg the Indigenous Niger Delta continuously distinguish themselves from Igbos), the North-South dichotomy, disparity between the 36 states of the federation and the six geo-political zones, and affiliations to the two major religions in the country (Christianity and Islam). Some of the cleavages however overlap in cases of conflicts with the weaker ties giving way for the stronger one; this further compounds the problem of inequality.

There are challenges in the various inter-group management principles adopted so far and their implementation, as earlier discuss. However, it is an undisputable fact that to achieve the desired result, inter-group management mechanisms must go hand-in-hand with good governance and adoption of balanced developmental policies. This brings us to developmental challenges and national issues which must be resolved to reduce inter-group clashes and positively influence the effective of inter-group management principles in the country. These include:

#### **i) Educational Inequality**

The historical educational imbalance between the North and the South traceable the religious cum cultural orientation of the Northerners and colonial history has residual effect on man-power development in the northern region.<sup>3</sup> By implication, the problem of man-power development in the North is directly linked to the

<sup>1</sup> Jibril Munzali (1991) *Minority-Languages and Lingua Francas in Nigerian Education*, in E. N. Emenanjo, ed., *Multilingualism, Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria*, Central Books, Agbor.

<sup>2</sup> Nyang'oro, J. E (2006) *Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Tanzania*, in Yusuf Bangura, ed., *Ethnic Inequalities and Public Sector Governance*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

<sup>3</sup> Adamu Fatima (2003) *Globalisation and Economic Globalisation in Northern Nigeria*: Development Studies Association, UK, [www.devstud.org.uk/publications/papers/conf03](http://www.devstud.org.uk/publications/papers/conf03)

imbalanced national educational system, and this can only be solved by a national educational reform and implementation of suitable educational policies and not by adoption of inter-group policies which will amount to unnecessary compromise of standards with boomeranging effects. This point was properly articulated in Oshionebo, citing Rensis Likert to the effect that;

All activities of any enterprise are initiated and determined by the persons that make up that institution. Plants, offices, computers, automated equipment, and all else that a modern firm uses are unproductive except for human effort and direction. Human beings design or order equipment; they decide where and how to use computers; they modernize or fail to modernize the technology employed; they secure the capital needed and decide on the accounting and fiscal procedures to be used. Every aspect of a firm's activities is determined by the competent, motivated, and general effectiveness of its human organization. Of all the task of management, managing the human component is the central and most important task, because all else depends upon how well it is done.<sup>1</sup>

By implication, for any organization to achieve success, the quality of human resources should not be compromised being the engineering force behind the management and organization of other resources. The mode of application of the Federal Character Principle and Quota system to recruitment in the federal civil service amounts to compromise of requisite standards.<sup>2</sup> Against the basis of the principle which is targeted at having equal representation of all states and ethnic groups in the federal civil service, but not at the verge of giving-up merits. This compromise affects service delivery as a direct nexus has been established between human resources and service delivery.<sup>3</sup> Also discourage students from being hardworking and creates a general sense of marginalization.

#### ii) Unequal Economic Development

Similar to the large North-South dichotomy in the educational sector, a huge gap also exist in the level of economic development in the Northern and Southern regions of the country as a result of several factors. Between 1986 and 1990, majority of registered companies(70%) were located in the Southwestern region, with only about 14% situated in the North. And by the year 2001, the North had witnessed tremendous de-industrialization which affected about 43% of industries situate in the region. Infrastructural challenges, macro-economic difficulties and several other factors accounts for this. In a similar vein, banking activities in the North is almost completely paralyzed. Whereas Lagos accounts for up to 48% of financial deposits in the country and about 69.96% loans, the North accounts for only 10% deposit and 6.55% loans.<sup>4</sup> By implication, economic activities in the North is relatively low, thereby discouraging investors and closing down access to job opportunities. Whereas birth rate in the Northern region is relatively high and this also implies high consumption rate. Sole reliance is placed on government allocations. Hence the high rate of unemployment, youth restiveness, poverty and violence in the region. On the other hand, the oil producing communities of the Niger delta lack social amenities like portable water, stable power supply, good roads, standardized health care facilities and they are also exposed to health hazards resulting from environmental pollution. Crude oil discovery and exploration has not really improved the lives of the local inhabitants of the oil producing region rather they have experienced increased level of poverty and unemployment consequent upon destruction of the ecosystem and environmental degradation which has adversely affected soil fertility, climatic condition, aquatic and terrestrial life, from which the inhabitants derive their subsistent livelihood.<sup>5</sup> This accounts for the up-rise of various violent groups from the various parts of the country such as the Niger Delta Avengers, Fulani Herdsmen, Boko-Haram etc. This particular problem cannot be solved by adoption of inter-group management principles; rather Government must adopt suitable economic and developmental policies capable of driving the economy in all parts of the country. Basic infrastructure must also be provided to improve living standards and rekindle the people's hope in a better tomorrow.

## Conclusion

Whereas the need for equal representation of all groups in a heterogeneous state like Nigeria is extremely important, necessary platform must be created to ensure that whatever inter-group management principles

<sup>1</sup> Oshionebo, B. O. (1992), "An Overview of Management and the Personnel Function" in A.D. Yahaya and I. C. Akinyele (Eds.), *New Trends in Personnel Management: A Book of Reading*, Badagry: Administrative Staff College.

<sup>2</sup> Olowu, D., Otobo, E. and Okotoni, M. (1997), *The Role of the Civil Service in Enhancing Development and Democracy: An Evaluation of the Nigerian Experience*. Paper presented at Civil Service Systems in comparative perspective, School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, April 5th – 8 th .

<sup>3</sup> Agbodike Flowrence Chinelo et al, The Application of Federal Character Principle and Its Implication on Service Delivery in Nigerian Federal Civil Service, *International Journal of Human Resource Studies* 5(2015)3 P.7.

<sup>4</sup> Adamu Fatima (2003) *Globalisation and Economic Glocalisation in Northern Nigeria* Development Studies Association, UK, www.devstud.org.uk/publications/papers/conf03

<sup>5</sup> Olujimi J.A(2011) Environmental implications of oil exploration and exploitation in the coastal region of Ondo State, Nigeria: A regional planning appraisal *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning* 4, 110-121.

adopted is not rendered futile. These include investment in infrastructure development, provisions of basic amenities, creation of job opportunities and increased public sensitisation. Government must take affirmative action involving elimination of past discrimination by reasonable compensating marginalized groups. Once past discrimination has been catered for, a level playing ground should be created for all regardless of ethnic group or religious affiliation. All persons should be given equal opportunities to openings and merit should be prioritized in order to develop a standardized system.<sup>1</sup>

This study concludes that we cannot overemphasize the need to ensure that appointment of persons to various positions should be made from the best available in any part of the country. Besides, recruitment to posts which require specialist training such as medical practitioners, architects, engineers and pilots should be essentially based on merit. Indigenization and privatization policies put the wealth of this country in the hands of a few Nigerian at the expense of majority of the people. The masses need to be given equal opportunities for employment, equitable share in the distribution of resources and benefits of the state in terms of provision of social amenities such as education, access to good roads, portable water, housing; electricity, fair-wages for their labour, etc., which will bring about improvement in their standard of living. What we now know is that an unbridled exploitation of the proletariat and the poor in the society will breed insecurity and non-commitment to national peace and integration. Finally, pending when we will get it right on how to manage our ethnic diversity through the constitution (if we heed timely warnings being provided in this article), there is need to be wary of misapplying the Federal Character Principle to further cause division among ethno-communal groups where non hitherto exists and douse stringent application of the principle with fairness among ethnic groups, states and local government that are homogenous.

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<sup>1</sup>Mustapha A.R (2007) *Institutionalising ethnic representation: How effective is the Federal Character Commission in Nigeria?* (Centre for Rise on Equality, Working Paper No 43, University of Oxford, 2007).