

Decentralized Governance in Nigeria: A Means to An End

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Abstract

Historically Nigeria has come a long way from multi-ethnic entity with political differences and background to the amalgamation of 1914 till the present structure of thirty-six states. Ethnicity, no doubt has contributed immensely to ethnic conflicts in Nigeria because of long standing hatred or resentments towards ethnic groups different from one's own or fear of domination which can as well lead ethnic groups to resort to violence as a means to protect and preserve the existing ethnic groups; this seems to make the adoption of decentralized political system a welcome development. With this re-organization it is believed that ethnic conflict would be contained in as much as it guarantee the protection and promotion of every ethnic group's interests through representation and participation in governance. In essence political decentralization ensures that every state is allowed to decide or determine what they do or do not in terms of socio-political and economic development of their local state.

Key words: Decentralization, Governance, Ethnic group, Conflict, Re-organization, Political participation

1. Introduction

At the heart of a very complex society lays essentially competition for socio-political and economic resources. The thrust of which is ethnic conflict among the various ethnic groups. The irreconcilable differences and the difficulty of establishing a political system that will engender socio-political development in an environment characterized by ethnic cleavages and ethnic loyalties implies that conflict within ethnic groups is not synonymous with socio-economic and political development which makes the complexity of ethnic differences pertinent to socio-political development in Nigeria. Coigligh (n.d:63) opines that the conflicts within the states are as much a result of ethnic (tribal) arguments as ethnic (tribal) arguments are a result of the state. What this means is that conflicts within ethnic groups emanate as a result of the differences or complexities of ethnics in such a state as well as the mechanism employed by the state to manage it which by implication may further deepened ethnic cleavages.

One fundamental problem facing Nigeria is whether the various ethnic groups that made up the country can hold together as one indivisible political entity. What this informs us about is that a large and ethnically complex Nigerian society must of a necessity manage its powerful and long standing ethnic cleavages to aid not only the development of the country but gears towards national integration. Of course as long as this is done with the right motives it will elicit the desired objective. Arguably one would say here that the perceived inability of the central government to reach every ethnic group effectively and ensuring a productive ethnic balance on one hand and the vulnerability of the minority ethnic groups to deprivation of their socio-political rights suggest that a socio-political system that will ensure the sustainability of the polity is necessary.

Ethnicity, as argued by scholars contributes immensely to conflicts in a multi-ethnic states like Nigeria because of long standing hatred or resentments towards ethnic groups different from one's own or fear of domination which can as well lead ethnic groups to resort to violence as a means to protect and preserve the existing ethnic groups since no ethnic group would allow others to deny them of their socio-political rights. This seems to make the re-organization of the country into smaller unit/states a welcome development to some extent because of its attendant problems, but notwithstanding, with this re-organization, ethnic conflict can still be contained in as much it guarantee the protection and promotion of every ethnic group's interests.

Originally the idea to split the homogeneous majority groups into states was conceived as a solution to the problems encountered by the minority groups within the polity some of whom are located within the majority. Put in another form the driving force behind this principle is to prevent centralism and give room for representation and participation of every ethnic group in governance. Ethnic minority group has been described

as a people who are singled out from others in the society in which they lived for differential and an unequal treatment, thus regarding themselves as object of collective socio-economic and political discrimination (Akinyele, 1996). This exploitative relationship can take the form of unequal regional development, differential access to political positions of power or different forms of social, economic and political discrimination. Which means that ethnicity may sometime lead to poor socio-economic and political policies. What inform the assertion that ethnic conflict management in multi-ethnic state can take the form of re-organizational approach so as to give room for the various ethnic groups' participation and accommodation thus strengthening the socio-political role of the minorities in the business of nation building (Adetiba, 2012).

The idea of re-organizing the various ethnic groups in Nigeria into smaller constitutional political units was meant to reduce ethnic conflict in the country and as well create a balance among the component units. But in a departure from this the fragmentation of the country into smaller constitutional units is today perceived in the country to be a means of achieving or scoring cheap political goals. For example during the military era, the government use it as a means of legitimizing itself, with the collaborations of the political group whose interest is in achieving their social economic and political goals. This scenario however did not take away the original goal (ethnic management) for which states were created. Thus under state creation the minority ethnic groups would not only be protected but it will preserve the stability as well as territorial integrity of the country.

Adetiba (2012:70) notes that at the heart of socio-political development in Nigeria is ethnic conflict which has been detrimental to national integration and unity. Therefore this paper explains political decentralization as a means through which ethnic conflict is creatively managed in Nigeria. The argument is that political decentralization is a means to an end. This suggests that the fragmentation of the country into states does not necessarily take away the potentialities for ethnic conflict rather it reduces it. Using secondary data collection method – published and unpublished records compiled by other scholars – this article is structured as follows; the next section provided a framework for understanding ethnic group. Section three explains ethnic conflict, concluding that the unpredictability nature of ethnic conflict necessitated the adoption of a decentralized form of governance. Section four looked at decentralized governance as explain by scholars, section five then examine decentralization in Nigeria as a means to ensure the sustainability of the polity and section six concludes the article.

2. Ethnic Group

Arguably the concept of ethnic group means different things to different people/scholars, hence a look at the concept so as to understand why decentralized governance is seen as an antidote to ethnic conflict in Nigeria. Ethnic group refers to a community-type group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who may not share this culture but who identify themselves with this ancestral group. Ukoha (2005) describes ethnic as groups with ascribed membership, usually but not always based on claims, or myths of common history, ancestry, language, race, religion, culture and territory. Therefore in Nigeria context the Hausa, Yoruba, Efik, Jukun, Igbo, Fulani, Birom, Igbira, Nupe etc. are all ethnic groups. Cohen cited in Salawu and Hassan (2011) sees ethnic group as an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the members of other ethnic groups within the larger society because they share primordial ties. Primordialism regards ethnicity as a principle of social structuring, powerful and immutable characteristics of the human condition evincing meanings which transcends the immediate social context Smaje (cited Byung-Soo, 2008). Odendaal (1998) shares this view by defining ethnic group as groups of people who see themselves or are seen by others as sharing a distinctive and enduring collective identity based on a belief in a common origin, a common history and a common destiny culturally specific practices and beliefs.

Ethnic group has also been described as those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation and it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists. In essence ethnic group is seen as a socially constructed and fluid society.

Nnoli (1995) describes ethnic group as those whose interaction may generate ethnicity, their social functions distinguished by the communal character of boundaries. The relevant communal factor may be culture, language or both as the case in Nigeria. Ethnic groups share common socio-cultural and sometimes political interests distinctive from other ethnic group. Therefore ethnic group is classified as any group who set themselves apart by others with whom they interact or co-exist on the basis of their perceptions of cultural differentiation and/or common ancestry (Baurmann, 2004:12). Hence the assertion that ethnic groups are small nations where the group enjoys shared language, culture and where individuals felt safe and saw themselves as separate political entities (Bayart, 2010).

Vanhanen (2004) perceives ethnic group as extended kin groups; and their members tended to support each other in conflict situations. Hence the Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo always support each other in conflict situation against those consider being outsider. Thus explaining why many types of interest conflicts tend to become canalized along ethnic cleavages in multi-ethnic states.

From the above one can deduce that an ethnic group consists of those groups who share common language and ancestry and are equally regarded as so by other ethnic group; each ethnic group has its own constituted features which do not change and as well consistently distributed within this group. Hence the Yoruba of the West, the Hausa/Fulani of the North, the Igbo of the East, and the Ijaw of the South in Nigeria can all be classified as an ethnic group who share common language/culture and ancestry and they are regarded as so by other ethnic groups. This informs us that an ethnic group can be defined on the basis of their distinct differences that the members of the group and other ethnic group see as significant to their identity. However, ethnic group can be classified into primary and secondary ethnic groups, majority and minority ethnic groups (Isajiw, 1993).

2.1 Primary Ethnic Group: This refers to the place of origin where the group's culture emerged as a distinct entity. Primary ethnic groups are those which exist in the same place in which they are formed. Put in another words they are indigenous groups. For example the Yoruba are regarded as the indigenous group in South Western Nigeria just as the Hausa in the Northern part of the country or the Zulus in South Africa.

2.2 Secondary Ethnic Group: This refers to ethnic groups which have their origin in society different from the ones in which they currently exist. In other words they are not originally/biologically from where they currently exist. For example the Yoruba in Plateau state, the Igbo in Lagos state of Nigeria, the Indians in South Africa or the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia. These groups share their cultural and historical background with the society from which they emigrated, but which do not depend any more on the original society for their existence (Isajiw, 1993).

2.3 Majority Ethnic Group: These are the group who determine the thrust on which the society's basic socio-political and economic policies are built. They seem to determine the character of the norms of society as a whole. Their culture envelopes the entire society into which the minority ethnic groups assimilate. What this translates to mean is that the relationship between the majority and minority groups in such society however does not relate to numbers but power. For example the thrust on which the socio-political and economic policies are built is determined by the majority Yoruba ethnic group in South Western Nigeria and not the minority ethnic groups (the non-Yoruba). This does not however suggest that the minorities are not reckoned with in the society where they have been assimilated.

2.4 Minority Ethnic Group: This group may preserve their culture and institutions in a larger or smaller degree, they can even influence the socio-political and economic character of the dominant institutions in larger or smaller degrees, but the fact remains that the framework for inter group processes is majorly determined by the institutions deriving from the culture of the majority ethnic group (Isajiw, 1993). What this implies is that the majority groups, because of their position in political system, the status of other ethnic group are directly or indirectly assessed in relation to them. They are the deciding force regarding socio-political and economic policies regarding the minority groups. The result of this in multi-ethnic state of Nigeria is incessant ethnic conflict over the allocation of socio-political and economic resources.

3. Ethnic Conflict

Ethnic conflict seems to be a significant feature of socio-political struggle in multi-ethnic states. It appears that no multi-ethnic state is free from it. Ethnic conflict is not peculiar to multi-ethnic states of Sub-Saharan Africa but also manifest in Asia and Latin American states. Ethnic conflict no doubt poses threat to socio-political stability and national cohesion in a multi-ethnic state. It diverts the attention of groups involve from more important socio-political and economic matters, thus endangering ethnic integration.

The term ethnic conflict is often used widely to refer to different conflicts that are not actually ethnic conflict observes Ismayilov (1994). For example the conflict in Somalia may not necessarily be termed ethnic since they are not between ethnic groups rather between political groups all which belong to the same ethnic group. The civil conflict in Sudan is arguably a socio-political and economic conflict over the control of economic resources; the conflict is underpinned by religion, where the Arab-Moslem North fights against non-Arab Christian and animist South. This justifies Shale (2004) who defines ethnic conflict as a conflict between two or more ethnic groups over resources, identity, borders or against oppression. In other words ethnic conflict is a situation where socio-political values form the basis for mobilization.

Wolff (2006) sees ethnic conflict as a form of group conflict in which at least one of the parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes and potential remedies along an actually existing or perceived discriminatory ethnic divide. Put in another word one party to the conflict arguably claim that its distinct ethnic identity is the reason why its members cannot realize their socio-political and economic rights.

The above inform us why Stavenhagen (cited in Jourek, n.d) sees ethnic conflict as a clash of interests or a struggle over rights; rights to land, education, the use of language, political representation, freedom of religion, the preservation of ethnic identity, autonomy, or self-determination etc. In other words ethnic conflict is a product of clash of ethnic groups over socio-political and economic interests.

According to Ismayilov (1994) the desire for secession, the demand for greater autonomy within a state or recognition and protection of minority interests within a society are three general issues of ethnic conflicts. In his

opinion ethnic conflicts refers to conflict between ethnic groups within a multi-ethnic state. It is a dispute about important socio-political and economic territorial issues between two or more ethnic communities. Hence the assertion of Horowitz (1998:6-7) that ethnic conflict entails a clash of cultures. It pits against each other people whose values (social, political and economic) are in conflict, who want different things, and who do not understand each other. He added that ethnic conflict is brought about by modernization; a situation that has makes people (groups) wants the same things and this sets up a great scramble for recourses.

From the above one can reason that there are several schools of thoughts to the concept of ethnic conflict. In other words there are various permutations and combinations, but it can be reduced to clash over socio-political rights where one ethnic group (majority) monopolizes the distribution of socio-political and economic goods to the detriment of the minority groups; the attempt to break this monopolistic nature often leads to ethnic conflicts.

The nature of ethnic conflicts however varies significantly, varying from peaceful expression of grievances to the outright use of physical force of violence. In essence it depends on prevailing socio-political circumstances as well as parties involve in the conflict. Ethnic conflict no doubt creates a nourishing environment for increasing violation of socio-political and economic rights of group particularly the minorities in a multi-ethnic state, thus undermining the importance of ethnic integration.

Ethnic conflict can be foreseen in certain circumstances, but often they emerged suddenly and unpredictably observe (Jourek n.d). Put in another words ethnic conflict are disguised under the surface of relatively stable multi-ethnic society. Thus the unpredictability nature of ethnic conflict necessitated the adoption of a decentralized form of governance in order to diffuse the potentiality of ethnic conflict.

4. Decentralized Governance

Decentralization no doubt has swept across the world, thus changing decades of centralized political system. Falleti (2005) observes that decentralized form of governance is seen as a solution to many different kinds of socio-political and economic problem, hence its adoption by many countries of the world.

The concept of decentralization is very broad; the reason why it has been described as an omnibus term covering a multiplicity of concepts (Nyendu, 2012: 222). This has made it to be given different definitions. Its components parts are many; therefore it often means different things to different people. The concept has been defined as a means for both reversing the concentration of administration at a single center and conferring powers of local government (Nyendu, 2012).

To Falleti (2005) decentralization is a process of state reform composed by a set of public policies that transfer responsibilities, resources, or authorities from higher to lower levels government in the context of a specific state. Thus in the context of a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria, decentralization seek to ensure balance of power as well as national integration. Also Aye (cited in Nyendu, 2012) defines decentralization as the transfer of power and authority from the central government to sub national units, either by political, administrative, economic and fiscal means.

Decentralization has been divided into three; fiscal, administrative and political. Fiscal decentralization exist when sub-national governments have the power given to them by the constitution or by particular laws, to raise revenue and carry out spending activities within clearly established legal criteria as in Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Nigeria, U. S. A. etc. Tanzil (cited in Herath, 2009). Administrative decentralization is a situation where most revenue is raised centrally, but funds are allocated to decentralized entities. A good example of this can be found in Italy. Herath (2009) opines that political arguments for decentralization appears if a country's population is non-homogeneous and is divided by ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic or other characteristics and they are regionally distributed as in Ethiopia, Russia and Nigeria.

Though there are various permutations and combinations; the term decentralization is generic for the distribution of power and authority. Considering the term of this study political decentralization is considered to be a powerful tool in managing ethnic conflict in Nigeria and as well promote national cohesion, what Herath (2009: 161) refer to as political glue. Decentralization is therefore conceived here as a means through which ethnic conflict is creatively managed through the fragmentation of the existing old regions into states; a process through which the political autonomy of the subordinate units is strengthened. In such situation the subordinate government is empowered to strengthen the participation of every ethnic group in governance.

Political decentralization therefore refers to the degree to which non-central government entities satisfy the political functions of governance such as participation and representation at both local and national level of governance (Schneider, 2002). Put in another word highly centralized governance in multi-ethnic state one would state lack the time and place to implement policies and programs that reflect people's real need and preferences (Johnson, 2001: 3). Underlying the case for decentralized governance is an assumption that a decentralized state will be more exposed and therefore more responsive to the socio-political and economic needs and aspirations of groups that constitutes the subordinate units.

Generally decentralization appears to mean the means through which the distribution of socio-political

responsibility for planning and management in multi-ethnic state is carried out. Decentralized governance seems to be more effective and efficient in managing ethnic conflict in a multi-ethnic state. What inform this assertion is the fact that policy makers at the subordinate levels are better informed about the socio-political and economic needs of those at local level than those at the center, more so the uneven socio-political and economic development are not always enforceable by the central level because it may violate the socio-political perceptions of equal treatment. Significantly decentralization is a more efficient mode of governance in a multi-ethnic state than centralization, and therefore leads to better policy performance Bieda, J., Hennl, A. and Kaiser, A. (2011).

From the above one can say that decentralization involves transfer of socio-political power and responsibilities as well as functions by the central government to sub-national levels of government. Significantly political decentralization in multi-ethnic states seeks to promote national integration and socio-political development. In essence decentralization of governance in multi-ethnic states leads to higher level of political participation and representation. Apart from bringing the government closer to the people, it will also contribute to good governance. In a nut shell decentralization will bring about a reasonably clear socio-political vision, which will guide the actions and inactions of every ethnic group for mutual benefits. It will also make every ethnic group responsible towards contributing to national integration, hence the choice of decentralized governance in Nigeria.

However decentralization has been criticized on the basis that it may foster more loyalty of groups to regional identities than the national identity, and this may encourage more autonomy from the central government and even a territorial secession in multi-ethnic societies; which may significantly jeopardize national integration (Saito, 2001). This argument one would conclude is informed by the fact that political power and socio-economic benefits are often contested in multi-ethnic states.

Going by the above submission, it means that decentralization is not a simple socio-political engineering based on a blue print which can be used anywhere observes Saito (2001). If the envelope that encloses this assertion is removed, it means decentralization is a mixture of some elements of failure and success. Therefore considering the adoption of decentralization in multi-ethnic state of Nigeria, one would conclude that it is a bold attempt to ensure equity and participation in governance on one hand and on the other hand to diffuse the threat of ethnic conflict to national cohesion.

5. Decentralization in Nigeria; examined

Considering the intractability of ethnic conflict in Nigeria, its management must be done in a way that every ethnic group will have the chance of participating in decision making processes. In other words ethnic conflict management in multi-ethnic state can take a re-organizational approach, a process that will allow every ethnic group to participate and be integrated into the socio-political system and as well strengthen the political role of the minorities in particular with the aim of building a sustainable socio-political system. One would say this informed Nigeria political leaders the choice of a decentralized political system.

Until 1804, the territories that contain the entire Northern region (North West, North East and North Central zones) were characterized by social, political fragmentations. That is to say before 1804 there was nothing like Sokoto Emirate, the Hausa overlords were the one in control of governance, but with the Jihad of 1804-1810 led by Uthman Dan Fodio the Hausas came under the hegemonic power of the Sokoto caliphate led by Fodio with a high centralized system of governance. The reason for which, the Emirs in the North till date still hold allegiance to Sokoto Caliphate. The colonial government who capitalized on the system brought together the entire empire including the powerful Kanem Bornu empire in the North East and introduced Indirect Rule system, thus culminating the expansive old Northern region; socio-cultural and political differences notwithstanding but for unifying factor in Islam the Hausa-Fulani were able to forge ahead.

In the old Western region (South West zone) and old Benin empire (now in the South South zone) had a system of government that gives room for checks and balances on the power of the Alaafin and the Oba of Benin. Socially and politically the Yoruba are more homogeneous than most of the ethnic groups in the country and more receptive the reason for which Western education was openly received. It is on record that the first secondary school in Nigeria, C. M. S. Grammar school Lagos was established in 1859 followed by Olivet Baptist High School, Oyo culminating early socio-political development in the area, the same thing applicable to the people of Benin. Thus by the time Indirect Rule was introduced, the system partially succeeded because of the established system of government that was already in place before colonialism.

There is a clear cut differences between the old Eastern region (South East) and other two regions in that there was never a centralized form of government, the reason why they were referred to as an acephalous (stateless) society. The highest ruling body was the Council of Chiefs. Thus by the time the colonial government attempted to extend Indirect Rule system, particularly the aristocratic Northern system to Eastern Nigeria, the system fail perhaps for ideological reasons observes Mustapha (2006). What this implies is that during colonial era different system of governance was adopted in different parts of the country, which explain why there are

differences in the level of socio-political consciousness, meaning that the North and South eventually evolved as separate entities.

However within these tripartite majority groups are the minorities who themselves constitute different Republics with different socio-cultural and linguistic differences whose identities were hardly known politically during colonial era until the early years of party system when they began to agitate for their own state, of course the majority ethnic groups use this to score political points.

From the above it can be argued that the ethnic groups in Nigeria that was woven together in 1914 by the colonial government evolve socially and politically at different time which explain the differences in their political and social consciousness and development. It can also be said that this development affect their socio-political and economic need as well as the strategy employed by each ethnic group to ensure their participation in governance at the center, the struggle for which at one time or the other has led to conflict.

Apart from the fact that the first political party in Nigeria – Nigeria National Democratic Party, formed in 1923 – was formed in the west following the introduction of the elective principle by Clifford's constitution of 1922; which eventually led to earlier political awareness of the people. One significant dimension to the dynamism of ethnic differences in Nigeria was the separate socio-political development that eventually led to the attainment of self-governing status by the ethnic groups at different time. The West and East achieved this height in 1957 and the North in 1959. What Ayoade (1986) sees as an historical event that has since served as rallying point and reinforces the psychology of ethnic cleavages.

Suberu (2001) observed that decentralizing levels of government in multi-ethnic state of Nigeria is likely to disperse conflict and help to contain it within the political submits; spread the ethnic loyalty of the three major ethnic groups; also generate cross-cutting state-based cleavages; and devolves resources down to lower levels of authority. However a look at decentralization in Nigeria seems to have pitched the three major ethnic groups against each other and in turn created North/South dichotomy. In essence there are cleavages within the state levels, national and religious levels. Thus while one set of socio-economic institutions might promote peace and stability in a particular state, it may be the opposite in another state where there are underlying social political and economic differences.

Significantly the fundamental reason though there may be other reasons; for example bringing the government closer to the people through political decentralization is to effectively put ethnic conflict under constant check as well as protecting the smaller ethnic groups. Decentralized governance is believed to be one of the suitable options of reducing the overbearing influence of the old regional governments which is believed to be capable of granting autonomy and integrating every ethnic group in the polity. One fact that should however be pointed out is the objective behind the creation of some the states. For example the creation of Katsina state in the North and Akwa-Ibom state in the South in 1987 was seen as an ethnic balancing measure, that is to say creating one state in the North means another must be created in the South; the same thing applicable to state creation exercise of 1996 where a state was created in each of the six geo-political zones of the country. The six geo-political zones include North West zone, North East zone, North Central zone from the old Northern region, South West zone from the old Western region, South East zone from the old Eastern region and South South zone from the old Eastern and Mid-Western region.

The re-organization of Nigeria into states no doubt is a means to an end, decentralized governance started in Nigeria as far as back as 1946 when the old amalgamated North and South was re-organized into three unequal North, East and West by the colonial government under Arthur Richards; whose aim was to maintain the unity of the country but it is unfortunate that the same constitution laid the foundation of socio-political schism being experienced in the country today. Thus the socio-political and economic forces that culminated the fissiparous tendencies in Nigeria polity had been activated long before the flag independence of 1960 only to be detonated by the ascendancy of ethnicity. Beginning from 1946 till date state creation has continued this is because different ethnic groups are still agitating for their own state within the polity.

A number of scholars and policy makers have come to view decentralized governance or some sort structural re-organization as a useful long term strategy for managing multi-ethnic society like that of Nigeria. Therefore in an attempt to diffuse the fire of suspicion and to ensure the protection and participation of every ethnic group in the affairs of the country through which a national integration can be achieved; decentralized governance is seen as a laudable solution. On the 27th of May 1967, the existing four regions (Northern region, Western region, Mid-Western region and Eastern region) were divided into twelve states by the government of Gowon. Of course with its own attendant problem, it's been argued that the number of state in the North was twice the number of states in the West and East combined.

But the fact is it does not take away the reason for which the old centrifugal regional system was jettisoned. One can say that through this re-organization the ethnic minorities in the North was adequately satisfied, the fear of Southerner over the size of the Northern region was allayed, it also secure the autonomy of the ethnic minorities in the country thereby opening the prospects of a more balanced political game that will ensure peace and stability. What this means indirectly is that before states were created, the various ethnic minorities had no

direct access to the distributive system at the center as well as the regions, even with the creation of Mid-Western region in 1963. Notwithstanding this, the majority ethnic groups using population differences still dominate the polity as oppose to the objective of creating additional region.

On the 3rd of February 1976 the military administration of Muritala Muhammad fragmented the country into nineteen states with additional seven states; the exercise which continued in 1987 (September 23) when the government of Babangida added another two states one from the North and one from the South. By 1991 (27th August) the same administration increased the number states in the country to thirty with additional nine states; the cycle of fragmenting the country into smaller unit was completed by Sanni Abacha on the 1st of October 1996 when he added six more states – one from each geo-political zones of the country; to bring the total number states in country thirty-six.

From the above one can argue that apart from bringing government closer to the people; it has helped to correct the regional imbalance which has helped to ensure some sort of psychological satisfaction to the people. It also enables people to have control of the government with the assurance that the government is responsible to them and can be held accountable for what it does or fails to do. In essence political decentralization ensures that the people are allowed to decide or determine what they do or do not in terms of socio-economic and political development of their local state.

Not this alone the fragmentation of the three big regions of North, West and East into states has invariably reduced the politicization of ethno-regional identities in the country. Thus weakening and making them less attractive as prospective independent state (Suberu and Diamond 2002). What this translate to is that the principal ethnic groups could no longer be overwhelmed by a single political party as it was obtained in the early Nigeria statehood particularly 1960-1966 and 1979-1983 instead all the ethnic groups across the country has thus divided their social, economic and political loyalties between different political parties. For example the membership of the ruling party PDP in the country cut across the thirty-six states of the federation. However this does not mean that Nigerians are still not ethnically conscious. In the last presidential election (April 2011) the candidate for Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) Rtd. Gen. Buhari won emphatically in the North but lost in the South with more or less the same margin. Against this background it becomes difficult for the ethnic majority politicians to sideline not only the minorities but also the majorities. In essence just as each party/candidate need the support of the people from their states they also need the support of other ethnic groups.

One aspect of political decentralization in Nigeria socio-political system is local governance system. The multiplicity of state in Nigeria translate to multiplicity of local units; if not to bring the government closer to the people but at least to ensure the participation of every ethnic units in the country in the business of nation building. That is to say it provides the opportunity for citizen that belong to different ethnic units to express their sense of belonging to the nation at large and to a smaller political unit with people of the same socio-cultural and possibly political background. Thus the 1976 local government reform fully recognized local governments as the third tier of government and at least with a level of socio-political autonomy.

Till date Nigeria consist of 774 local government areas. The creation of local government definitely will give citizens the opportunity of getting themselves involved in political activities though at local level but still help in building the political competence of such citizens' in running the affairs of government at local level. Thus reducing the salience of ethnicity and engender socio-political development of the polity at local level.

Without any point of contradiction what state creation would produce or have produced in Nigeria polity is a system of intergovernmental relations. Decentralization in Nigeria political system argued Suberu (1990) has shown that politics in Nigeria could be re-organized creatively along institutional, rather than ethnic loyalties. This will allow the states controlled by other larger ethnic groups to defend their rights. Of course this will engender socio-economic and political development; knowing fully well that the most obvious of social political and economic underdevelopment instrument is ethnic cleavage and a weak sense of nationhood.

The denial of ethnic pluralism publicly however may not prevent the mobilization and manipulation of ethnic identity by the political group for their own selfish end but it will still not take away the purpose for which states are created. Even the highly centralized economic system in Nigeria which has made each ethnic group contest fiercely for a stake at the center does not take away the existentiality of states in Nigeria polity as the basis for an alternative and independent administration which will help to stem and contain the intensity of the competition for political control at the center. In other words instead of contesting for the elusive power at the center, each state for which the country is divided through their representatives can still stay at state level and ensure socio-economic and political development of such states.

Though the process of political decentralization innovation may be questionable in managing ethnicity in Nigeria; arguably it still serves as an avenue to developmental undertakings and delivery of socio-economic and political goods. In other words the creation of state and local government should not only be seen as sources of patronage and political positions as some scholars have argued but equally relevant in the formulation and implementation of socio-economic and political policies apart from the fact that states will also serve as an experimental ground for some policies before been implemented at national level; the end result of which is

socio-political and economic development.

Generally decentralization has come to be a major avenue through which every ethnic group has a share of the national cake in the form of state controlled socio-political and economic opportunities (Olugbade, 1992). Also the creation of state and local government has given the minorities the opportunities to be liberated from the old regions hitherto dominated by the majority groups and thus provided for them a pedestal to having access to political participation in the country's governance and as well guarantee the sustainability of the polity.

6. Conclusion

Nigeria in all respect is a product of the British colonial administration. Nigeria from the beginning consisted of different ethnic groups with different socio-political orientations, beliefs, culture and understanding; one would say was fused together without mutual agreement and understanding among the various ethnic groups. This has made the problem of national integration in Nigeria multi-dimensional (Odetola, 1978). One major outcome of this is the increasing ethnic conflict over the allocation of socio-political and economic resources.

The organization and creative administration of multi ethnic state like Nigeria no doubt is very important. To this effect this study has looked at political decentralization as a means to achieve socio-political sustainability in Nigeria. Understanding the complexity of ethnic differences in Nigeria may likely act as forces of social, political and economic change in Nigeria. The reason for this statement is because just as there are different ethnic group in Nigeria, there are also differences in their demands socially, politically and economically. By implication it means that the strategy to be adopted in managing socio-political and economic problem in Nigeria need to be creatively done in such a way that the desired socio-political development and national integration would be achieved, hence the adoption of a decentralized political system.

Generating a sense of commitment to a common national goal among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria no doubt is a challenge to the Nigeria's socio-political stability. One fact that should be noted here is that because of inter-group relations, and as long as ethnic cleavage exists in Nigeria there will always be conflict over the allocation of distributive resources; the understanding of their differences would eventually bring out the values in each ethnic group which would translate to the sustainability of the polity.

In a multi-ethnic society, like Nigeria ethnicity should be seen as an additional variable in socio-political development over and above those normally present in the more homogeneous societies. The role of ethnicity in development can be negative or positive; it can be a problem or a potentially rewarding challenge (Chien, 1982). The consolidation and survival of Nigeria union thus depends on the ability of the center to manage the pressures and demands that comes from every ethnic group.

By implication productive ethnic conflict management needs to reassure every ethnic group be it major or minority of their socio-political, economic and cultural security. In essence decentralized political system in multi-ethnic state is a possible way of managing ethnic conflict, the product of which would be a congenial atmosphere for the interdependence of groups, and political participation and prevent groups from being locked out of government (Glickman, 1995). What this translates to be is that a decentralized political system should be seen as a confidence building measure and a means to promote the rights of every ethnic group which will reduce the socio-political and economic factors that produces ethnic conflict.

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