

Unity and National Development in Nigeria: A Paradox

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(Received: December-2017; Reviewed: January-2018; Accepted: March-2018;

Available Online: March -2018; Published: March -2018)



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ABSTRACT

Nigeria with well over 350 ethnic nationalities is constitutionally a secular state. The secularity of Nigeria implies that within the framework of the law, people are to undergo their businesses without being restricted to a particular parochial or primordial arrangement. But in spite of this position, monumental frictions which have impaired developmental pedestal of Nigerian state are on high scale. Philosophy has identified unity as the major springboard to navigate development both at the individual and the state level. Apart from philosophy identifying unity as a tool for peace and progress, the Nigerian state underscores the values of unity that it reflects in the Nigeria's coat of arms. The need for unity also has expression in the national anthem and the pledge which is sworn to by every citizen at any given time the need arises. In spite of these concerted efforts at ensuring unity, Nigerian state is still found in the deep sea of disunity. This ugly phenomenon has adversely affected development in the country. No tremendous progress is likely to be recorded by any nation state faced with the problem of disunity. This paper is of the view that ethnicity, tribalism, corruption, electoral fraud, bad leadership, immorality, contract inflation, "sit tight" government and others are very many issues that promote disunity in the Nigerian state, and these ugly phenomena do not allow the nation state to advance pragmatically in all the spheres of existence. This paper submits that national re-orientation, enlightenment campaign and spiritual and/or moral rebirth are not only therapeutic but a condition-sine-qua-non for national integration.

Keywords: Unity; Ethnicity; Corruption; Electoral fraud; Re-orientation; Moral rebirth.

INTRODUCTION

"United we stand divided we fall" is a popular adage which seems to underline the thesis of this paper. The need for unity in a pluralistic/heterogeneous society like Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. In fact, without a conscious effort at bringing about the unification of the diverse components that make up a given society, efforts to achieve development will be a mere illusion (Obilor *et al.*, 2018). However, before delving into the main thrust of this paper, it is

pertinent to make clear the sense in which the major concepts are used, namely, “unity” “development” and “national development”. This over simply makes the point that for any nation desirous of development in the right direction, unity must be its watchword.

By this it simply means that the citizens should deemphasize their differences while emphasizing their similarities. In that way, ethnicity, tribalism, favoritism, nepotism and discrimination of any kind will be eliminated. Also, by chasing away the already mentioned agents of stagnation, the state will pave way for a vibrant psychology of development a mind-set of collective strength anchored on the threshold of *Ibuanyidanda, onye aghala nwanneya* and *Ahamefula the ejiri mara* (identity) of a people.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Unity

Unity is the state of being united. It is the arrangement of parts to form a complete whole (Hornby 1975). Unity refers to harmony and agreement of aims, feeling among persons or group of persons. Unity is used here to represent the will and desire of a people to live together, interact among each other for social, political, and economic ends. Unity can also be understood from the point of view of integration. It connotes coming or bringing into equality by the mixing of groups or races.

On the bases of this understanding, one can safely say that for any entity such as a society, country or nation to develop, there must be a sense of unity from all the component parts. Meaningful progress and development take place only in the atmosphere of unity. People of diverse cultures, languages, religions and tradition must agree to be together, communicate and foster a common front before their aspirations can be realized. Diversity and pluralistic clout should not be viewed negatively to be working against the paradigm of development; rather, it should be seen as a source of strength. Diversities that are evident in the country’s social and or existential parameters should not weaken the tempo of peace and harmonious living, rather should strengthen and continually massage the fabrics of unity in line with national symbols. In view of the above, Chums C. Chinye (2005) citing Sir Ahamdu Bello argues thus; “By understanding our differences, we can build unity in our country” (p. 202). Conflict of interest does not help the Nigerian state build up a strong unified nation. Patriotic Nigerians should perceive existing diversities as parameter for measuring and determining the strength of Nigeria for optimal national growth and benefits. Over the years, the unity of Nigeria has been sacrificed in the altar of self-interest, ethnic chauvinism, vendetta, religious acrimony and other negative antecedents which bifurcates the road map of development. The logic of this paper hinges on the need to align to the tenets of unity as a ready tool for the development of Nigeria in the 21st century. This is because meaningful development is bound to take place if Nigeria is united.

Development

Development is derived from the verb ‘develop’, which means to grow larger. Development therefore, refers to a state of growing larger, fuller or more matured and organized, such that one’s essence or a thing’s essence is realized or unfolded. Development here refers to the progression, movement or growth towards a relatively stable state or position in which it can only get better and not worse (Egbeji 2019). It is a significant improvement from what a thing was at a particular period in time to what its present condition is. A nation state is said to be developed when there are significant changes in all the strata of its existence (Ikegbu & Moses 2018). In this case, the length and breadth of the said state or thing have experienced significant change. Take for instance, a nation state that depends solely on importation of

products for its internal use cannot be said to have developed. Also, a nation state that is noted internationally for election rigging, contract inflation, and ethnic militancy, kidnapping and trafficking in persons cannot claim development.

However, a positive pragmatic shift from the previous negative practices to a more modest, accommodating and tension free society would accord the state to have developed in the moral perspective. Also, in the area of economy, improvements in exportation of manufactured products for foreign earnings also, mark a considerable level of development. In a similar sense, development has been defined as a progressive change which produces a condition that is better than the existing one (Obi 1985). In any discussion about development, an implication is made to the fact that earlier there were some conditions or state of affairs that were not very good but which have undergone some improvements. Development therefore is simply a progressive change. Discussions about development cannot elude two major strands of development to wit: Mental development and physical development. Mental development is the conscious moral and cerebral training of the individual person as a formidable agent for physical development. In this case, we talk about training and retraining of the mind of a person by equipping the fellow with appropriate vocation. The developmental paradigm of most societies of the world is hinged on huge investments in human resources; this is the secret of the Asian tigers. Physical development on the other hand, means the development of the state on infrastructures such as road network, rail, power and recreational facilities.

National Development

When development takes place in an Institution, society or nation, structural or institutional development is said to have taken place. Moreover, when this development or progressive change is found on individual members of a state, then it is said to be human or individual development. On a larger scale, when there is a development in each of these areas at a time in a given society. It is said that national development has occurred. Hence, national development is a combination of the progressive change in the state of the structures or institutions, individuals, machineries and other resources or component parts of a nation. This is what C.C. Ikeji alludes to when he quotes Edward Widner as saying that “national development is the means of selecting and accomplishing progressive political, economic and social objectives that are authoritatively determined in one or another” (p. 57). Therefore, it follows that a planned change which is derived from a purposeful decision to effect improvements in a social system is national development. National development refers essentially to the standard and organizational behaviour necessary for the implementation of schemes of socio-economic and political changes undertaken by the government, groups and individuals in the society. Indeed unity is *sine qua non* for national development. It is a necessary ingredient if national development is to take place. What this implies is that national development is dependent on the level, nature or extent of the interaction between individual members of the state. The more harmonious it is, the more closely it brings them to development at the national level. This brings to mind Plato’s notion of justice in a society. His conception of justice in the state and hence national development stems from his view that the state or society is “individual writ large”, which means that the society or state cannot exist without the individual. Thus, whatever happens amongst the individual members of the society also happens in the society at large. Following this, Plato opines that if the three components of the soul; reason, appetitive and spirited part function harmoniously, then the individual person will develop and there will be justice therein. Similarly, in a society where the three major parts of the society; rulers, soldiers and labourers perform their functions harmoniously; national development is a national consequence. An analysis of Plato’s concept of justice and national development points to the fact that there is a link between the individual human person and the development of the nation.

For an authentic national development to take place in Nigeria there must be a corresponding, development of the creative potentials of the individuals who make up the nation. What is implied here is that the development of Nigeria requires a concentration on the progressive change of individuals towards conditions of personal creativity that are better and more satisfying than the existing ones. To clearly buttress this, Ikegbu (2012) contends that: "...adequate leadership credential, application of mental creativity in leadership and use of appropriate leadership tools will eliminate wasteful spending and prodigalism and also, assist in aligning to the symbolic expression of the national pledge" (p. 243). National development therefore can be referred to as the progressive change which a nation undergoes towards some better and more satisfying conditions naturally leaving behind its trail, correct evidence of achievement which can be seen and measured. The point is that the development of individual members of the state and their subsequent harmonious co-existence is the bedrock for national development (Ikegbu & Akpan 2018).

When each individual citizen carries out his or her duties and obligations in the state consciously without interference on other duties and without deceit or hypocrisy of any kind, then there would be justice of the kind Plato talked about and above all, there will be complementarity of each individual to the other. The result is unavoidably reflected at the national scale or level in the form of development. But where one individual neglects his duty or performs it with reckless abandon, such that some problems are created, then a situation of missing link is created and the Platonian justice will be a mirage. Hence, the talk of national development will be a misnomer in such a society (Asouzu 2004). Omorogbe (1999) agrees with the view that national development is dependent on the unity and development of human beings in the society. According to him, "to talk of national development is to talk primarily about the development of human persons" (p. 195). Similarly, if we agree with Tom Ogar (2000) that development is culturally founded that is, the culture of a given society plays a vital role in initiating, guiding and broadening the character and level of growth and development of the society; then one would agree that individual cultures or persons of different cultures have vital roles to play in determining the level of national development obtainable in that society. The above stated position captures the philosophy of development of the Asian tigers where their various cultures become a prevailing factor and spring board for their economic growth and prosperity.

Development therefore, represents a set of psychological schemata that hinge on change of attitude, self-reliance, and self-help. National development is thus measured by the way natural and human resources are harnessed and manipulated by human beings for maximum utilization. Hence, "Development should lead to the realization of human potentials towards the desired end of man" (Ogar 2000, p. 93). Following this line of thought, Uwalaka (2003), lamenting the deplorable state in which the Nigerian development process has fallen, posits thus.

The only way to reverse such situation is for Nigerians in general to take some urgent steps at all levels as individuals, groups and a nation in mobilizing and harnessing the enormous creative and productive energy of the Nigerian people to social, economic, political and religious development (195).

However, it is still argued that the much desired national development through the realization of individual's potentials cannot take place in the absence of unity. Thus, unity in our opinion is the bedrock of national development without which any talk about national development is a waste of time.

UNITY: A MEANS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

From Innocent Asouzu (2003), we realize the existing and inherent anathema in the fallacy of “the nearer the better and the safer” (p. 70). This is a driving philosophy that has affected the psychology of existence of people in the universe. Self-interest and/or self-preservation as the first law of nature, does not ensure unity which is required to galvanize the society and make it a better and safer place for people. Individual aspirations at the expense of communal peace and progress would stall the development of a given society. Asouzu (2004) contents that:

To survive better than others, we have the general tendency to highlight certain things we imagine are special or exceptional about ourselves. We encounter this tendency in almost all spheres of life and at almost all level of our existential situation. In this way racism, ethnicity, nationalism, tribalism and all forms of exclusive tendencies drive their force from the primordial human natural inclination to self-preservation (p.69).

What Asouzu reminds us is that promotion of individual interest cannot lead us to the pathway of development. This is because, in such a situation, individuals pursue and aspire for their own good with complete disregard for the good of other members of the state. And because, individuals pursue their interests only, there is bound to be conflict and clash of interest, which has the tendency of bringing to birth the phenomenon of ‘might is right’. No matter what the differences may be, it is only in the atmosphere of unity and cooperation that development can be realized, and this unity is the secret of the good performances of other countries of the world. To further elucidate the necessity of peace, unity inclusive governance and just system, John Rawls’ as cited by Ikegbu (2006) contends that justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant or economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue, likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust. Ikegbu in a joint paper with Akpan (2018) stressed the need for unity and elimination of all forms of nepotism and exclusions when they argued that:

It is believed though arguable that Nigeria is facing plethora of problems ranging from ethnicity, nepotism, tribalism, favoritism religious fanaticism, corruption and lopsided appointment and promotion of personnel in key areas. These selective approaches to leadership can only destroy or segment the country instead of uniting the Nigerian state. Exclusive leadership ideology which has been practiced in the past and still dominates Nigerian leadership history at all strata is viewed in this paper as old fashion due to its mimeos negative consequences.

The need for unity in Nigeria as a gateway to socio-political and economic development cannot be over-emphasized. Augustine Nwoye (1997) corroborates this view through his survey of the attitudes of school children in ensuring national unity and cohesion. He is of the opinion that “The growth of national unity and cohesion cannot but be viewed against that of a multiplicity of factors that can influence its durability in the citizens while in and outside of the schools” (p. 261).

Prior to Nigeria’s independence in 1960, one of the major challenges faced by the national leaders was how best to free Nigeria and Nigerians from the chains of British colonialism (Ikegbu & Enyimba 2010; Ikegbu & Diana-Abasi 2017; Ikegbu et al., 2013). The common philosophy then was that if Nigeria was able to subdue her common enemy, Britain, every other thing would nationally fall in place. With this growing mind-set, it was settled that independence from external interference was natural and expedient, after which the need for nationhood among different ethnic regions would be advanced. The quest for national unity for

the purpose of building a virile socio-political and economic base in Nigeria was almost a challenge and task for every Nigerian citizen. Eyo Ita (1949) buttressing the above argues that:

Genuine national unity and cooperation can be achieved not by any artificial federation or regionalization, but by those naturally, socially-cementing forces that have always operated to wed up homogenous peoples. Common experience, common life, common education serving the purpose of producing a community of culture, free and open intercourse through the instrumentality of communications and transportation, free interchange of ideas and other goods and mutual service and good will, these are the natural cohesion forces that have always produced genuine nationality and oneness among peoples of all lands (p. 16).

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, disunity and not unity is the common feature. The factors that breed disunity are invariably the same factors that undermine any effort towards national development. Such factors are many and varied. They include ethnicity and tribalism, bribery and corruption, bad leadership, religious intolerance, egoism and self-interest, poverty and ignorance of etc. Nigeria can only develop in an atmosphere of peace and unity, mutual complementarity and with the stern application of the logic of 'harmonious monism'. This logic is so central to the development of Nigeria, because it talks about the recognition of different segments of the country as pillars for development. This is possible when the various ethnic groups see the need to unite and fraternize for the purpose of advancing national progress and cooperation as reflected and echoed daily in our national anthem, pledge and coat of arms. Finally, following the thoughts of Malcom X whether we are Christians or non-Christians, literates or illiterates, in school or out of school, working or not working, rich or poor, we must first learn to ignore our differences.

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