

# Contradictions of Ethnic Loyalty and the Quest for National Development in Nigeria: A Sociological Investigation

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## Abstract

Before and after independence in Nigeria, persons are identified first and foremost with their ethnic identity before being identified as Nigerians. However, sustainable development is impossible without a reasonable level of social and national integration. Any meaningful discussion of national integration must involve an understanding of the entity being integrated. Many analysts have located the primary obstacle to Nigeria's development and integration in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural nature of the country. The ethnic, cultural and political diversities of the country have been perceived as the source of its fragility and instability as well as its inability to evolve a cohesive strategy of national development and integration which enjoys the support and commitment of all Nigerians. This study investigates the reality of ethnic loyalty in Nigeria and its effect on sustainable national development. The paper proffers that ethnicity must be de-emphasised if the country is to be on the path of sustainable development and occupy an enviable space in the comity of nations.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Independence, National integration, Nigeria, Sustainable development

## Introduction

Nigeria is a highly heterogeneous nation with diversity in terms of multi-tribal, cultural, religious and political sphere. It is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria as a nation has been kept below the level of development expected of her by the indices of pluralism (Ngele, 2008). Nigeria's

heterogeneous nature with reference to religion, politics and ethnic pluralism has kept her running round the vicious circle of underdevelopment. Rather than harnessing diversities towards viable national development, many Nigerians have become slaves to their ethnic origins to which allegiance is largely focused to the detriment of nation building. Fanatical ethnic consciousness has resulted in ethnic prejudice and mistrust, religious and political problems, and socio-cultural conflicts (Jekayinfa, 2002). Interfaced with religion, statism and class, ethnicity is a potent reality in the Nigerian federal equation (Ngele, 2008).

Nigeria emerged as a nation in 1914 when Sir Frederick Lord Lugard brought together what was then the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria under a single administrative system. Prior to this date, the political entity called Nigeria today was administered in separate smaller units: Northern Nigeria, the colony of Lagos and Southern Nigeria (Ademoyega, 1981). Nigeria covers an area of about 924sq km with three major ethnic groups the Hausa/Fulani, the Ibos and the Yorubas and about three hundred others (Bamgbose, 2004). The British brought these groups together for administrative convenience not minding their differences in culture, religion and politics. Today, Nigeria's political problems, according to Ademoyega (1981) sprang from the carefree manner in which the British took over, administered and abandoned the government and people of Nigeria. When the British came to Nigeria as an imperial nation to take over rulership of the country, they met the people of the South free, only observing and regulating their own monarchs and institutions. In the North, they met the Fulani in the process of establishing their rulership over other ethnic minorities. In order to administer Nigeria to their own advantage, the British introduced the indirect rule system of government, thereby rubberstamping the political state of the ethnic nationalities of Nigeria. This according to Bamgbose (2004), was one evil that outlived British administration.

Ethnographers estimate that over 250 ethnic groups make up Nigeria. Each of these consists of smaller social groups. For example, the Yoruba consists of the Ekiti, Ijesha, Oyo and so on. The Ibo consists of Oguta etc, the Urbobo of Agbarho, Agbon, Ugheli and others. The Hausa have their various indigenous states (Mezieobi, 1994). None of these groups, however large was a nation in any sense before the colonial regrouping. It was the colonial government that merged them together in 1914 and later balkanized Nigeria into three regions in 1947 along ethnic lines

(Jekayinfa, 2002). Before the advent of colonial rule in Nigeria, the three major ethnic nationalities had distinct forms of government peculiar to them. There was the feudalistic oligarchy in the North, the centralized monarchical democracy in the West among the Yoruba and the decentralized democracy in the East among the Ibos. From the religious perspective, the Hausas were pagans before they were conquered by the Fulanis who subsequently introduced Islam. The Emir doubles as both the political and religious head of his people. The Yorubas and the Ibos also practiced traditional religion before Christianity was introduced among them.

Furthermore, prior to independence, three power blocs were established. Kaduna in the North where Sir Ahamdu Bello, the *Sardauna* of Sokoto emerged as leader, Ibadan in the West where Obafemi Awolowo, a renowned lawyer, was the leader and Enugu in the East where Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an accomplished journalist was the leader. This was the pattern that was the prelude to the independence of Nigeria. With the calling forth of regional representative to the constitutional conferences that brought independence, the political leadership of the country was born and nurtured along ethnic lines. That today we still talk about underdeveloped Nigeria is as a result the challenges posed by the indices of pluralism (Jekayinfa, 2002). These forces have produced *Awoists*, *Zikists* and *Sardaunas* and the trend continues today.

## **Theoretical framework**

### *Social identity theory*

One of the most popular and sophisticated psychological theories of social identity developed by Tajfel (1978) holds that the purpose of ingroup identification is the achievement of a positive social identity (i.e. of a group-based positive distinctiveness in a relation to an out group) (Zavalloni, 1983). Social identity theory is a theory of group membership and behaviour (Hogg et al., 1995). As a sub-theory of social cognition, social identity theory developed with the purpose of understanding how individuals make sense of themselves and other people in the social environment. As such, individuals derive a portion of their identities from their memberships and interactions within and among groups (Hogg and Terry, 2000).

Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s) (McLeod, 2008). Identity is the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or ethnic group. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that the groups (e.g. religion, family, football team, tribe etc.) which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world. Therefore, the world is divided into "them" and "us" through a process of social categorization. This is otherwise known as in-group (us) and out-group (them). Social identity theory states that the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image and attain their goals. Jenkins (2004) described social identity as an ongoing process of interaction between the individual and the focal group (in-group), and between the individual and other groups (out-groups). In his view, it is a process - not an entity or label.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed a Social Identity Theory which held that there are three cognitive processes relevant to a person's being part of an in-group, or of an out-group. Such group membership depends upon circumstances, possibly associable with the appearance of prejudice and discrimination related to such perceived group membership.

The cognitive processes are:

**(a) Social categorization:** This is the process of deciding which group you or "another person or persons" belongs to. At its most basic and non-involved level "any group will do" and no necessity is seen for conflict between groups.

**(b) Social identification:** This the process by which a person or "another person or persons" identify with an in-group more overtly. The norms and attitudes of other members within that group being seen as compatible with the person's own or worthy of emulation, or as compatible with those of "another person or persons" or seen as being open to emulation by "another person or persons".

**(c) Social Comparison:** This occurs when one's own self-concept or the social concept of "another person or persons" becomes closely meshed with perceptions of group membership. Self-esteem or the estimate of "another person or persons" is enhanced or detracted from by perceptions of how in-groups and out-groups are held to behave or are held to be able to perform or to rate in society. At this stage, the groups are being compared to one another, with the differences in goals and identity coming to the fore. When a group is perceived to be relatively having advantage over the other

group, then the sentiments of discord and disagreements among the groups begins to emerge.

According to Cicero (1991), the degree of fellowship between men varies according to the degree of relationship between them. Thus it is stronger between citizen and citizen than between citizen and foreigner, between those who are related by blood than between those who are not. The ethnic group is the limit of this kind of love which begins from the claim to a common ancestor. All within this common ancestry identify themselves as one and regard others as outsiders. It is not only the awareness of the biological relationship that makes members of an ethnic group to be united. A number of other factors are also significant. They include geographical location, culture, religion, tradition, morality, language etc. These are integrative factors. As a result of these factors, ethnic identity has been defined as "a feeling of belonging and continuity in being, resulting from an act of self ascription and/or ascription by others to a group of people who claim both common ancestry and a common cultural tradition" (Umezina, 2013).

Ethnographers estimate that over 250 ethnic groups make up Nigeria (Mezieobi, 1994). The proliferation of these ethnic groups has however polarized the nation along ethnic lines. The reality in Nigeria is that most Nigerians identify first and foremost with their ethnic groups within the nation's social system. When people identify with a group, they subscribe to its goals and committed to the attainment of the goals. Social Identity Theory offers an explanation for the so-called categorization effect. It holds that people think that by treating or evaluating in-group members more favourably than out-group members, social identity can be ensured or enhanced (Hogg and Terry, 2000). The categorization ultimately leads to comparison, which sets the groups against one another. Therefore, in the pursuance of the parochial ethnic goals, the other ethnic groups are discriminated against and this has sometimes led to armed conflicts in Nigeria. It is a situation of "we" against "them".

By its nature, an ethnic group maintains relative peace and less internal contradictions (Umezina, 2013). The real problem associated with ethnic group rears its ugly head when it comes into contact with other ethnic groups. The desire to dominate or the fear of being nominated by other ethnic groups reigns supreme. This often leads to outright declaration of hostilities resulting inexorably in loss of lives and property. Nigeria was

engulfed in a 30-month civil war as a result of ethnic tension that had brewed for a long period of time. The war was fought, won and lost but the ethnic suspicions and hatred still remains unabated. Also, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was caused by ethnic rivalry between the Hutus and the Tutsis. The conflict brought the country to a halt. More than 800,000 people lost their lives in the imbroglio. In Kosovo, it was called ethnic cleansing. The Serbian forces engaged themselves in the sinister project of decimating the Kosovar Albanians. Other countries that have experienced ethnic or sub-ethnic conflicts are Somalia, Liberia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Ethiopia and Uganda (Osinubi & Osinubi, 2006).

### *The concept of ethnicity*

Ethnicity is a phenomenon that permeates virtually all societies across the globe. It is a reality that cannot simply be wished away or neglected. According to Nnoli (1978), ethnicity "is a social phenomenon associated with interaction among members of different ethnic groups. And ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. Thus, relations between ethnic groups within the same political system produce ethnicity". Also, Elaigwu (1994) defines ethnicity as ethnic consciousness acted out in relations with others - individuals and groups - to maximize gains in situation of conflicting interests and claims over scarce resources (i.e. values, status, and/or goods). Azeez (2004) views ethnicity as a sense of 'peoplehood' that has its foundation in the combined remembrance of past experience and common aspiration.

Furthermore, Rose (1965) defined an ethnic group as those whose members share a unique social and cultural heritage, passed from one generation to the other. According to her, ethnic groups are frequently identified by distinctive patterns of family life, language, recreation, religion and other customs which cause them to be differentiated from others. Sanda (1976) also defined an ethnic group as consisting of interacting members, who defined themselves as belonging to a named or labeled social group with whose interest they identify, and which manifests certain aspects of a unique culture while constituting a part of a wider society. These various definitions of ethnicity presuppose the fact that ethnicity is the division of people within a nation or state into various groups through common ancestry, history and aspirations. This is why a nation made up of various ethnic groups is likely to have conflict of interests among the various constituting ethnic divisions. Hence, the

effective management of the union of the diverse ethnic groups towards having loyalty to the emergent nation is crucial for national development. Ethnicity in Nigeria involves the identification of Nigerians with the dominant or subordinate majority or minority ethnic groups, all of which co-exist within the same society. The co-existence of these ethnic groups within the same polity has frequently led to the description of Nigeria as an accident of history facilitated by the colonial masters.

### *Ethnicity and party politics in Nigeria*

Nigeria's party politics has been polluted by ethnic chauvinism. This problem is one of the major qualms confronting the progress of liberal democracy in Nigeria since 1960, to the extent that ethnic sentiment has gradually crept in to find a place in every facet of Nigeria's political activities (Ayatse & Akuva, 2013). In a democracy, the existence of political party is very essential owing to the important role played by them. They are essential instruments for representing political constituencies and interests, aggregating demands and preferences, reuniting and socializing new candidates for office, organizing the electoral competition for power, crafting policy alternative, setting the policy making agenda, forming effective governments and integrating groups and individuals into the democratic process. To play these roles effectively, what is needed is a strong mass base, which by extending its support helps the party to legitimize its existence. This is made possible when the party has place in a slow and systematic way and when it has the presence of leaders. This according to Achebe (1983) is lacking in Nigeria. The national movement that was spearheaded by the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was torn apart along tribal lines. The split in the rank and file of the movement doomed not only the chances of a unified force against imperialism but also created ground for the emergence of issues of ethnicity and produced *Zikists*, *Awoists* and *Sardaunas* as leaders along ethnic cleavages (Ngele, 2008).

Nigeria as a country has continued to experience disunity in supposed unity. This is why some have referred to Nigeria as a forced marriage which did not receive the approval of the couple involved. Even though the entities are said to be united under one umbrella called Nigeria, each entity is still loyal and committed to the goals of their groups. This led to a situation where, according to Odivwri (2011), "in pre-independence era, party politics was based on ethnic factor". Thus, one can say that it was during this period in question that the seed of (formal) ethnicity was sown,

germinated in the First Republic and the products started spreading during the 2nd and 3rd republics. For example, the Action Group was a party developed from a Yoruba Cultural Association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the NCNC was closely allied with the Igbo Union, while the NPC developed from Jamiyyar Arewa. The leadership of the aforementioned parties was along ethnic cleavages. The A.G. was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba; the NCNC leadership fell on Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, an Igbo while NPC was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin Sokoto, a Fulani. Even to a large extent, the colonial administrative arrangement in Nigeria during the colonial period encouraged ethnic politics. The 1946 Richard Constitution had divided Nigeria into three regions for administrative convenience which is directly associated with the three major ethnic groups - Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first political parties were formed along ethnic lines (Ngele, 2008).

Another interesting manifestation of ethnic politics in Nigeria is the administrative division of the country into three regions. Each of these regions is dominated by one of the three ethnic groupings thereby reinforcing the popular philosophy of three-player of ethnic game. Many things have been affected by this tri-polar pattern. Particularly interesting was the move for self government, which if attained would usher in a democratic government in Nigeria. The north was unwilling to see self-rule at the centre. The position taken by the north on this issue was indeed another expression of fear of domination. The north then felt that the enlightened south could use their advantage position to marginalize its people. The fear continues till today, almost five decades after independence (Salawu & Hassan, 2011).

### *Ethnicity, integration and national development in Nigeria*

Ethnographers estimate that over 250 ethnic groups make up Nigeria (Tsolaye, 2012). Out of these, the predominant ones are the Hausa-Fulani, Ibos and the Yorubas. Each of these dominates a specific region of the country. The Hausa-Fulani dominates the northern parts, the Ibos dominate the Eastern part and the Yorubas inhabit the Western part. Among these three predominant groups, as well as the minorities hostilities have been rife as skirmishes of war are very much obvious. The roots of this hostility can be traced back to the colonial period when the British pursued the policy of divide and rule (Ademoyega, 1981).



Nigeria was called a mere geographical expression by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and not only by the British who had an interest in keeping it so. Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more than the chequered fortune of tribe in her vocabulary. At our independence in 1960 our national anthem which is our Hymn of deliverance from British colonial bondage has these lines: "*Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand*" (Hodkins, 1962; Jekayinfa, 2002). This was in the opinion of Achebe (1981) "a most ominous beginning" and not surprisingly, this brotherhood lasted only six years. And ever since then, a Nigerian child seeking admission into a federal school; a student wishing to enter a university; a graduate seeking employment in the public service; a businessman tendering for contract will fill a form which requires him to confess his tribe".

In line with the above assertion, Mezieobi (1994) holds that from 1947, the multi-ethnic composition of Nigeria continued to be a bane to Nigeria's national unity and development. Thus whatever is done or anticipated in Nigeria, particularly at government's quarters had ethnic undertones. For instance, in employment, admissions into schools, distribution of social amenities and in social relationships, ethnic affiliations and attachments are very strong and conspicuously manifest. Attachment of a Nigerian first to his ethnic group before the nation is a bane to Nigeria's national unity, national consciousness and socio-political integration. There have been cases of multi-ethnic vices such as allegiance to ethnic-group, intra-cultural and inter-ethnic antagonism, hostility, aggression, bitterness, hatred, mistrust in the country which have not augured well for the building of a virile Nigerian nation.

According to Jekayinfa (2002), competitive ethnicity started in Africa since the colonial days. In search of the crumbs from colonial production, competition among Africans created or reinforced common consciousness among the various competing ethnic groups. Acceptance and rejection on linguistic-cultural grounds characterizes social relations. This factor of exclusiveness is usually accompanied by nepotism and corruption. This generally leads to conflict, which sometimes culminates in a situation where the various ethnic groups resort to killings and wanton destruction of property. According to Odivwri (2011), conflict is an important aspect of ethnicity. This is inevitable under conditions of inter-ethnic competition for scarce and valuable resources particularly in societies where inequality is accepted as natural, and

wealth is greatly esteemed. The fear of being confined to the bottom of the inter-ethnic ladder of inequality generates divisive and destructive socio-economic competition which has anti social effects. Demonstrations, rioting and various forms of violent agitations become instruments in inter-ethnic relations.

Awolowo (1947) pointed out that Nigeria was "a mere-geographical expression". This means that in terms of social relations and national identification, Nigeria was not yet a nation by 1947 and sadly in 2014, it is doubtful if the situation has changed. The just concluded National Conference in Abuja, made up of the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, failed to arrive at cogent agreeable decisions on many of the vexed issues bordering on national unity. The sharp divide between the North and South, as well as the divide on ethnic lines that permeated the entire duration of the Conference casts huge doubts on the success of the conference and the unity of the nation. As a matter of fact, the North has openly declared that it will not accept the outcome of the conference. This implies that there is no way forward for Nigeria as a well integrated nation yet! As a multi-national society, one of the sociological problems of building Nigeria as a nation, continues to be multi-ethnicity with its concomitants such as multi-lingualism and competitive ethnicity.

Sustainable development is the balancing the fulfillment of human needs with the protection of the natural environment so that these needs can be met in the present and in the future. The society should manage its resources in an effective and efficient manner that it benefits all; the resources should be judiciously and carefully used so that there shall be no poverty, no diseases and the quality of life will be better (Popoola, 2009). The United Nations asserts that the various components working together to produce sustainable development are economic development, social development and environmental protection (McKeown, 2002). Also for Ayeni (2010), a culture of sustainable development is one that is selfless and cares passionately about human welfare today, tomorrow and generations to come. According to Rodney (1972), development is a many sided process. At the level of an individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. At the level of a social group, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. In like manner, Todaro (1982) sees development as a multi-dimensional process involving re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic

and social system. Thus, it involves in addition to improvement of income and output, radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structure as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs. The contention of Todaro is that development is both a physical process as well as a state of the mind. Development must also entail structural transformation of the economy and its traditional institutions (Achumugu, Ata-Agboni & Aliyu, 2013).

The task of development for a nation requires the unity and loyalty of all the constituent ethnic units to the common goals of the nation. Nation building involves actions, behaviours and thoughts or feelings aimed at sustaining the attributes of a nation. Nation building as a process, whereby the leaders of a country strive to achieve unity and progress for their nation through various programmes. It is aimed at promoting peace and harmony, reducing conflicts, laying good foundations for economic, social and political development, and above all to create conditions for progress. The problem of nation building is more critical in the third world country generally and more particularly in Nigeria where there are peoples with different cultures, languages, religion and a diversity of inclinations who have been forced together into one geo-political entity (Ezegbe, 1993). This is because where there are differences in the characteristic attributes of a nation like Nigeria, among the peoples of that country, and where loyalty resides with the various ethnic groups rather than the nation, problems are bound to arise in building such a nation. Problems generally arise as a result of differences in culture, tradition, religion and language. Also problems like alienation, discontent, disaffection or disillusionment may arise where there is a low level of national consciousness.

National Integration is an essential factor for accelerated development in multi-ethnic nations. This entails a situation where the various ethnic nationalities must allow their ethnic identities to be swallowed by national identity. In this way, every tribe subscribes to the goals of the nation and not to the parochial goals of any tribe. However, this has not been achievable in Nigeria. According to Jekayinfa (2002), a very crucial factor in nation building in Nigeria is that of accommodation and integration among the various peoples of the country. It is very necessary that the various peoples should accommodate one another which is not easy to achieve in Nigeria. Also, the minority groups should be carried along so as to peacefully

achieve the goal of nation building. Similarly, Ezegbe (1993) listed some factors from literature which according to him constitute prerequisites for the building of a strong nation. Some of the factors include: obedience, allegiance and loyalty to a central government; willingness to live together as a people; national sentiment of feeling; and loyalty to a nation.

Corruption is the bane of any nation (Adebayo, 2013). One of the evils which ethnic loyalty continues to breed in Nigeria is massive corruption. Any accused corrupt government functionary in Nigeria will quickly run to his ethnic group from where he finds a ready sanctuary of protection from the state, as shouts of victimization rents the air in his favour. For example, Chief James Ibori, former governor of Delta State even after his imprisonment on corruption charges in the United Kingdom is still being celebrated as a hero and icon by his kinsmen. His annual birthday is still being celebrated like a carnival by his people even in his absence.

An analysis of the anti-graft/anti-corruption laws in Nigeria shows that corruption will continue in spite of the laws because the perpetrators do not fear any consequences (Ayobami, 2011). As a result of tribalism in politics, corruption has been seen to be the best beneficiary from these trends. It has thrived to its peak and this can clearly be seen by recent world rankings in which Nigeria was among the topmost corrupt nations in the world. This has completely tarnished the image of Nigeria and not forgetting the whole of the African continent as most European states consider Africans to be corrupt. In Nigeria, the whole idea of corruption is attributed to tribalism since favouring of kinsmen is the theme of the day. Corruption now appears to have become a permanent feature of the Nigerian polity. It has become completely institutionalized, entered into the realm of culture and the value systems. Nigeria got her independence in 1960, but fifty-three years after, in spite of massive human and natural resources, corruption has stifled her growth, confining it to the ranks of developing nations. Corruption has virtually turned Nigeria into the land of starvation and a debtor nation in spite of the nation's enormous resources (Adebayo, 2013).

Also, sitting and location of federal government projects continues to enjoy ethnic patronage rather than allowing consideration for national development to determine the location. Every government

functionary wants to bring something to his tribe or community even if such will not benefit the community, tribe or the nation as a whole. This is why Otite (1990), held that the ethnic virus has been one of the most important causes of social crisis and political instability in Nigeria; and ethnicity has been perceived in general to be a major obstacle to the overall politico-economic development of the country. Meanwhile the Nigerian society continues to suffer from this trend as it has become a norm. So also can nepotism and favouritism on the basis of ethnicity be traced to the smallest homes and offices, Government parastatals, corporate bodies and other organizations. For instance, a Yoruba landlord will insist on a Yoruba tenant, a Christian director will insist on a Christian assistant. Preferential treatments are given to people of the same tribe even when they are not qualified for it. Discrimination on ethnic lines continues unabated without consideration to the overall development of the nation. Competence, capacity and patriotic characters were jettisoned and our national system paved way for all sorts of practices depending on the tribe you belonged to and which tribe was at the helm of affairs.

Ethnic conflicts continue to dominate the political landscape of Nigeria. This has contributed in no small measure to the retardation of growth and development in the nation. Sustainable development can only be assured in an atmosphere of peace and mutual trust. Jekayinfa (2002) affirms that the dominant characterization of Nigeria politics, such as intense ethnic and elite conflicts, the recurrent tendencies of crisis in governance and development, the trend towards centralization of power and the excessive use of political repression, with the dependent nature of Nigeria is solely dependent on the operations and manipulation of the international capitalist system. Ethnic conflicts have their origin in an antagonistic relation of production and exchange introduced into Nigerian societies first by merchant list system. Conflicting material interest in the society tends to divide society into hostile camps and structure themselves through organized institutions such as political parties, the workers, trade unions or informally through the façade of ethnic and religious sentiments. In Nigeria, all the vagaries of crisis that usually develop into situation of bad governance are of ethnic or elite kind. And these conflicts are a reflection of the material interest of various groups in the society, which in the context of scarce resources, manifest in a sharp and intense political competition which brings about crises in governance and development in the political system.

This was further buttressed by Elaigwu (2005) when he writes: ...the violent protests in the Niger-Delta over perceived injustice in resource distribution; the Itsekiri-Ijaw violence in the Delta; the resumption of the Ife-Modakeke communal violence; the menace of Odu'a Peoples' Congress (OPC) and the accompanying violence in Lagos and Shagamu areas; the formation of the Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC) and the Igbo Peoples' Congress (IPC); the MASSOB's feeble attempt to resuscitate Biafra; the Sharia crisis and the demands for a confederation; the South-South demand for the control of its resources; and all the recent interethnic/religious conflicts in various states across the country are all part of the bubbles of the Nigerian federation. They are based on the historical structures of mutual fears and suspicions among Nigeria's groups in a competitive process. They reflect the dissatisfaction of Nigerian groups with the state of the federation.

Albert (2005) presents a case where a scuffle between an Igbo trader, Mr Arthur Nwakwo, and a Fulani security guard, Mallam Abubakar Abdu, both operating at the Sabongari Kano market, led to community fracas as both were supported by their kinsmen, and more than thirty people were killed as a result of the incident. The October 1991 Tiv-Jukun ethnic crisis is another conflict over land ownership and political domination. The crisis was said to have claimed not less than 5,000 lives with dozens of villages burnt, while up to 150,000 residents fled the war zone in the exodus that followed (Newswatch, 1991). The Jos crisis of 2008 was fatal as it recorded more than 700 casualties. The crisis in Jos has been alleged to have ethnic undertones. According to Umejesi (2010), the Jos religious crisis of 2008 was both ethnically and politically motivated, as it was as a result of Local Government elections in Jos North, which Hausa/Fulani Muslim settlers claim to be their own as against the claim of ownership by indigenous people of the area who are mostly Christians. The Head Quarters of Jos North was, shortly, before the election of November 27, 2008 relocated from its location of C Division of the Nigeria Police to the premises of the Jos Metropolitan Development Board (JMDB). The relocation did not go down well with the Jasawa (Hausa/Fulani in Jos) who saw the relocation as an attempt to short change them politically and they were prepared not to allow that.

Conflicts have the potential of destroying the foundation of national unity or nation-building. This is because ethnic and sub-national demands and aspirations often challenge nation-building and allocation policies and

ultimately, the legitimacy of the state (Achimugu, Ata-Agboni & Aliyu, 2013). Continued ethnic conflict in Nigeria could destroy democracy and the unity of the country, and eventually lead to total disintegration. Ethnic conflicts also consume a large and disproportionate share of national resources. In an effort to combat ethnic conflicts, government diverts a large proportion of the national resources, whereas such resources could have been channelled to the provision of infrastructure for the people. Similarly, government wastes a lot of resources on repairing its property damaged during ethnic conflicts.

Ethnic conflicts have long-term effects on the economic activities of the country (Achimugu, Ata-Agboni & Aliyu, 2013). Many of the conflicts may occur during the farming season, thereby preventing people from going to their farms for fear of being killed or kidnapped. When such situation occurs, farming and other economic activities such as fishing and trading also suffer the same fate. During violent clashes, farmlands grazing lands and crops meant for farming and animals are destroyed. This situation could therefore lead to famine, hunger and starvation in the country. In most cases, men abandon their economic activities to participate in the clashes, thereby leaving the farms for nobody to work on. Continued crises in the country could lead to food shortage, hunger and starvation. Ethnic conflicts also affect business houses, manufacturing industries, small-scale enterprises and other business ventures, as they would be closed down. People would flee from the streets and towns in panic and run away for their lives. Commercial vehicles too would be off the road and movement within and outside the community would become impossible. Buying and selling too would come to a halt and communication within and outside the communities would become practically impossible. Ethnic conflicts lead to displacement of people and movement of immigrants into other communities, towns, local government areas and states thereby creating refugee and resettlement problems. Displaced people tend to lose all they have and lived for. They become homeless and go in search of new accommodation and a new means of livelihood. Aside from losing their homes and properties, children and aged people who cannot run are either killed or get missing during the crisis. Ethnic problems create restriction on mobility of labour as many Nigerians cannot work in states of their choice or get employment in their chosen field (Adebayo, 2006).

All these crises have led to wanton destruction and looting of properties worth millions of naira. The big questions then are: how can

remarkable development take place in an atmosphere of crises, chaos and disturbances? Can foreign investors decide to come to a country where ethno-religious crises have become the order of the day? Are those killed in the crises not relevant in the scheme of development of the nation, more-so that virile men and women are mostly the victims of the crises? From the above, it is clear that ethnicity and its attendant problems, if not well managed or harnessed as in the case of Nigeria, has been a major setback for the nation.

### **Recommendations and conclusion**

It is essential that the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria should resolve their differences and come together and live peacefully as Nigerians. There is need for the mutual appreciation of one another's ethnic group and see none as either inferior or superior.

Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are largely a fall out of collective frustration over government's gross negligence in the provision of the basics of life like good roads, decent shelter, jobs, etc. Rather than spending millions of naira on trying to contain conflicts when they arise, government should make concerted efforts to address the issues that trigger such conflicts.

The National Orientation Agency should embark on a massive enlightenment programme to educate Nigerians on the need to embrace and pursue national development over and above parochial ethnic interests. This will go a long way to kick-start a process of authentic national integration which is essential for sustainable development.

Injustice to any of the constituent ethnic groups by the government is likely to breed distrust and disloyalty to the system. Government and its agencies, therefore, must be fair to all ethnic groups.

Putting the right pegs in the right holes is also essential for the development of a nation. Favouritism on the basis of tribe or ethnic sentiments, with total disregard to qualification, competency and efficiency must stop so that the country can be on the path of sustainable development. All ethnic groups must find constitutional ways of resolving their grievances and stop resorting to violence.



Nigerians should see their pluralism in terms of diverse religious, political and ethnic affinities as a blessing that would make her a multi-coloured nation with diverse potentialities to give leadership to Africa, the third world and the world at large.

Efforts should be made to discourage the idea of choosing a leader because of his ethnic group, religion and political affinity. Whoever would serve to the best interest and common good of all Nigerians should be given the opportunity to serve Nigeria especially at the highest level of governance irrespective of his or her tribe, religion or political affinity.

Religious leaders as stakeholders in the Nigerian project should endeavour to give proper orientation to their followers and should emphasize that religion pursues love and peaceful co-existence with all peoples irrespective of tribe, religion or political affinity.

The Nigerian state is in dire need of sustainable development. Sustainable development is not possible under an atmosphere of acrimonious division, mutual distrust and disloyalty to the system. Development is a process that requires the concerted efforts of all and sundry, and in the case of Nigeria, the various ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria must as a matter of urgency come together as stakeholders irrespective of their ethnic affiliations, and form a united front committed to the development of the nation. As it is commonly said, *united we stand, divided we fall*. The continuous attachment of citizens first to ethnic groups cannot guarantee development for the nation. It is only if and when, Nigerians begin to value nationalism more than ethnicity that there will be an accelerated increase in economic and political development in the nation.

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