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Strengthening Social Cohesion in Nigeria: a Panacea for National Development

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria, right from her independence on 1st October 1960 has been bedevilled with many issues of perennial agitations for marginalization, deprivation, political exclusion, negligence and domination across the length and breadth of the country, due to the problems of poor social cohesion among the groups in Nigeria. Despite her vast and enormous human and material resources, a greater number of her population is still wallowing in abject poverty with insecurity becoming the order of the day. Thus, impeding her drive towards National development. With the aid of largely secondary data, the paper found out that beyond the economic challenges, the greatest challenge to national development is poor social cohesion among the various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in Nigeria. It, therefore, recommends among others the strengthening of social cohesion through a resort to good governance, focused leadership, strengthening of national cohesion and integration institutions and restructuring of the country to ensure national cohesion and national unity.

Introduction

Nigeria, since her independence in 1960 has remained a paradox in terms of economic growth and development despite the enormous natural and human resources at its disposal. Her economic growth and development pace in almost all the major sectors; economy, security, infrastructure, health, education, and politics contrasts sharply with the enormous resources, that the country has been controlling since her independence to date. It particularly becomes clearer when compared to the socio-economic growth and developmental strides of fellow oil-producing and exporting countries like Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea that were at par with Nigeria in the post-independence period.

Recent projections by international and national socio-economic development monitors such as UNDP (2018), AANDEC (2019), NBS (2019), and World Bank (2021), show a consistent pattern of worsening insecurity, and poor infrastructural development, unemployment, and poverty in Nigeria. The UNDP report (2020) on human development index (HDI) in Nigeria and the National Bureau of Statistics report that followed, confirmed that human development index has been on the decline in Nigeria since 1999 due to infrastructure deficit to the extent that Nigeria ranked low among other countries and territories with a position of 161 out of 189 countries between 1999 and 2020. The World Bank Report (2021) reveals that Nigeria with of lower-income status falls short of the economic and social progress required to impact the well-being of the average Nigerian given that half of Nigeria's population lives on less than one dollar a day.

However, these were not without efforts by successive administrations in Nigeria towards revamping the economy and enhancing national development, as there have been myriad economic policies, development plans and programmes as well as strategies aimed at stimulating economic growth to enhance development across major sectors across the country. The latest of such policies is the adoption of the internationally accepted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequently, the ongoing Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). Unfortunately, these efforts have failed to yield the expected results, because the underlying factors militating against the efforts of government towards national development such as identity politics, ethnic distrust, social inequality and inequity amongst other centrifugal tendencies have continued to play prominent roles in the political decision-making process, allocation and distribution of resources as well as the development of the country.

It is on this premise that the study examines social cohesion in Nigeria with a view to establishing a relationship between social cohesion and national development in Nigeria. To achieve this feat some questions are posed to drive the study: What is social cohesion and what are the indicators of social cohesion? What is the relationship between social cohesion and national development and how does social cohesion impacts national development? What are the challenges of social cohesion in Nigeria and how can the country strengthen social cohesion for enhanced national development in Nigeria? Through library survey and discourse analysis, the paper attempts to find answers to some of these questions in order to establish the imperative of strengthening social cohesion for enhanced national development in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Social Cohesion and National Development

The Concept of Social Cohesion

Globally, social cohesion has been recognized and identified as a major intervening variable towards ensuring the survival and development of the State. Maxwell (1996:13) defines social cohesion as the process of building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community. The Council of Europe (2010:5) defined social cohesion as a concept that includes values and principles which aim to ensure that all citizens, without discrimination and on an equal footing, have access to fundamental social and economic rights. The Council of Europe

however does not see cohesion as being a homogenising concept that is only based on traditional forms of social integration, which nonetheless are important, such as identity, the sharing of the same culture, and adhering to the same values. Rather a concept for an open and multicultural society. What this entails is that the meaning of the concept can differ according to the socio-political environment in which it evolves.

From an operational point of view, a strategy of social cohesion refers to any kind of action which ensures that every citizen, every individual, can have within their community, the opportunity of access to means to secure their basic needs; progress; protection and legal rights; dignity and social confidence. Any insufficiency of access to any of these fields operates against social cohesion (Council of Europe, 2010). It is in this light that Jenson (2010) refers to social cohesion as a 'flagship' concept which constantly reminds us to be collectively attentive to, and aware of, any kind of discrimination, inequality, marginality or exclusion.

Similarly, the OECD Development Centre (2011) describes a socially cohesive society as one that works towards the well-being of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalization. The OECD's description denotes three key dimensions, namely, fostering cohesion by building networks of relationships, trust and identity between divergent groups; fighting discrimination, exclusion and excessive inequalities; and enabling upward social mobility (OECD, 2022). This definition, therefore, highlights the capacity of a society to pursue its members' welfare while at the same time reducing inequalities and promoting inclusion amongst divergent groups.

Numerous international development monitors have followed the line of the OECD to describe social cohesion as a glue that holds a society together, promoting harmony, a sense of community, and a degree of commitment to promoting the common good. Beyond the social relations that close the gap between ethnic and religious groups, vertical linkages in which state and market institutions interact with communities and peoples can further

cement the cohesiveness of society if they are inclusive, transparent, and accountable (World Bank, 2001). What this entails is that there is a set of accepted norms and rules around inclusion and equity, social and national membership and access to livelihoods and basic services, as well as a state that actively promotes these norms. More so, the interplay between these vertical and horizontal ties lies in development. This is because they are critical elements of conflict management and a peaceful and secure society is a driver for national development (World Bank, 2013).

Supporting the above assertion Schmeets (2012:128) describes social cohesion as a bond or 'glue' that brings together people in a society, particularly in the context of ethnic diversity. This description, however, entails the integral value of social cohesion in multi-ethnic societies, of which the absence is inimical to the social development and national growth of the country. Ihua (2021) defines social cohesion as the willingness of citizens to cooperate and work together towards ensuring the survival and prosperity of the country. His definition of social cohesion lay emphasis on two key elements; citizens' cooperation and the prosperity of the country, which according to him makes social cohesion integral to national development.

Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the bonds and glue such as religion, cultural affinity, one goal, unity in diversity and one indivisible entity as a nation that should bring people together, to work towards ensuring the survival and prosperity of the country are literally dividing the citizens. On a daily basis, the bonds are being threatened by issues that are meant to bring the citizens together and the glue of having no other country to call our own has made it even worse, as the whole country is engulfed by divisive tendencies.

Sadly, the Nigerian elites who should be promoting cohesiveness in the country are the ones championing issues of division such as the supremacy of an ethnic group or religious group over others, social exclusion, economic marginalization and identity issues. Thus, making national development a mirage. National

development cannot be realized in the absence of social cohesion, because it is the bonds and the glue that ensures national development.

Indicators of Social Cohesion

Several scholarly opinions have arisen as to how social cohesion can be measured in a nation. Prominent amongst these notions are Langer et al, (2017) who draw their analysis based on survey data from 19 African countries from the Afro Barometer. They contend that the three most critical areas in assessing the level of social cohesiveness in any society are the levels of inequalities, trust and identities prevalent in the society. However, these indices are based on individuals' shared perceptions because social cohesion is basically a matter of people's perception in the society in which they live.

Other scholars like McClosky et al (2011); Delhey and Gragolov (2016) associated multifaceted dimensions of social cohesion to include social trust, identification as to how one is attached to his or her country; fairness and social justice, participation and self-determination. They construe social cohesion as being expressive of the sense of belongingness exhibited within a group and the individual perception of the whole group or society as greater than its constituent parts. This individual sense of belongingness helps in bringing peaceful solutions to conflict that may arise among members, which in most instances is communicated through shared values and shared norms of behaviour that bind people together for national cohesion (or solidarity) (McClosky et al, 2011). Despite the shortfalls in their analysis, particularly their inability to capture African societies in their studies, these indicators have featured prominently in the measurement of social cohesion in many societies.

The Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey (2021) highlighted five major indicators of social cohesion in Nigeria. These are identity, trust, equity and social justice, participation and patriotism, and self-worth and future expectations. The Survey further explains each of these components to identify their impacts on cohesion (NSCS Report 2021):

1. *Identity*: This component of social cohesion sees the cohesiveness of a multi-ethnic

society in terms of how individuals view their national relationship to identify with a tribe or group to which they belong. A socially inclusive society encourages opportunities for growth and social mobility through the provision of strong policies that discourage marginalization, and encourage the integration of minorities in the society, by creating the perception of being accepted with the feeling of belonging.

2. *Trust*: This component reflects the different perceptions of people towards the reliability of others. This is not only reflected among people but also in institutions. Trust strengthens unity and identification as well as a moral sense of solidarity. There are at least three levels of trust: Social Trust, Trust in institutions and Trust in politics. Social trust refers to trust in other people, institutional trust refers to trust in organizations, and political trust refers to trust in politics and political institutions. Without trust, a society cannot attain cohesion.
3. *Equity and Social Justice*: The Equity and Social Justice Component reflects the acceptance of and compliance with established social order. A lack of social order results in anarchy where societal members' goals are no longer in harmony with the legitimate approaches to reaching the goals. Social Justice and Equity levels on the laws and policies of the government, the perception of fairness and equality amongst different groups in the society, the treatment of individuals and groups by the government and the trust of the people in the government.
4. *Participation and Patriotism*: As a component of social cohesion, participation and patriotism hinge on the willingness of individuals and groups to work together to ensure the growth of a society or an economy. The interest of individuals to participate in the political process for the progress of an economy is part of the questions to be expected when patriotism is

discussed. This brings to the fore the definition of social cohesion as a state of affairs in which a group of people demonstrate an aptitude for collaboration that produces a climate for change that, in the longer run, benefits all (Ritzen, 2001).

5. *Self-worth and Future Expectation*: Worth is portrayed through the subjective measures of equity of life. The measurement of life satisfaction, individual happiness and future expectation explicitly convey the aspect of worth as a component of social cohesion. Are citizens satisfied with the present life they live? Is what they currently undergo a sufficient measurement of their happiness?

The Concept of National Development

For a comprehensive understanding of the concept of national development, it is important to understand what development in itself depicts. Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) posit that the concept of development seems to be in a state of flux since the end of the Second World War. Thus explaining the reason for the various scholarly definitions of the concept since after WWII. This is because prior to the end of the WWII, ideological differences between the socialist East and the Capitalist West influenced the meaning and conceptualization of the term. The above assertion resonates with Ake's (2001:9) argument that the ideology of development itself became a problem for development because of the conflict between its manifest and latent functions. Ake's position has been proven right by the failure of the various conceptions of development as the outcome of economic growth by many western theorists such as Rostow (1952) and Harrod and Domar (1957) and many others who assumed that structural changes, savings and investment as sources of economic development and growth would generate funds for investment and infrastructural development that would guarantee the better living condition of people (Otto and Ukpere, 2012).

Evidently, economic growth in most developing and underdeveloped countries, especially Latin America and Africa in the 1970s has shown that economic growth alone could sufficiently address

the spate of unemployment, poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy and the ever-increasing crimes, wars and conflict that have characterized these regions. This seems to have necessitated the new thinking and redefinition of development from an economic growth-centred perspective to a human-centred approach. Development is now seen as a transformation of society, which Stiglitz (cited in Afeikhena 2004:207) explained as a move from the old ways of thinking, and old forms of social and economic organization to new ones. Chandler (2007:367) asserts that development has been redefined, taking emphasis away from traditional economic indicators of GDP and trade and broadening out the concept to include psychological and material factors related to the measurement of human well-being. This view reverberated Nnoli's (1981) definition of development as a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and the society interact with their physical, biological and inter-human environments transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large being transformed in the process.

Indeed, development is multifaceted and centred on Man (Rodney, 1972; Ake, 2001). It encompasses growth and social progress, thus bringing play all human relations into play. It focuses on man's potential and capacities to eradicate or alleviate poverty, penury, inequality, and unemployment and in general enhance the condition for human existence and self-reproduction (Okolie, 2009). Development therefore could be seen as the process of empowering people to maximize their potential and the ability to exploit nature to meet daily human needs (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013). It can also be seen as the capacity to lift people out of poverty and penury by transforming their living standards. Based on this we can confidently say that national development is the capacity of the country to raise the living standard of its people. The centrality of it, therefore, lies in the strengthening of social cohesion in society. This is because for national development to be attained, all indices of social cohesion should be strengthened to provide the required glue that will bond the different social formations in the society. Olaoye (2013) posits that national development denotes the growth of the

nation in terms of internal cohesion, integration, unity, economic well-being, mass participation in government, and educational growth. These factors are what Balogun and Obosi (2018) refer to as the intervening variables that facilitate national development. Thus, making national development the outcome of the intervention of these factors. Without a doubt, social cohesion constitutes a major enabler of national development because of its capacity to open gateways of opportunities to society members and foster positive social mobility toward each other's well-being.

Understanding Social Cohesion Issues and National Development in Nigeria

Undoubtedly, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country with diverse and competing interests which underscores the importance of social cohesion in the development of the country. Unfortunately, over the years the issues have been downplayed and relegated to the background despite being acknowledged by the constitutions and other official reports of the government even before independence.

Prior to independence, even before the amalgamation in 1914, the issue of social cohesion has been a major factor among the groups in the southern and northern protectorates. However, rather than find a solution to resolving it, the British Colonial Government accommodated and strengthened it through the introduction of the indirect rule system of administration. The issues through the Indirect Rule system aided the British Colonial Government to have an effective grip on the two protectorates despite the fears of the minorities within the two protectorates that later formed the Nigeria State. However, towards the end of the colonial administration, and in the drive towards decolonization and independence, the issues vividly manifested, as minority agitations became one of the dominant national discourses at the time.

In 1958, the Willink Commission was established to enquire into the fears of minorities and means of

allaying them (Willink Commission Report, 1958). The Commission noted in its report among others that there were "genuine fears and the future was regarded with real apprehension" but repudiated the demands for state creation on two grounds. Firstly, the potentially divisive character of state creation and second its cost and associated miscellaneous implications. It however suggested a "Bill of Rights" modelled after the European Convention on Human Rights to be included in the independence constitution as a way of promoting national integration and guaranteeing minority rights (Willink Commission Report, 1958: P.88). But that was not considered as they went on with the declaration of independence without due consideration to the issues.

Remarkably, post-independence politics intensified the endemic centrifugal forces of cohesion within the Nigerian polity, climaxing in the complete absence of national consensus. The height of it all was the thirty-month brutal civil war that engulfed the country between 1967 and 1970 (the civil war was between the defunct republic of Biafra, a carved-out territory of Nigeria located in the eastern part of Nigeria and the Nigerian government). It is important to note at this juncture that the civil war was instigated by the 1966 pogrom on Igbos across the country, which could have been averted if the government had recognized the people, respected their fundamental rights, distributed resources equitably, protected the people, and did not feel the perceived marginalization of occupying political positions in Southeast (Lugard, et al., 2015).

Regrettably, despite attempts at stabilizing the polity, from federal system to military system, and now democracy with 36 states and a federal capital territory, Abuja, the same problems that led to the civil war have continued to shoot-up. This is so because most of the policies are mere cosmetic and do not address the issues. Rather than assuage the feeling or perception of being politically excluded, economically marginalized and socially oppressed they are being strengthened. By virtue of the inequity and inequality that characterized most policies of the federal government on the basis of ethnicity and religion, from Gowon's post-civil war

rhetorical effort to ‘heal the wounds’ by describing the war as “No Victor No Vanquish”, the post-civil war peace initiatives; the reconstruction, Reintegration and Rehabilitation programme carried out in the eastern region, the introduction of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), the reclaiming of properties across the country, the creation of more states, the challenges have persisted, rather than reduced. They have continued to reinforce themselves in different guises. Even, the federal character principle which took effect in the 1979 constitution and the quota system, as well as the geopolitical zone principle and many others that aimed at assuaging the eastern region, and entire ethnic nationalities that constitute what is known as Nigeria have not helped out. Not that the policies are not with good intentions but their problem is in the bias in the implementation, which has been the major instigator of the perennial agitations and conflict across the geographical divides in Nigeria.

However, this fear was to be allayed by the 1979 constitution which adopted the internationally accepted constitutional principle of “Unity in Diversity” as the basic tenet of social cohesion and national integration in Nigeria (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976). The 1999 Nigerian constitution as amended also re-introduced it as a major challenge to Nigeria’s development that must be accommodated and championed by all. Specifically, the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions of Nigeria as amended clearly stipulated that: “national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the issues of the place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.” Unfortunately, rather than enhancing social cohesion and strengthening national cohesion and national integration as the constitution entails, the country has fallen neck-deep into divisive tendencies: threats of secession, hatred, and war rhetoric seem to have dominated ethnic vituperations across the country that at the slightest provocations results into violent conflicts among ethnic nationalities.

In an attempt to further rescue the collapsing situation and strengthen social cohesion among social groupings in Nigeria for enhanced national development, the federal government on several occasions had constituted national conferences to address the issues. The most recent conferences include the 2005 national political conference under President Olusegun Obasanjo and the 2014 national conference under President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The two conferences were aimed at allaying the fears among ethnic and religious groups on the rising issues of social cohesion which were tearing the country apart and finding solutions to the problems. The main objective is to enhance national development in Nigeria. Expectedly, the conferences recommended measures towards strengthening the indicators of social cohesion such as equity and equality in the distribution and allocation of resources, appointments, inclusivity among groups, and many others as drivers towards the attainment of national cohesion and integration in Nigeria for enhanced national development. However, the recommendations in the usual Nigerian style ended up as mere rhetoric and political slogan rather than being implemented. Meanwhile, the gaps in the social cohesion index are still expanding with severe tensions and threats across ethno-religious lines.

The report of the 2021 Nigeria Social Cohesion Index conducted by the Africa Polling Institute (API) shows that the social cohesion index in Nigeria stands at 44.2 per cent, below the 50 per cent internationally acceptable average mark of social cohesion for multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries. Thus, indicating that Nigeria is not as socially cohesive as it ought to be (NSCS Report, 2021). The report further states that the country has become more divided today than it was 4 years ago as observed by 65 per cent of citizens interviewed (NSCS Report, 2021: 14). The implication is the severe effect on the country’s efforts toward national development as the entire country is bedevilled with insecurity instigated by hatred among the social formations against each other and against the State. No region across the country is safe from threats anymore. It is either insurgency, terrorism, violent separatist uprising, attacks on

security formations and soft targets, conflicts between indigenous communities and herders, or militancy. Even the general elections have become new avenues for pouring out ethno-religious vituperations among the social formations in Nigeria. This situation is detrimental to the attainment of national development because no country can succeed in such a tense security atmosphere; where people are afraid to go about their daily activities freely, economic activities are crippled, the schools are shut down in many parts of the country because of fear of been attacked and resources meant for development are wasted on fighting insecurity.

The Imperative of Strengthening Social Cohesion for enhanced National Development in Nigeria

It is a fact that strengthening social cohesion in Nigeria is a sine qua non to enhanced national development. It plays the role of an enabler as well as a building block for national cohesion and integration which are drivers of national development. For a country to be socially cohesive is to have a sense of belongingness and build good relationships with community members. A state of social cohesion opens gateways of opportunities to society members and fosters positive social mobility towards each other's well-being. When this is done economic growth is stimulated and human development is achieved.

The OECD (2012) identified three pillars of social cohesion on which development is achieved. These are social inclusion, social capital and social mobility. Social inclusion refers to the extent of participation of an individual in society, especially those who are disadvantaged and who need to be amplified to be heard. It is also the process of involving them in addressing certain causes within the community; Social Capital on the other hand is the reason behind various systems in society, economy, and politics. Citizens share values, norms, and trust, which is essential in the process of social exchange; While Social Mobility refers to the movement of an individual's social status in society. The movement can either be upward or downward depending on what they are experiencing, be it

either progressing or diminishing on the social strata. These three pillars help to identify whether a society is strongly glued and bonded or not.

Undoubtedly, the three pillars of social cohesion as enunciated by OECD are building blocks on which national development could be enhanced in Nigeria. They ensure that the society is strengthened from all angles of development, from the economy, politics, and social life to security. When this is achieved, national development is automatically enhanced. For a comprehensive analysis these are explained further below:

Socio-political Benefit: One of the major benefits of a socially cohesive society is that it brings people of diverse origins, cultures and affiliations together to promote common societal goals. Such a bond among diverse groupings in society ensures the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and social justice and offers its members the opportunity for upward mobility. It strives to consolidate the plurality of citizens by reducing inequality and socio-economic disparities and fractures in society. Thus, ensuring both personal development and a sense of belongingness that links together individual freedom and social justice, economic efficiency and fair sharing of resources and pluralism as well as common rules for resolving all conflicts.

Social cohesion offers a broader approach to connectedness that permits a stronger set of references to the functioning of democracy and the healthiness of society by strengthening civic and societal responsibility (CoE, 2007). The more socially cohesive a society becomes, the less friction and the brighter the political atmosphere and feature of that society. This is because it promotes institutional solidarity, thus making the people tend to lean towards common national objectives rather than the proclivity towards ethnicity. The impact most often according to Dahrendorf (1995) is seen in the drive towards national goals and objectives which in turn enhanced national development.

Economic Benefit: A socially cohesive society improves economic growth through preventing physical and human capital destruction, and building social capital, cooperation and trust between individuals of a society. It systematically rubs off on allocation, productivity and efficiency, which inextricably are tied to economic growth because the state and the citizens are committed to the institutional ideals of national development.

Additionally, for an effective allocation of resources in a society, resources must be equitably distributed so as to maximize total economic welfare and this cannot be done efficiently if there is a lack or poor cohesion among the diverse groups. Moreover, discrimination and social polarization resulting from the absence of social cohesion most often lead to a suboptimal distribution of resources (Cilingir, 2016), thereby inhibiting economic growth and development. The following instances have been used as a rationale for the economic benefit of social cohesion: the discriminatory appointment of people into offices based on ethnicity and religion that grant opportunities to unqualified people from a favoured group and denied qualified people from other groups opportunity to work can accrue unfavourable outcomes, such as having to rely on production by unqualified staff.

Secondly, if the minorities are denied access to infrastructures and social services such as education, transportation and healthcare, a respective loss in human capital and productivity is inevitable (Cilingir, 2016). The above instances are part of why Nigeria is where they are today on the developmental chart. A socially cohesive society provides for high levels of workers' productivity and innovation (Spoonley, 2014). Thus, stimulating economic growth and engendering development of the society.

Security Benefit: Undoubtedly, security remains a major enabler of national development. There can be no sustainable development without peace and security. Increasingly, security and development concerns have become interlinked so that you cannot separate them. Therefore, the need for cohesion to exist among groupings in society to

ensure peace and security. Several studies such as Alesina et al., 2003; Foa, 2011; Spoonley, 2014; Cilingir, 2016; and many others have found that lack of social cohesion is an instigator of insecurity and conflicts in a society, because of its ability to fan the amber of political and populist anxieties about ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversities that eventually results into confrontations and conflicts.

The lack of social cohesion makes society more vulnerable to social conflicts, violence and separatist movements. It creates bottled-up grievances that easily trigger violent uprisings among groups in a society. In Nigeria where issues of social cohesion are prevalent, elections, religious preaching, and minor personal confrontations had caused serious violent conflicts that have severe national security implications. A good example is the Zango Kataff crisis of 1992 in Kaduna State. It is also remarkable to note that majority of the security challenges bedevilling the Nigerian State are rooted in the issues of social cohesion such as identity politics, exclusion; marginalization, etc. Therefore a socially cohesive Nigeria will bring about a unified approach and commitment to confronting the threats and restoring peace and security, which in itself is a sine qua non for national development.

Challenges Militating against Social Cohesion in Nigeria

Leadership Challenge

The failure of leadership in Nigeria remains the bane of social cohesion and integration in Nigeria. Right from independence to date, the leadership of the country has always been skewed to support divisive ideologies against the values that promote cohesion among diverse groups in Nigeria. The leadership has paid lip service to Nigeria's national values and principles to the detriment of Nigeria's unity to the extent that doing the right thing pits those at the heads of the institutions against powerful internal and external environmental factors, such as the internal culture, the people, the resources available and the socio-economic and political structure of the very organization or

country you will be labouring to transform (Lokoson, 2013). Moreover, studies have shown that the majority of the political leaders in Nigeria are ethnic or tribal champions whose intention is only to promote the domination of their ethnic groups on others. This has created a zero-sum political attitude and intolerance that tends to pitch geopolitical groups, and ethnic and religious groups against each other prior to, during and after elections in Nigeria. Thus, exacerbating the already existing gaps in the Nigeria social cohesion index.

Governance Challenge

When we talk about Governance, we mean ‘*good governance*. It means that government effectively and efficiently upholds the sanctity, ideals and principles of democratic governance. This entails respect for the rule of law, transparency and accountability to the people and recognizing and effectuating the people’s right to know. In Nigeria which is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, good governance would involve the upholding of the constitutional recognition of the “Unity in Diversity clause” which is intended to allay the fears of the minority in the leadership of the country. However, the case is different as those national values and principles that tend to engender unity among diverse groupings in Nigeria are relegated to the background and used as mere national slogans. Even where they are meant to be recognized they are implemented in the bridge, thereby instigating violent confrontations and conflicts. For instance, the Federal government policy of indigeneity, quota system and federal character principle that are meant to recognise every group in the society and give them a sense of belonging are being implemented wrongly across the states (Kaduna and Plateau are striking examples where people are considered second class citizens in their states and certain rights and privileges denied them on that ground) (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

Structural Challenge

The skewed structure of the Nigerian federal system that promotes inequality and inequity, political exclusion, and economic marginalization remains a major challenge to social cohesion. In Nigeria,

states were created based on landmass rather than solvency and population which gave more states to the north than the south. Being the basis of resource sharing and allocations, the northern region continues to dominate in economic resources sharing. Thus, granting more economic power to the region. For instance, the Northwest region has seven states with three of the states, Kano, Katsina and Jigawa states outnumbering the entire southeast states with five states and eighty-five LGAs. While the three states in the northwest have hundred and five local governments with more allocations. This is the reason some states are mere begging bowls rather than contributors to the national revenue purse. More so, the southeast has the least states with five against the other region with six and seven (northwest). The consequence of the southeast being the only zone with the least states is the least amount of revenue allocation in the federation. It is not only the lopsided revenue allocations being channelled to the northern region that is perceived as an injustice but the political inequities that acutely manifest in addressing the national issues (Ezeakukwu & Nsoedo, 2019).

Institutional Challenge

In this context, we mean the weakness of those institutions of government that are established to promote national cohesion and integration in Nigeria. Such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Federal Civil Service Commission and State Civil Service Commission, Federal Character Commission, and Unitary School System of Education, amongst others. The failure of these institutions in their primary mandate to strengthen cohesion and national unity makes it difficult for the country to attain the level of cohesion required in a country like Nigeria to attain the desired development strides. It is important to note at this juncture that the achievement of national cohesion and integration in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria requires such institutions to drive the process. It is a gradual process that is meant to institute the psychology of oneness in the individual from puberty to adulthood. Therefore when they are not effective or weak the essence of their being is defeated and the implication is the

poor social cohesion that has characterized contemporary Nigeria.

Corruption

Corruption has remained a recurring decimal on issues of national development and governance in Nigeria. It is therefore not peculiar to the attainment of social cohesion in Nigeria. The very reasons why the institutions, leadership, structure, and governance in Nigeria remain challenges to the attainment of national cohesion are partly a result of corruption. The abuse of office by those in charge of delivering the dividends of the office to the people for their own personal gains and aggrandisement. They make it difficult for the government of the day to deliver the dividends of government to the people. In most instances we have seen representatives of states in the Federal Civil Service Commission and their counterparts in the state sell their quota to the highest bidders from outside their states, thereby depriving their people of the opportunity to be engaged in government offices. There have been incidences of people influencing the NYSC posting of the children to the favoured states against the principle of NYSC. There have also been cases of development commissions misappropriating and embezzling resources meant for the development of the areas they represent to the detriment of their people. The list goes on and on. Such situations do not go down well between the people and the government, as most often they are meant to believe that the government are against them, thus fanning the ember of disenchantment and hatred against the government. This has been common in Nigeria and a major hitch in the drive for social cohesion and integration in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Way Forward

It is not an overstatement to assert at this juncture that issues of social cohesion remain an open sore of Nigeria's preparedness for the pursuit of national development, especially when considering Nigeria's multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious nature. Nigeria stands a chance of being one of the 20 largest economies of the world, and a significant player in the global economic and

political arena, if it is able to get its house together. Because it is only a socially cohesive society where there is a sense of belongingness among the social formations or groupings, where there is equity and social justice and people are allowed to participate in the politics and development of the state on an equal basis without recourse to fear of oppression, marginalization and exclusion that national development is attained. Moreover, the indicators of social cohesion have exposed the strengths and weaknesses which Nigerian policymakers should engage in efforts at moulding plans and programmes for national development. Thus, bringing forward the imperative of social cohesion to national development in Nigeria.

In the light of the above, the paper makes the following recommendations as part of the major strategies that would help resolve the anomalies and strengthen national cohesion, national integration and national unity for enhanced national development in Nigeria.

1. **A Focused Leadership:** The leadership should be focused and driven based on Nigeria's national values and principles to be able to strengthen cohesion among the social formations in Nigeria. This will help to strengthen national unity and enhance national development.
2. **Good Governance:** Good governance is sine qua non for national unity and national development. It improves the country's productive capacity, improves people's welfare and enhance their freedoms. This will help to address the myriads of socio-economic, political and security issues bedevilling the country, of which most of them are instigated by issues of social cohesion.
3. **Restructuring:** There is need for the Federal Government to agree to the much talked about restructuring without reservation. A restructuring that will consider the indices of our national values where equity and social justices will thrive in all aspects of our national life.

4. Inclusivity: Absence of inclusivity in the political economy of Nigeria remains a major instigator of ethno-phobic behaviours and other centrifugal pulls that keep dividing the country. Therefore government at both federal and state level should ensure that groups within the society are carried along and given a sense of belonging in the society. This will go a long way in ensuring cohesion and stimulating economic growth and development in the country.
5. Strengthening National Cohesion Institutions: There is a need for government to review the activities and mandates of national cohesion and national integration institutions and policies with a view to repositioning them towards achieving their mandates. Such institutions as the Federal Character Commission, Federal and State Civil Service Commission, the NYSC, the federal government quota system, National Orientation Agency, Unitary Schools and many others.

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