

## THE NIGERIAN STATE AND THE CHALLENGES OF NATION BUILDING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: THE WAY FORWARD

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### Abstract

*Adopting the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, Nigeria attained the status of statehood on October 1, 1960. It was then that Nigeria formally acquired an independent and sovereign status that enabled her to make and enforce laws within her jurisdiction. Apart from striving to ensure its survival, the state is usually charged with a myriad of functions aimed at improving the good life of its citizens. Several years after the attainment of political independence, the Nigerian state has continued to be faced with enormous challenges on her nation building efforts to the extent that majority of the people still wallow in despair and hopelessness. Nation building represents an integrative effort through which nations engage in the search for nationhood. It involves the process of developing national consciousness instead of ethnic chauvinism among groups and individuals who are expected to develop a sense of oneness and love for their fatherland. This study adopted the qualitative descriptive approach. Data for the study was sourced through the secondary means of data collection. The study reveals that the efforts of the Nigerian state on nation building in the 21st century have not fully been adequate as majority of the people still feel alienated. Consequent upon this, the state has been faced with daunting challenges on her nation building efforts. The paper therefore argued that even with the restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria in May 1999, nation building efforts in the country have continued to live much to be desired. The paper therefore recommended that nation building efforts in Nigeria should be result oriented and people focused.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Nation Building, State, Ethnicity, Independence.

### Introduction

The historic amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates with the colony of Lagos by the British colonial masters under Lord Lugard in 1914 led to Nigeria's emergence as a political entity (Nwaoga, et al, 2014). This amalgamation was fundamental as it led to the integration of some distinct ethnic groups and cultures that hitherto operated as separate entities. In the process of the amalgamation however, the British government failed to give serious consideration to the diverse, multi-ethnic and heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state. Events that followed subsequently after the arrangement went a long way to affecting the level of integration and cohesion among the people from the various ethnic groups (Enebe, 2009).

With the introduction of the Richard's constitution of 1946, political participation in Nigeria got regionalized with the three dominant political parties: The

National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC); the Action Group (AG); and Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) dominating the politics of their regions. These political parties and other minor ones participated in the general elections of 1959 that produced leaders that formed Nigeria's first Republic (Iroanusi, 2009). Given the nature of the Nigerian state, post independence politics in Nigeria was so much characterized by inter-ethnic competition, unhealthy rivalry, mutual suspicion, ideological differences and personality clashes to the detriment of national survival and development.

At independence in October 1, 1960, the new nation continued to be heated through the actions and inactions of some overzealous politicians and their supporters to the extent that some unresolved inter and intra party differences, leadership failure and intense disharmony among others led to the first military coup on 15th January, 1966 (Ndoh, 1997). The coup took the lives of the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar T. Balewa; Sir Festus Okotie Eboh (Federal Minister of Finance) and Sir S. L. Akintola (premier of the Western region) in addition to other top-ranking military and civilian leaders, especially of the Northern and Western extractions. The ethnicization of the military coup led to a counter coup on July 29, 1966. The coup was described as a retaliatory coup as it took the life of the first military Head of state, Maj. Gen. J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi, an Ibo, among others. National unity was seriously threatened as the military leaders failed to reconcile their differences. The attempt for secession by the people of the Eastern region following the declaration of the Republic of Biafra under Col. O. Ojukwu as head of the region was hotly resisted by the Federal Military Government. What followed this was the civil war that lasted from July 1967 to January 1970.

Before the restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, the Nigerian military dominated the politics of the country since after the first military coup and even afterwards. The General Babangida's transition to civil rule programme of 1993 which would have led to a power shift to the south was annulled when late Chief M.K.O. Abiola (a southerner) was leading in the released results. National unity and integration was seriously threatened by this action. Up till the Fourth Republic, the wound generated by the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election is yet to heal in Nigeria (Asia, 2000). Majority of the Yoruba ethnic group felt seriously short changed as they refused to accept the Interim National Government headed by their brother, Chief Ernest Shonekan as a substitute. A better palliative to the south came with the adoption and emergence of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the second Executive President of Nigeria on 29 May, 1999 (Etoghagua, 2002).

Despite 17 years of unbroken democracy in Nigeria (since 1999) some ethnic groups and sections in the country have continued making serious agitations over alleged marginalization by the dominant ethnic groups in the distribution of both tangible and intangible national resources. The failure of the leadership to concretely address the complaints of these groups has led to the emergence of militant or sectarian groups across the country. Those that emerged from the Niger Delta for instance applied the instrumentality of force or violence in pressing for their

demands. Up till 2017, ethnic agitations on the restructuring of Nigeria and even the threat of secession by some ethnic groups from the federation remained unabated.

The Nigerian state has continued to be confronted with myriads of challenges in her nation building efforts up till the 21st century. Dissenting voices have continued to trail across the nation. In May 2017 for instance, the Arewa youths in Northern Nigeria purportedly issued a “Quick notice order” against the Igbo domiciled in their region to relocate by October 1, 2017. The Niger Delta youths (the Igbo inclusive) reacted by also releasing their own notice for the Northern indigenes domiciled in the Niger Delta to relocate out of the area in the same period. The intervention of the relevant stakeholders led to the relaxation of ethnic tension and anxiety that resulted from this.

Nation building efforts are usually aimed at the development of the necessary structures, institutions and infrastructures aimed at overall national development. Nation builders therefore refer to those members of a state who take the initiative to develop the national community through a number of government programmes and initiatives (James 2006; Mylonas, 2012). Often times, nation building is effected through a number of mechanisms such as: the use of propaganda and major infrastructural development in a bid to foster social harmony and economic growth.

Nation building has therefore remained a major challenge to the Nigerian state up till the 21st century. The various approaches adopted by the various administrations in Nigeria in this regard have proved inadequate. This study therefore is poised to examining the challenges of nation building in Nigeria in the 21st century and the way forward.

## **General Conceptualization**

### **Nation Building**

Nation building is described as an act of engaging the resources of the state in working tirelessly towards building a strong nation through the democratic process or military hegemony (Dare, et al 2015). In this idea, nation building denotes the process of passing through one challenge or the other in a nation’s bid to achieve stability. In a broader view offered by James (1996) nation building which is also known as national formulation is seen to represent a process of building strong nations. This implies that the aim of nation building is the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run.

For Magstadt (2009) nation building denotes the process which all the inhabitants of a given territory, regardless of individual, ethnic, tribal, religious or linguistic designs come to identify with the symbols and institutions of the state and share a common sense of destiny. Drawing from this therefore, nation building has to do with the process that involves everyone in a given society. The process here is targeted at bringing about the elements of continuity in generating the forces necessary for nation building. This phenomenon requires that the component elements of the nation must in their mutual interest come to identify with the symbols and institutions of the state (Odoemelam & Aisien, 2013).

In the process of nation building, the identification with the symbols and institutions of the state enables the component elements to share a common sense of belonging. It is this common sense that propel members of a country to act in the best interest of their political system. For Nigeria however, this view is far from what obtains in the sense that although many Nigerians identify with the national anthem, the pledge, the national flag, the coat of arms and the constitution, they hardly demonstrate the needed spirit of national unity necessary for nation building. Usually, through the process of nation building, efforts are geared towards keeping a nation as an indivisible entity whereas patriotism implore the individuals to place the interest of the nation above their personal, group, ethnic or clannish interest (Adejumo, 2014; Ogwuonuonu, 2014).

The importance nation-states attach to nation building has made it to take different dimensions. According to Gambari (2008:2):

Nation building has many important aspects. Firstly, it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles and a common citizenship. Secondly, it is about building institutions which symbolize the political entity or institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service and civil society organizations.

In his further contention, Gambari (2008:2) insisted that “nation building is about building a common sense of shared destiny and collective imagination or sense of belonging among a people”. Nation building efforts are usually centered around building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and gives it a sense of purpose and direction. In the 21st century for instance, globalization and rapid international flows of people and ideas have arisen to bring about modernity which has enhanced the viability of nation states.

According to Friendrich (1996:32) “nation building is a matter of building group cohesion and group loyalty for purposes of international representation and domestic planning irrespective of what has been the building stones of the past”. In the same vein, Almond & Powell (1966:36) submit that “nation building implies a process whereby people transfer their commitment and loyalty from smaller tribes, villages or principalities to the larger central political system”.

In the 21st century, Nigeria has acquired the ascriptive status of being addressed as the “Giant of Africa”, not necessarily because of the quality of her governance or national institutions and values but just because of her large population, natural resources and oil wealth which have not been properly harnessed. National greatness is earned and not just a matter of a nation’s size or abundance of natural or human resources. For instance, China and India for long have the largest population in the world but it was only in the 20th century that they arose as important global players. Similarly, the history of Japanese industrialization was a miracle (Ele, 2013). With her few natural resources, Japan has long managed to turn

itself into a global economic power house despite the bombing and devastation of two of her major cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States atomic bomb in the early 1940s.

The Japanese experience has been the case with some of the Asian countries such as China, India, Singapore and Malaysia. For Malaysia, it is disturbing to note that after it had diversified her economy from its over reliance on the export of rubber and tin mining in the 1960s, the country has now arisen as the world leading producer and exporter of the oil palm, a product it once collected from Nigeria and taken to Malaysia for experimentation.

In the 21st century, national greatness is measured more by the acquisition of skills, industriousness, productivity and competitiveness than the acquisition of nuclear weapons. This is in consonance with the high value the Marxists place on economic survival as the basis of every society. The 17th century renowned economist, Adam Smith had once pointed out that the wealth of a nation is not based on the wealth and opulence of its rulers but on the productivity and the industriousness of its citizenry. This view is clearly the case in modern Nigeria where nation building efforts have continued to be crippled by insatiable acquisition of wealth by a few people in power and their cronies in other sectors with little or no emphasis on developing the productive capacity of the country. Nation building therefore implies the efforts of the state towards overall national development as well as the development of national consciousness among the citizens irrespective of class, religion or party affiliation.

### **Challenges of Nation Building in Nigeria in the 21st Century**

This paper examined the following:

**i. Persistence of Sectarian Uprising and Ethnic Militia Groups:** The 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria has continued to witness rising and persistent cases of ethnic militia and sectarian groups across the geo-political zones in Nigeria. The activities of these groups have led to a high level of insecurity across the nation; inter and intra-ethnic disharmony; hatred; mutual suspicion and disaffection which have hampered nation building efforts in the country. Worse still, the continued incessant violent attacks and suicide bombings by the dreaded Muslim fundamentalist sect, the Boko Haram has remained a major threat to nation building efforts in Nigeria. Between 2009 and 2015, Boko Haram was noted to have killed over 10,000 people with countless number of people particularly in the North East, Nigeria becoming Internally Displaced (James, 2014). Up till 2018, the insurgents have continued changing tactics (use of suicide bombing) in their attacks against the state, its institutions as well as innocent individuals. The state has remained in dilemma on how best to successfully deal with the insurgents. In the light of this, national unity in Nigeria has continued to be threatened. As Amanze (2017:48) has argued:

Separatist agitations have assumed a feverish dimension. Angry young men across the country have pulled the rug off the feet of pretentious elders. They want to put an end to the reign of deceit.

They are repudiating the situation where Nigeria has been lying to itself. They are out to unearth Nigeria and present it in its stark reality, complete with all the dirty details. As they do this, those who have been telling us for some five decades that Nigeria is a potentially great country are squirming in discomfort. They are worried that the wall myth they erected around Nigeria is about to be dismantled.

Events across some of the ethnic groups in Nigeria before 1999, and even thereafter showed that discordant tones continued trailing unabated especially in the Niger Delta region. In the Niger Delta, the Federal Government and oil multinational companies operating in the area were accused of long period of neglect and undue exploitation of the natural and mineral resources in the area without significant show of government presence or compensation. The people also lamented their alleged marginalization by the subsequent Nigerian governments. The failure of the powers that be at both the state and federal levels to effectively address the myriads of complaints of people in the area resulted to a high level of youth restiveness. Consequently, militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF); Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and later, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) arose and at various times applied the instrument of force, blowing up of oil pipelines, and kidnapping of expatriate and indigenous oil company workers as well as top government officials as a way of demonstrating their anger against the state. The Movement for the Actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) emerged from the South East to demand for secession out of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Later, the Indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu arose alongside other sectarian groups in the area to press for the autonomy of Biafra. Similarly, twelve Northern states in year 2000 introduced and reinforced the Sharia legal system which went further to threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria. The Egbesu boys also arose as the militant youth wing of the South West, whereas the Arewa youths came up to champion the interest of Northern Nigeria.

ii. **Endemic Corruption:** For most parts of Nigeria's existence as a nation-state, corruption has been identified as a major cankerworm that has seriously derailed the nation building efforts of the Nigerian state. The precise meaning of corruption has attracted divergent views among scholars. Ifamose (2007) defined corruption as the manifestation of anti-social behaviour by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefit on its perpetrators. The practice is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prescribed moral ethos of the land and this subverts or diminishes the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual wellbeing of all members of the society in a just and equitable manner.

In an attempt to distinguish between the terms "corrupt act" and corruption, Amunden (1999) contended that corruption refers to the misuse of public power by

individuals who are bestowed with such power for private benefit. On the other hand, a corrupt act occurs when a responsible person accepts money or some other forms of reward, and goes further to misuse his official power by returning undue favours.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) sees corruption as an abuse of office or trust for private benefit. Corruption is a temptation indulged in by not only public officials but also by those in positions of trust and authority in private enterprise or non-profit organizations (IMF, 1998). Similarly, the Transparency International observes that corruption refers to the use of entrusted power for private gain; and is classified as grand, petty, and political depending on the amount of money lost and the sector where it occurs. Grand corruption constitute acts committed at a high level of government that distorts polity or the central functioning of the state and enabling leaders to benefit at the expense of the public good; petty corruption has to do with everyday abuse of entrusted power by low and mid-level public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens; political corruption involves manipulation of politics, institution and rules of procedures in the allocation of resources and financing by political decision makers who abuse their position to sustain their power, status and wealth (Transparency International, 2015 Report).

Lawal (2012) identifies the types of corruption to include: moral corruption, which is exhibited in sexual pervasiveness, greed, particularly in interpersonal relationship, loose tongue, indecent dressing, etcetera: Economic corruption include: manufacturing of fake drugs, adulteration of drinks, piracy, plagiarism, fraud at all levels, etcetera. Political and bureaucratic corruption includes illegal, unethical and unauthorized exploitation of ones political gain; electoral corruption refers to electoral frauds such as election rigging, manipulations, ballot box stuffing or snatching, registration of under age voters, etcetera. According to Charles, et al (2016:61) "corruption manifests in personal gratification, self-preservation, and glory at the expense of general political and economic growth of a particular state, an organization or any establishment".

In Nigeria, forms of corruption can be identified to include: bribery; smuggling; various forms of fraud; illegal payment; money laundering; drug trafficking; falsification of documents and records; window dressing; false declaration; tax evasion; under payment; examination malpractices; deceit; forgery; concealment; aiding and abetting of crimes and various forms of Sabotage (Lawal, 2012; Ukachukwu, 2015). Corruption has continued to manifest both in public and private lives of the Nigerian people. The consequence has been the inability of the country to attain or realize her economic goals or national development despite its substantial natural and human resources. Over the years, Nigeria has consistently appeared on the top most position as one of the most corrupt countries of the world on the corruption perception index released annually by Transparency International. The figures in table 1 clearly illustrate this:

**Table 1: Corruption perception index ranking of Nigeria**

Year	Ranking
1996	54 out of 54
1997	52 out of 52
1998	81 out of 85
1999	98 out of 99
2000	90 out of 90
2001	90 out of 90
2002	101 out of 102
2003	132 out of 133
2004	144 out of 146
2005	152 out of 158
2006	150 out of 163
2007	147 out of 180
2009	130 out of 180
2010	134 out of 178
2011	173 out of 183
2012	139 out of 176
2013	144 out of 177

**Source:** The Transparency International Corruption Index Report, 1996-2013.

As shown in table 1, the 1996 study of corruption by Transparency International ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt nation among 54 nations listed in the study (Moore, 1997). The 1998 report ranked Nigeria as the fourth most corrupt nation out of 85 countries studied; that of 2001 rated Nigeria as the second most corrupt nation among 91 countries listed. The 2002 report ranked Nigeria as the third most corrupt nation out of 102 countries listed. Similarly, the 2003 report rated Nigeria as the second most corrupt nation out of 133 countries listed. Even though Nigeria made improvements for the 2005 corruption perception index rating, yet, the country remains within the first ten most corrupt nations of the world (Ogbeidi, 2012).

The global rating of Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries of the world had attracted some national and international consequences against the country. Consequent upon this, the various administrations in the country at various times have come up with the anti-graft war. However, the successful fight against corruption in Nigeria has remained a major challenge of leaders of the Nigerian state. The various anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria such as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) set up during former President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration which have been retained by the later administrations have often been accused of partisanship, partiality and bias given the way they are often manipulated by the executive against the opposition.

In his open letter to the Vice and Acting president (Professor Yemi Osibanjo) in July 2017, the Ekiti State Governor, Mr. Ayo Fayose did not mince words when he expressed his reservations against the partiality of the Federal Government on its anti-graft war. Governor Fayose insisted that the Federal Government uses insecticide on the fight against corruption when members of the opposition party especially the People's Democratic Party (PDP) are involved and uses deodorant when members of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) are involved. The governor cited the case of the suspended secretary to the Federal Government, Mr. David Bashir over alleged acts of diversion of funds and contract meant for the rehabilitation of victims of insurgency in North East, Nigeria. Next, was also the case of Mr Ayo Oko, the suspended Director General of National Intelligence Agency (NIA) over alleged shuddy deals and bridge of due process. Unlike other cases, it took the vice president a longer time to conclude and submit the report of the committee which was headed by him. In addition, the duo were not arrested and detained in the usual way some members of the opposition were treated (AIT News, 15/7/2017, 8.00pm). By the end of October 2017, President Buhari bowed down to pressure, especially from the opposition by suspending both Mr. David Bashir as secretary to the Government of the Federation and Mr Ayo Oko as Director General of National Intelligence Agency.

**iii. Ethno-Religious Conflicts:** The multi-ethnic and heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state has manifested in the multiplicity of religious beliefs and practices in the country which have continued to generate some ethno-religious conflicts. According to Ibenwa (2014:12) conflict implies "a disagreement between two individuals, groups, or countries especially when they have differing views or interests". For Phil Eze (2009:10) conflict refers to "the expression of disagreement over something important to two or more individuals, groups, state or nation". Conflict usually occur when these groups have divergent or different views, goals, needs and have to fight over available limited resources.

Religious conflict therefore implies a religious disagreement which often times takes a violent dimension between people or members of different or opposing religious sects. Ethno-religious conflict is much more pronounced in multi-ethnic, multi-religious and heterogeneous societies such as Nigeria, Turkey and Pakistan. For Nigeria, religion has over the years remained a sub system given the level to which it has permeated into the socio-political and economic fabrics of the Nigerian people.

For much of her existence, the Nigerian state has continued to record incessant cases of ethno-religious conflicts across the country, with much of the conflicts occurring in the Northern part of the country. Religious conflict erupts due to overt or covert manipulations of religion for selfish, economic and political ends. Most times, intra-religious conflicts have been recorded in Nigeria in addition to the series of inter religious conflicts which have become a common experience in Nigeria. Some recorded ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria include: those that occurred in Kaduna state in 1982; 1987; 1992; year 2000 and 2002. Similar conflicts were also recorded in Kano State in 1980; 1982; 1991 and 2001. Bauchi State had its turn in 1991 and 1992. There were also colossal loss of lives and property when

similar conflicts occurred in Jos (Plateau State) in 2001 and 2010 (Krause, 2011; Owutu, 2012). Despite the efforts put in place to checkmate the reoccurrence of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, the conflicts have continued unabated up till the 21st century.

Incessant religious conflicts in Nigeria have negatively affected national development efforts of the Nigerian state in view of the huge loss of lives, property and cases of Internally Displaced persons that have been resulting from this (Nwokoye, 2006; Johannes 2008). In addition to the various ethno-religious conflicts that have continued to be recorded in various parts of the country, the persistent attacks and suicide bombings by the dreaded muslim fundamentalist, the Boko Haram has also put the nations image on an edge nationally and internationally. For instance, between 2009 and 2015, over 10,000 people lost their lives to the conflict with over 5,000 Internally Displaced (John, 2014). In 2014, what became most worrisome was the midnight abduction of about 276 school girls of Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State.

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have greatly affected the level of inter-ethnic harmony, migration as well as the deepening of the level of mutual distrust and hatred among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. In addition, much resources have continued to be spent by the state on the anti-terror war and rehabilitation of those internally displaced during religious conflicts or Boko Haram attacks. The resources should have been channeled into the provision of critical infrastructural needs.

**iv. Gender inequality and persistence of human rights abuses:** Gender is a universal concept that classifies the human nature into male or female with respect to sex characteristics (Adedoyin, 2015). Gender is also described as social construct of roles, rights and responsibilities that human communities or social members consider to be more appropriate for men and women. In this vein, gender roles, inequalities or power imbalances are not natural biological differences but are humanly or socio-culturally defined. Gender therefore represents a social construct or parallel of unequal division classifying human nature into feminist or masculinity.

Gender discrimination between the men and women to an extent is culturally bound. Hence, the notion that females are poor in initiatives or ideas vis-à-vis their male counterpart deny them of having equal opportunity with the male folk. This disparity which has a biblical origin has persisted since human history. Gender inequality therefore is used to describe the gap of discrepancies or imbalances that exist between the male and female genders which dichotomizes or perpetuates the unequal situation between the two sexes and subjugating and subordinating one gender against the other. Agitations for gender equality is the advocating for more power distributional systems where the female gender can gain and receive more opportunities (Adedoyin, 2015). Recognition of gender issues have a lot to do with the institution of human rights. According to Obaseki (1992:246):

Human rights have been variously described as the rights of man or fundamental freedoms. They are claimed and asserted as those which

should be or sometimes stated to be those which are legally recognized and protected to secure for each individual the fullest and freest development of personality and spiritual, moral and other independence. They are conceived as rights inherent in individuals as rational free willing creatures, not conferred by some positive law nor capable of being abridged or abrogated by positive law.

Human rights are the inalienable rights that accrue to man by virtue of his humanity and are therefore granted and guaranteed to every member of society. In modern times, the recognition of the basic rights of the citizenry constitutes a major hallmark of democracy. Before the 21st century, human rights issues became universalized in 1948 following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948. Just like other member nations of the United Nations, Nigeria became a signatory to the relevant provisions on human rights on admission into the world body later in 1960. The 1999 constitution has elaborate provisions on human rights with respect to Nigerian citizens. (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, section 17 (1).

Despite the constitutional provisions guarding against discriminatory practices on grounds of gender with respect to civil, economic, cultural and political rights, discriminatory practices against the women folk and children in particular have persisted in Nigeria. In addition, the 35 per cent affirmative declaration in favour of women during the Beijing conference in 1995 is yet to be fully realized in Nigeria. Instead, acts of human rights abuses have continued to be recorded especially against women, the youth and children in Nigeria. For instance, there have been reported cases of human rights abuses in the form of extra-judicial killings, rape, ritual killings, unwholesome widowhood or traditional practices and non-accountability in governance (Law, 2006).

**v. Political violence:** Political violence has constituted a bane in the Nigerian electoral process and democratic consolidation. Up till the 21st century, elections in Nigeria are still characterized by widespread violence, intimidations, killings and various forms of rigging in favour of a preferred candidate or party (Ele, 2013). Privileged or wealthy politicians have continued to use financial or other inducements to pay their way through. This scenario has led to the emergence of unpopular candidates and a high level of political alienation among the average Nigerian electorate.

Even with the restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria since 1999, the electoral process has continued to be flawed. The institutions that should ensure the conduct of free and fair elections and electoral consolidation such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Tribunals and even the judiciary have continued to demonstrate partiality in favour of the ruling party or preferred candidates. According to Oni (2014:12) "elections in Nigeria's fourth republic may be best described as precarious, a situation that has left many Nigerians shun the polling booths on many electoral occasions".

The electoral context in Nigeria has been reduced to the battle of the strongest and survival of the fittest. The state has more or less become a tool in the hands of the political elites and their cronies who use the instrumentality of power to attain sectional and particularistic interests and objectives. Elections in Nigeria have become a do or die affair as politicians adopt both covert and overt means to impose themselves on the vulnerable electorate. Ashiru (2009:101) captured this when he noted that:

Apart from the violent nature of our electoral competition, the contestants for state power also try to undo or outdo one another using all shades of electoral malpractices such as recruiting the juvenile to vote, detaching ballot booklets, duplicating ballot papers, vandalizing voting materials, stuffing of ballot boxes, and outright intimidation of opponents as well as falsification of electoral results.

Political violence has persisted and has been changing dimensions in Nigeria due to the insatiable quest by Nigerian politicians and their supporters to win elections at all cost. Several lives have been lost to political violence in Nigeria and millions of property destroyed. The fear and intimidation that even come from some state security operatives (who have been directed to protect special interests) on election days have resulted to high level of alienation and the often low turn out of voters during elections.

**v. Ethnicity:** The manner through which Nigerian territories were partitioned, balkanized and amalgamated by the colonialists without due consultation of those involved or proper study of the people's culture and ethnic affiliations have continued to affect nation building efforts of the Nigerian state. Nnoli (2008:5) defines "ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of the largest possible competing communal groups (ethnic groups) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system". In Nigeria, the issue of where somebody hails from before certain recognitions, job offers, admission into higher schools and some other considerations are made have remained the order of the day. In most cases, merit have been compromised on the alter of expediency. This has led Nwabughuogu (2016:53) to contend that:

Ethnicity promotes mediocrity which lowers the productivity of the workforce. In most cases, unqualified persons are placed over the more qualified and more efficient workers. The low productivity that is a feature of African economies is essentially a result of this state of affairs.

**vi. Regional imbalance, political and socio-economic disparities:** One major issue that has continued to affect the unity and stability of Nigeria since independence has been the uneven distribution of the size of the geo-political zones in the country. Just before and after Nigeria's political independence, the size and

population of the North was noted to be bigger than the other regions put together. Nothing has changed significantly till date and this has continued to put the North in an advantageous position in the distribution of both tangible and intangible national resources. Kano state for instance, has 44 local government areas presently, a number that is larger than what exist in three states outside the North put together. Presently, the South-East has the least number of states (5) whereas the other zones have between six and seven. This arrangement has left the South-East short changed. This development has also partly contributed to the series of agitations by the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) and other pressure groups that exist in the area.

From the history of Nigeria's political leadership, the North has always resisted the bid of any southerner to superintend the affairs of the country (Opeloye, 2011). The experience of the June 12, 1993 presidential election which Babangida's regime cancelled when late Chief M.K.O. Abiola was leading in the released preliminary results is a clear example (Asia, 2000). Out of about 57 years of Nigeria's existence as a political unit, the North has produced more leaders in both civilian and military dispensations. The opportunities the two southerners in the person of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and Dr Goodluck Jonathan had to lead the country was circumstantial.

With respect to socio-economic inequalities or disparity among the regions, there has been glaring worsening disconnect between what the citizens expect from the system and what they actually receive. Despite the fact that Nigeria is endowed in human and mineral resources, and a haven for many investors, bad governance has hindered Nigeria's economic development. Poverty for instance, has continued to ravage a greater number of the Nigerian populace. In a revelation made by Dr. Magnus Kpakol, a onetime Senior Special Assistant to former President Olusegun Obasanjo and National Coordinator of National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP):

the number of poor Nigerians could be put at an estimated figure of 70 million... In 1980, the figure was 28.1 million; in 1985, 46.3 million; in 1992, 42.7 million; in 1996, 65.6 million; in 1999, 7.0 million; and 2004, 54.4 million. Undoubtedly something must be wrong somewhere. For a critical official poverty statistics which revealed that over half of Nigerian's 150 million populations are poor is unexplainable going by the abundant human and material resources in the country (Oni, 2014:24).

Glaring socio-economic disparities also exist among the geopolitical zones in Nigeria and this has continued to marr nation building efforts in Nigeria. Nigeria's former Central Bank Governor, Charles Soludo in 2006 revealed that whereas 95% of the population of Jigawa State was classified as poor, only 20% of Bayelsa state was so classified. Similarly, while 85% of Kwara State was classified as poor, only 32% of Osun State was so classified (Soludo, 2007).

According to (Omoh, 2012:22) a former Business editor of the vanguard newspaper “regional poverty disparity in Nigeria has been endemic”. This assertion is shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Regional Incidence of Poverty by different Poverty Measures in Nigeria**

Zone/Region	Food Poor	Absolute Poor	Relative Poor	A Dollar Poor
North – Central	38.6	59.5	67.5	59.7
North – East	51.5	69.0	76.3	69.1
North – West	51.8	70.0	77.7	70.4
South – East	41.0	58.7	67.0	59.2
South – South	35.5	55.9	63.8	56.1
South – West	25.4	49.2	59.1	50.1

**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics Report (2014:19).

Table 2 clearly shows the regional incidence of poverty by different poverty measures in Nigeria. The records show that a lot of gross disparities exist among members of the various geo-political zones in the country. This development has exacerbated the level of inter-ethnic antagonism, unhealthy rivalry and disharmony which have continued to puncture nation building efforts of the Nigerian state.

**vii. Youth Unemployment:** The level of unemployment in Nigeria especially among the youth has remained alarming. This has constituted a major threat to their survival. Government efforts over the years to tackle this have remained cosmetic, half baked and unfocused. In 2015 for instance, figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that 64 million Nigerian youths were unemployed while 1.6 million were underemployed, a situation which led to dejection, frustration, desperation and dependency on family members, relations and friends. The resultant effect of this has been very worrisome as it has left the youth hopeless, frustrated and under a vicious circle of chronic poverty that daily erode their confidence of a brighter future (National Bureau of Statistics Report, 2015). This has hindered majority of the Nigerian youths from contributing their quota to national development. The persistence of Boko Haram insurgency and other sectarian tension across the country being perpetrated by the youth is not far fetched from the little engagement of the youths on productive ventures. The unemployment rates by states in the country between 2007-2011 are shown in table 3.

**Table 3: Unemployment rates by states, 2007-2011**

State	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Abia	25.1	11.9	14.5	22.8	11.2
Adamawa	21.5	13.5	29.4	24.6	33.8
Akwa-Ibom	18.0	11.1	34.1	27.7	18.4

Anambra	14.9	7.3	16.8	10.8	12.2
Bauchi	20.5	6.9	37.2	27	41.4
Bayelsa	21.9	67.4	41.5	27.4	23.9
Benue	7.9	7.8	8.5	6	14.2
Borno	12.5	11.8	27.7	26.7	29.1
Cross River	32.8	18.9	14.3	27.9	18.2
Delta	22.9	11.5	18.4	27,9	27.2
Ebonyi	7.9	5.1	12	25.1	23.1
Edo	14.8	15.6	12.2	27.9	35.2
Ekiti	11.4	11.5	20.6	28	12.1
Enugu	14.1	10.5	14.9	28	25.2
Gombe	16.9	7.6	32.1	27.2	38,7
Imo	28.3	17.4	20.8	28.1	26.1
Jigawa	27.0	5.9	26.5	14.3	35.9
Kaduna	8.7	12.7	11.6	12.4	30.3
Kano	10.1	5.8	27.6	14.7	21.3
Katsina	10.9	11.8	37.3	11	28.1
Kebbi	1.3	16.5	12	10.7	25.3
Kogi	14.6	16.4	19	9.5	14.4
Kwara	17.7	10.2	11	2.7	7.1
Lagos	13.7	7.6	19.5	27.6	8.3
Nasarawa	11.8	17	10.1	3.4	36.5
Niger	4.2	3.9	28	11.7	39.4
Ogun	3.6	5.8	8.5	27.S	22.9
Ondo	6.7	6.3	14.9	28	12.5
Osun	7.2	6.5	12.6	27.6	3
Oyo	8.1	8.7	14.9	27.7	8.9
Plateau	6.8	4.7	7.1	10.4	25.3

Rivers	4.2	3.9	28	11.7	39.4
Sokoto	12.3	5.9	22.4	15.9	17.9
Tarawa	15.2	19.9	26.8	24.7	12.7
Yobe	24.4	12.8	27.3	26.2	35.6
Zamfara	19.1	16.4	13.3	14.5	42.6
FCT	47.8	8.7	21.5	11.8	21.1
Nigeria(National)	12.7	14.9	19.7	21.4	23.9

**Source:** Nigeria; National Bureau of statistics report, 2012.

The record on table 3 clearly reveals that youth unemployment rate across the states has remained a major challenge the Nigerian state is yet to find a lasting solution to.

**viii Communal conflicts:** Generally, conflict refers to a felt struggle between two or more independent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals or differences in desires for esteem, control and connectedness (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). Conflict does not occur in isolation as it usually occur in social relationships. Conflict is described as functional or constructive when the intended outcome turns positive. On the other hand, conflict is dysfunctional when the intended outcome becomes negative. Gray & Starke (1984) describe conflict to mean the behaviour by a person or group intended to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group. Conflict erupts when the behaviour of incompatible individuals or groups are expressed in antagonistic form.

On the other hand, communal conflict is a social conflict that relates to a group or groups in a society. Azuonwu (2002) sees communal conflict as a conflict that occurs between two or more communities. Communal conflict also refers to conflict involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims for land ownership, religious and political differences leading to loss of lives and destruction of property. Communal conflict often times result from incompatible interests among individuals over some religious, ethnic, personal, class and other sentiments. Communal conflicts also result from other factors such as economic, political, social, colonial and ecological.

Communal conflicts, either at intra or inter levels have been most volatile in Nigeria. Scholars have noted some of the communal conflicts that have erupted in Nigeria. For instance, Ekeh (1999) revealed that the Aguleri-Umuleri Communities in Anambra State for decades lived and farmed side by side but with mutual distrust and enmity. However, the outbreak of conflict between the two communities in September 1995 led to destruction of schools, banks, post offices, town halls, churches, and 200 private houses with countless number of people killed. The same fate also befell the people of Ife and Modakeke. That of Ife and Modakeke was more

of election violence. Following the violence of 1981 and 1983 in the area, several houses, vehicles and persons were burnt during the conflict. Hundreds of people, were also shot, slaughtered or lynched (Albert, 2001). Northern Nigeria has the highest record of communal conflicts in the country. According to Alimba (2014:192):

In May 1992, the communal feud that occurred between the Katafs and the Hausas in Kaduna State claimed lives and caused serious damage to property. Also, in October 1991, the Tiv Jukun communal crises claimed 5,000 lives with not less than 12 villages burnt down and over 150,000 people displaced. The Fulani/Tiv communal conflict outbreak in Benue State in May 2011, claimed not less than 30 people and left over 5000 persons displaced.

Up till September 2017, Plateau State in particular has continued to record series of deadly communal conflicts (AIT News, 9/9/2017, 8.00pm).

### **Challenges of nation building in Nigeria in the 21st century; The way forward**

For over 57 years of Nigeria's political independence, the issue of nation building has remained a major challenge to the leadership. The more certain issues confronting the Nigerian state are addressed, the more some other threatening challenges emerge. As a way out, this study proposes the following as the way forward:

i. **Use of the political approach in resolving Sectarian uprising and Boko Haram insurgency**

In view of the huge losses in persons and materials the nation has continued to record on the war against youth militancy and Boko Haram insurgency without fully getting the desired results, the Nigerian state and other relevant security agencies should as a matter of urgency reconsider their approach. Even under democratic dispensation, the Obasanjo administration for instance got involved in constitutional messes and abuses reminiscent of the Abacha military regime in 2002 in the wake of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta (Oni, 2014). The Obasanjo administration had adopted more of the teeth for tat approach in addressing the age long Niger Delta crises through the formation of the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) whose operation resulted to huge economic losses and human casualties (Yagboyaju, 2010). The JTF massacred many promising youths, women and children of Odi Community in Bayelsa State in year 2001. Under a democratic regime, consultative, mediatory and conciliatory approaches usually provide more lasting solutions in conflict resolution.

Again, the pride of the Nigerian leadership made it not to listen to the option of engaging the Boko Haram insurgents in meaningful dialogue but preferred the military approach that led to the escalation of the crisis. It was after some Nigerian and foreign negotiators engaged some representatives of Boko Haram on dialogue in 2016 that certain concessions were made to swop some of the abducted Chibok girls with some detained Boko Haram members who were later released. Up till the second

quarter of 2017, Nigeria continued to record huge losses of the lives of some defenceless Nigerian youths who engaged on mere protest against some harsh policies of the government. Some mild protests organized by some of the youths led to their being shot dead by some overzealous members of Nigeria security forces, a development which has led to the blacklisting of Nigeria as a country that does not observe international practices on its anti-terror war. Worse still, after president Buhari had been briefed on the state of the nation on return from his medical trip abroad in August 2017, he summoned his security chiefs and ordered them to restore order across the country with the mandate to treat Boko Haram and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) members as terrorist groups. This led to the reinforcement of troops in South East, Nigeria “under the aegis of Operation Python Dance 2” (AIT News, 8/9/2017, 8.00pm). The soldiers were reckless in their operation as they raided the family residence of the IPOB leader, abducted his parents and killed some IPOB members. Several months after the invasion, the where about of the IPOB leader and some members of the group could not be ascertained.

**ii. Provision of enabling environment and level playing ground for all citizens**

Section 17, sub section 1(2) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria clearly states that every “citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law” (egalitarian society). Over the years, this novel constitutional provision has continued to be undermined in virtually every aspect of Nigeria’s administration. Different standards have continued to exist for the various groups of people in Nigeria in such areas as employment opportunities and admission into Federal Government institutions among others. In the 21st century Nigeria, there has been more of state sponsored policy of exclusionism against some people due to no fault of theirs (victims of circumstance). The spirit of alienation has therefore been entrenched among certain groups in Nigeria which constrains them from meaningful participation in state affairs.

**iii. Intensified national citizens’ orientation**

One of the aims of nation building is the creation of national consciousness and love for ones nation through the building of structures and sound institutions. From what obtains so far in Nigeria, many a Nigerian has continued to lose fate in the country given the tempo of sectarian uprising and security breaches across the country. Discordant voices and expressions of ethnic chauvinism have continued to trail over a galaxy of issues. In as much as political demands are inevitable in democracy, such demands however should be managed in order not to provoke unnecessary ethnic tension and agitations to the extent of constituting a threat to national unity. Therefore, the various agencies at both state and federal levels charged with the responsibility of enabling Nigerians acquire the right values of tolerance, compromise, accommodation and patriotism should be alive to their duties. Good enough, by the second quarter of 2017, there was the withdrawal of the purported “quick notice order” from the Arewa youths and other youth militant groups asking

non indigenes domiciled outside their places of origin to relocate back to their states of origin.

**iv. Responsive governance and leadership accountability**

The development of any society is undoubtedly tied to the extent to which its government or governance is responsive and accountable. Democratic good governance “provides a platform for rapid changes in the socio-economic and political status of nations and their citizenry” (Oni, 2014:5). Nation building hardly takes place where there are no nation builders (selfless, visionary and committed patriots). Responsive government takes place when those in power adhere to the principles of constitutionalism, that is, seeing leadership as a social contract between the leaders and the led whereby government actions reflect the will or wishes of the electorate.

On the other hand, accountability is a constitutional requirement whereby leaders have to render account of their stewardship to the electorate on whose consent they are in power. Up till the 21st century, the pattern of leadership recruitment and performance in Nigeria has continued leaving sad memories in the mind of majority of the people. For Nigeria to succeed in her nation building efforts, Gambari (2008:2) has contended that:

We must have a leadership that is committed to the rule of law and has a demonstrable sense of fair play and democratic tolerance, a leadership with ability and integrity; above all else, we must have a leadership that can see beyond the ostentatious pomp of office, we must have leaders who have a vision for a Nigeria better than the one they inherited. Leaders who will not lead by words: achievers, not deceivers. We need a leadership that will not only leave its footprints on the sand of time, but one, which by dint of hardwork, fair play, dedication, and commitment will live forever in the heart of Nigerians.

**v. Adjustment of existing Western ideologies and strategies of development**

The blind adoption and importation of some Western values, ideologies and strategies of national development by Nigeria without a careful study of the Nigerian environment has continued to constitute a cog on the wheel of societal progress in Nigeria. Some of the ideologies such as western capitalism, liberalism and programmes such as privatization and commercialization have been placed not within, but above the Nigerian society. The end result has been failure of implementation and inability to realize expected targets. Some western values which Nigerians have also imbibed wholeheartedly have encouraged corruption, ostentatious living, undue competition, political violence, individualism and the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor. To build a healthier nation therefore, there must be as much as possible a re-visitation and adaptation of the bourgeois and obnoxious western ideologies and development patterns in line with the Nigerian environment.

**vi. Finding Lasting Solution to environmental challenges of desertification, erosion, flooding and land slide**

Genuine nation building can hardly be effected in a country when some sections of the state are left frustrated and suffer from natural disasters. For instance, the menace of desertification threatening the lives and existence of most states in Nigeria has been alarming. Some of the states include; Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Yobe, Sokoto, and Bauchi. Erosion has also been ravaging communities in Abia, Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Ondo, Edo, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto and Gombe States. In Kebbi, gully erosion has almost displaced communities in Zuru, Jeda, Shanga, Yahuri, Argungu, Arewa, Aleiro, Bagudo, and Bernin Kebbi. In Awka (Anambra State) over 1000 persons and 4000 families lost their homelands to the gullies that ravaged Nnewi, Nanka, and Ekwulobia (Ele, 2013). Besides, cases of flooding have remained unabated in places like Lagos, Maiduguri, Aba, Sokoto, Warri, Benin, Ibadan and Enugu.

Similarly, in the second quarter of 2017, 21 Local Government Areas and 23 communities in Benue State were displaced from their ancestral homes because of flooding. (AIT News, 6/9/2017, 8.00pm).

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the paper hereby recommend as follows:

- i. Intensification of national integration efforts:** In view of the multi-ethnic and heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state and the challenges this has continued to generate, greater efforts need to be made in inculcating the right spirit of patriotism, tolerance and compromise among Nigerians.
- ii. Bridging the wide gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria:** Deriving from the negative effect this has continued to generate, no effort should be spared in giving hope to the Nigerian poor. Nation building in Nigeria will continue to be hampered when a greater number of the populace continue living under frustration, hunger/malnutrition and deprivation. The state must rise to empower especially, the people at the grassroots; introduce palliative measures to cushion the effects of the economic recession and condemn undue display of wealth and ostentatious living by the rich.
- iii. Good Governance:** Commitment to good governance is highly recommended in Nigeria's leadership. Good governance ensures that leaders uphold democratic principles of transparency, the rule of law and accountability. Every effort therefore should be made to press it on leaders to eschew corruption, economic mismanagement, class and partisan interests in governance.
- iv. De-militarized State:** The tendency for the Nigerian state to continue resorting to, and relying on military approach in handling mild civil protests or uprising in a democratic dispensation should not be allowed to continue in view of the fact that this approach has ended up escalating such crisis. The state should see the option of dialogue and possibly, the political option as a

more lasting approach in handling the myriads of complaints and ethnic agitations from the various groups across the nation.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the Nigerian state and the challenges of nation building in the 21st century as well as the way forward. A good number of efforts undertaken to bring about nation building in Nigeria have continued to be problematic. For various reasons, a lot of people have continued to express lack of faith on the Nigerian state as state policies and programmes have continued to alienate majority of Nigerians especially those at the grassroots, and thus reducing their level of patriotism to the state.

One cardinal thing that has continued to elude Nigeria has been that of competent and responsive leaders with integrity, vision, service orientation and high moral values. It has remained worrisome that after over 57 years of Nigeria's political independence, a country that is blessed with abundant natural and manpower resources still wallow in abject poverty of the majority; unemployment; institutionalized corruption; squandering and looting of public funds and economic mismanagement. These have led to undesirable consequences on the state and its people.

As corruption has been noted as a major cankerworm that has derailed societal progress in Nigeria, every effort should therefore be made to intensify the anti-graft war in an unbiased, non-partisan, class, religious and ethnic manner. The challenges of nation building in Nigeria in the 21st century can be overcome. This requires overall change in the attitudinal mindset of both the leadership and the led. For the leadership, there must be a radical change from the old path that encourages or pays lip service to corruption, illicit and provocative accumulation of wealth. As Gboyega (1996:22) has contended:

...until political and higher bureaucratic appointments ceases to be a means to easy accumulation of illicit wealth and a new political culture that abhors corruption in public life and humiliates corrupt public servants emerge in Nigeria, the country cannot escape the inevitable disastrous consequences that comes with pervasive corruption.

Although long neglected, the need for proper leadership orientation in good character and importance of diffusion of wealth, power and education in the society has become inevitable in the 21st century Nigeria. A culture of honesty and a tradition of selflessness and patriotism in public service must be built (Ogbeidi, 2012). The need to borrow a leaf from some mature democracies with a commitment to good governance has arisen. Our former colonial master, Britain, for instance has a culture on the entrenchment of responsible government. Over there, people do not join government to increase their fortunes but to contribute to their country's development, an attitude that could be likened to J.F. Kennedy's remark "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" (Kennedy,

1961). For the attainment of Nigeria's vision in the 21st century therefore, every hand must sincerely be on deck.

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