Nigeria and the Challenges of Nation Building in the 21st Century

Ele Samson

*Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Gombe State University, Gombe, Nigeria
E-mail: elesamson@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

Nation building is a complex task that requires the fixing of so many contending issues. With the attainment of political independence from the British 5 decades ago, it was expected that Nigeria would emerge as a technologically strong and industrialized nation-state that would command respect in the committee of nations. Paradoxically, the current tides of poverty, unemployment, ethno-religious crisis, poor infrastructures, corrupt and bad leadership, environmental hazards, insecurity including boundary disputes, human trafficking and brain drains, are all indications pointing to the fact that Nigeria is yet to reach the bench mark of development in the 21st century. This work is therefore designed to examine the factors militating againstNigeria's journey to sustainable national development in the 21st Century.
Keywords: *Nation building, sustainable national development, 21st Century*

INTRODUCTION

Some countries rated under the premise- Third World Nations have proved to the world that the negative effect of colonialism on the development of a nation has been exaggerated. Such is the case of most countries in Asia. Japan, China, India, Singapore, Malaysia have demonstrated that a nation could be industrialized and attain enviable development despite its colonial experiences when the determination is overwhelmingly spurring the citizens on. It has been well established in the literature that Japanese industrialization was a miracle. It is recognized for its manufacture and supply of high-tech products such as computers softwares, electronics and automobiles. Even the South-east Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Hong Kong grow economically at the annual rate of 4 to 10% (Handelman, 2006). Malaysia is acknowledged as the world leading producer and exporter of the oil palm and this was the product of an agrarian reform embarked upon by the Malaysian government in the 1960s to diversify the Malaysian economy from its over- reliance on the export of rubber and tin mining.

Today, the oil palm industry provides employment for a number of Malaysian populace. It is disturbing to note that, it was from Nigeria that some palm kernels were collected and taken to Malaysia, but today she has displaced Nigeria in the area of oil palm production and export worldwide. What are the forces responsible for Nigeria's inability to industrialise and diversify her economy from over dependence

on petroleum export? This question is relevant because technology and industrialization are synonymous with development. Most of the developed nations of the world like the U.S.A and other nations in Western Europe all had a strong industrial base. This indicates that they had been able to address their basic internal problems be it political, social or economic. It is against this backdrop that the paper examines the integration question, ethno-religious crisis, border related issues, the scourge of poverty, desertification and erosion, inadequate infrastructure, poor leadership, corruption, election violence and gender inequality as fundamental obstacles on the path to nation building in Nigeria hence the need to surmount them. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (7th Edition), to build is to create or develop something. Nation building is therefore synonymous with national development.

MAJOR CHALLENGES OF NATION BUILDING AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

The Integration Question: It is true that the forces of non-integration of the Nigerian peoples had its root in colonialism as a result of the restrictive policies of the British between the North and the South. Nigeria in the 21st Century is an ethnic mixture with over 374 ethnic groups each of which possesses its unique language, traits and identity that militates against integration and national consciousness (Ubi, 2004). Yet, it is instructive to recognize the fact that societies cannot be regarded as parochial localities autonomous unto themselves. Indeed, they may constitute their own identities, but inevitably have to interact with others and exchange ideas, goods, and services. Societies are therefore necessarily embodied in diversity (Falola, 2010), but one of the problems of the forces of disunity in Nigeria is too much emphasis on factors that readily point to our differences than the similar experiences shared by the peoples inhabiting the area.

Closely related to the issue of integration is the question of land acquisition and occupancy in the country. Under the Nigerian jurisprudence, it is stated in section 315 of the Land Use Act, the right of all Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic, regional and religious affiliations to acquire rights of occupancy in any part of the nation. But most people, even in the 21st Century, still held tenaciously to the view of ethnic ownership of land (Usman and Abba, 2005). The implication of this is that the Land Use Act only exists in theory but yet to be fully enforced in practice. According to the argument of Ubi (2004), to deny a citizen full residence rights in a nation state of his birth as it is in Nigeria at present, makes citizenship a political joke and national integration a futility. The rhetorical question to ask here is: Why are Nigerians more united abroad than within the country itself?

Ethno-Religious Conflicts: This phenomenon has plagued and threatened the very existence of the nation since independence. Multiple causes have been attributed to their eruption in Nigeria viz; the attempt to have control over land, lack of faith in

the nation's leadership, the question of legitimacy in the political structure, struggle for chieftaincy titles or kingship positions, the indigene-settlers phenomenon as witnessed in Nasarawa, Taraba and Plateau States, poverty, unguided utterances by religious leader, religious fanaticism, intolerance, fundamentalism, external influence to the rising tides of ethno-religious conflicts in the country (Sylvester, 2007). All these have serious negative effects on the country; not only do they breed mistrust amongst Nigerians, more often than not, they were accompanied by the colossal destruction of lives and properties thereby causing retrogression in our attempt at national development. This is because the intra-state conflicts have been increasingly militarized through the utilization of arms and ammunition.

Border Disputes/Porousity: The Bakassi Peninsula had hitherto constituted a challenge and threat to Nigeria's territorial sovereignty. This controversy was attributed to the presence of crude oil and gas in the region which gave it a strategic significance. The Peninsula also possessed enormous water, fish, plantain, banana, fruits, yam, cassava, coconut, palm oil and various other resources (Odeh, 2008). Nigerians inhabiting the area in question were maltreated through the forceful collection of land rents, personal income taxes and the placement of economic embargo thereby barring Nigerians from conducting business in Nigerian markets or utilizing the naira.

There were also the incessant armed invasion of villages and fishing settlements occupied by Nigerians, abduction, detention and torture of Nigerian fishermen, traders and military personnel, vandalization of Nigerian settlements and the forceful ejection of Nigerians. The lease of the Peninsula to Cameroon has its implication. These include, the loss of the off shore oil deposits and vast fishing grounds to Cameroon against the economic wellbeing of Nigerians. It also brought into question the issue of citizenship as Nigerians residing were unwilling to recant their citizenship to Cameroon (Shehu and Aliyu, 2008). The worrisome issue in contemporary times is that inspite of the transfer of the Peninsula to Cameroon on the 14th of August, 2008 following the International Court of Justice ruling in 2002; there has been growing concern over the continuous ill-treatment of Nigerians in the area representing the breech of the Green Tree Agreement. These include amongst others, the October 16,2009 attack of Nigerian fishermen in the Bakassi territorial waters claiming 6 lives and more recently, the March 7, 2013 invasion of Efut Obot Ikot, an area in Bakassi with predominant Nigerian residents killing 5 and rendering 1800 people homeless.

Yet, the Green Tree Agreement signed between both countries meant to facilitate the peaceful transfer of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroun, encouraged the evacuation of Nigeria military from the Peninsula stressing that the protection of the fundamental human rights of Bakassi Nigerians residing in the region will be granted by the Cameroonian Authorities (World Press, 2013, August 9). Related to the border issue is the proliferation of illegal immigrants into Nigeria due to the porous nature of our border which could pose a threat to the governments strive at

nation building. Research has indicated that approximately 416,082 persons penetrated into the country unofficially in 1997 (World Press, 2013). Nigeria in the 21st century is still battling with this malaise. It is relevant to note that most of the illegal immigrants are now gainfully employed to the detriment of our teeming unemployed youths.

External Domination: It is undoubtedly true that the incorporation of Nigeria into the world capitalist system during the colonial era impacted negatively on the nation. This is so because the country, according to Falola (2010), was incorporated into an exploitative global economic system as a supplier of labour and raw materials to the metropolitan nations and the importers of foreign industrial products. He further contended with dismay, that even in the 21st century, the power of the Nigerian state to manage or reduce the impact of external forces is greatly limited. Thus, advocated for a rise above the current trend through political and economic strategies and produce positive international relations to the advantage of the country.

Poverty: Nigeria is the 6th major producer and exporter of the crude oil in the world, yet poverty is ravaging its populace culminating in high crime rates, teen age marriages, child labour, human trafficking, terrorism and so on. Indeed, rural and urban poverty is a common sight in the country as it manifested itself in insufficient consumption of basic necessities of life; indebtedness, inadequate shelter, poor quality of life, over-crowded and insecure housing, lack of savings and a host of others. The near absence of industrialization and the wind up of industries like the textile industry threw many into the state of unemployment (Onikosi and Ojibo, 2008). In addition, in the banking sector, it was estimated that 15,000 employees were relief of their means of livelihood following the Consolidation Policy of the government of Central Bank of Nigeria.

Also, many Nigerians have been reduced to the level of poverty with the privatization of public enterprises causing loss of jobs (Oyeshola, 2009). Development in most parts of Africa Nigeria in particular has often been threatened by the menace of poverty. The implication of this was the rating of Nigeria as the 26th poorest nations of the world regardless of it huge human and natural resources. The consequences of poverty are the reduction of peoples' potentials and productivity since it threatens their very survival. Secondly, it increases the wave of identity conflicts along communal, ethnic, religious and regional lines in the country. The mounting strained relationship between the indigenes and non-indigenes producing the citizenship and settler questions could be linked with the issue of poverty (Adetula, 2006).

Environmental Problems of Desertification/Erosion: Another challenge is the menace of desertification threatening the very existence of most Northern States in Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Yobe, Sokoto and Bauchi. Also, erosion has been impacting negatively on the country from the Abia, Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Ondo,

Edo, Ebonyi, Jigawa, Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto and Gombe States axis. It is on record that gully erosion in Kebbi threatens communities in Zuru, Jeda, Shanga, Yahuri, Argungu, Arewa, Aleiro, Bagudo and Birnin Kebbi. In Awka, more than 1,000 persons and over 4,000 families lost their homelands to the gullies that ravaged Nnewi, Nanka, and Ekwulobia. In addition to this, Lagos, Maiduguri, Aba, Warri, Benin and Ibadan are not free from flooding. The implications of these are that houses, farmlands, economic trees like rubber, oil palm, cocoa, infrastructures such as roads, bridges and a host of others situated in such communities are destroyed. Indeed, some were even associated with loss of lives (Adetula, 2006).

Inadequate Infrastructure: The provision of basic welfare services like potable water supply, health care facilities, education, power, high quality road network, housing and a host of many others are some important aspects of national development. The Nigeria citizens are still faced with inadequate provision of these basic infrastructure. For instance, water scarcity has really constituted a major challenge to nation building. Research has indicated that, the world is running out of fresh water because humanity is polluting, diverting and depleting this resouces at a startling rate.

Consequently, the demand for fresh water surpasses its availability and a number of people are put at risk (Barlow and Clarke, 2002). It is further averred that, the legacies of factory farming, flood irrigation, the construction of massive dams, toxic dumping, wetlands and forest destruction, urban and industrial pollution have damaged the earth's surface water in such a way that there is at presently, the mining of underground water reserves so fast than it could be replenished by nature (Barlow and Clarke, 2002). Be that as it may, Nigeria's surface water is equally fast depleting as a result of the associated factors above.

Apart from the fact that it has the capacity to paralyse socio-economic functions, the impact of water scarcity is that most people suffer from water borne diseases in their bid to utilize water from sources other than treated tap water. This clearly suggests that, a lot is still needed to be done in the area of water supply across the country. A critical aspect of national development is associated with electricity supply. In fact, 5 decades after the attainment of political independence, the situation in Nigeria is that of insufficient power generation and epileptic supply. The power generating capacity of Nigeria's power station is 5400 Megawatts (MW) but merely 1,600 (29%) MW was generated. What is actually required to meet global benchmark for electricity is 37,500 MW but only less than 3000 MW was actually generated in the 4th quarter of 2007 and the 1st quarter of 2008 respectively. This indicates a per capita consumption rate of 27KW/hr per person in Nigeria which is less than the 2500KW/hr fixed as the World Per Capita Consumption rate per person. Corruption is at the heart of the constant inadequate power supply Nigerians are plagued with (Mawoli and Aminu, 2010). This has affected attempts at industrialization.

Small and medium scale industries which could have metamorphosed into big industries have been handicapped by the nature of power supply. The effect of this is the increase in the utilization of power generating sets by business owners culminating in the high cost of production which is transferred to the consumers in the form of high cost of consumer goods. A disturbing dimension of the situation is not only the noise pollution but the hazardous smoke emanating from the power generators which have negative consequences on human health in addition to its contribution to the depletion of the ozone layer threatening the existence of the earth and humanity at large.

Corruption/Poor Leadership: Corruption has been defined as the manifestation of anti-social behaviour by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefit on its perpetrators and is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prescribed moral ethos of the land and is likely to subvert or diminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual well being of all members of the society in a just and equitable manner (Ifamose, 2007). Despite government campaigns and fight through the institutionalization of anti-corruption bodies like the EFCC and ICPC, available evidence indicates the prevalence of corruption amongst top government officials involving the fraudulent looting of the treasury in addition to money laundering. Ifamose (2007) indicates that a former Senate President was alleged to have accepted the graft of 39,000 million naira as Christmas bonus in 1999.

Similarly, the Minister of Housing was sacked as a result of scandals related to the sales of government houses "as a means of implementing the new housing policy". The Minister of Education also lost his job as a result of the 55 million naira bribe he offered to the Senate members to approve his ministry's inflated budget figures. Also, 14 governors were highlighted as having possessed foreign accounts. Indeed, the governors of Bayelsa and Plateau States were shown to be at the forefront of this malaise. In addition, an ex-Inspector General of Police was alleged to have enriched himself to the tune of 17 billion naira.

Recently, is the corruption over fuel subsidy in which case, few individuals had enriched themselves immensely at the expense of the Nigerian masses. Poor leadership over the past 4 decades has impacted adversely on the Nigerian polity. It has been argued in some quarters that bad followership produces bad leadership. This is an exaggeration and an attempt to criticise the citizenry for the obvious limitations of the leaders. While it is true that leaders needed the co-operation of the populace to function effectively in the area of good governance, it is equally true that they are expected to lead by example which will produce such dialectical relationship. For, the bench mark for assessing greatness is the extent to which a leader increased the freedom of man, enhance his dignity, better the lot of man, contribute in the promotion of world peace (Odey, 1997) engenders equity in wealth distribution thus bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. Indeed, Odey's

(1997) argument is apt here, any regime either it civil or military that delights in sending those who clamour for justice and equity in the country to prison, exile or the grave while associating with a handful of political sycophants and opportunists who jointly imposed distress on the nation is a bizarre one (Odey, 1997). Nigerians are in dare need of a democracy that is anchored on the twin pillars of representation of citizens and accountability to citizens; the absence of which democracy does not exist (Usman and Abba, 2005). It is indeed, disheartening to note how contemporary politicians manipulate the ethnic identities in the country to perpetuate their economic dominance and divert attention away from their economic and political mismanagement (Falola, 2010). It is undoubtedly true that, accountability and equity in the distribution of the nation's resources are major pre-requisite for security, self worth and mutual co-existence amongst Nigerians otherwise, insecurity, mistrust, and hatred will manifest itself culminating into violence with its attendant consequences for the nation.

The Security Question: One of the challenges of nation building confronting Nigeria is the frequent incidence of kidnapping which brings into focus the question of security. Security is indicative of freedom from danger of threats, safety or the ability of the nation to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and legitimate interest and enhance the wellbeing of its people without intimidation from internal or external sources (Odofin, 2007). Undoubtedly therefore, any development contrary to the foregoing, connotes insecurity. The kidnapping phenomenon started in the form of hostage taking of Oil Companies' expatriate staff in the Niger Delta demanding huge sums of money as ransom.

It later metamorphosed into the kidnapping of prominent personalities in society especially those related to politicians. It was regarded as a business; a lucrative business indeed! The recent occurrence involved the kidnapping of 15 students in Aba on their way to school in September 2010. The kidnappers asked for $130,000 dollars equivalent for their release. They were however, eventually rescued by the security agencies, but the malaise led to the closure of schools, banks and emigration of many Aba residents (BBC, 2010). The preceding portrays the level of insecurity in Nigeria as a critical national question. Indeed, it degenerated to the point of bomb dropping at Abuja- the capital and seat of power on the day Nigeria was marking its 50th Anniversary in 2010; it claimed lives and maimed several persons. The security implication of such obnoxious activities in the country is enormous. Again, the proliferation of bombings by a militant group referred to as the Boko Haram in most parts of Northern Nigeria has posed serious security threat to the nation since 2010. Thus, the nation is still battling with the challenges of providing adequate security for its citizenry after 50 years of self rule.

Gender Inequality: Gender relations in Nigeria have gradually developed into the National Question. Although, the Nigerian constitution made provisions for fundamental human rights for all its citizens implying equal rights to both men and

women; this is only obtainable in theory while in practice women have been relegated to the background through marginalization, oppression and exploitation by the men folks who re-enforced religion and socio-cultural dictum to perpetuate their dominance. Odey (1997) argues that women still remain the most disadvantaged gender in society and this is based on the premise that they constitute a disproportionate number of poor Nigerians with low access to economic activities mostly in the reproductive areas which are either unpaid or taken for granted, and women have a lower share of the national income than men.

Within the house-hold, there are massive income/consumption disparities to their disadvantage and in credit/loan facilities they receive smaller than men. Women are therefore faced with the challenges of living in the society irrespective of how they define their roles, aspirations, identity and femininity, while negotiating gender relations with men (Falola, 2010). Undoubtedly, it was the manifestation of the impact of the injustices suffered by women in society that prompted most young girls to unknowingly become victims of exploitation by human traffickers who promised to take them to Europe for greener pastures which often turned out to be an illusion. For example, it was reported that a brothel in Mali managed by some "Madams" in a slave-like condition became the destination of a number of Nigerian girls who were supposedly on their way to Europe (BBC News, 2010).

The United Nations summit advocated for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The United Nations also made a declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (Sani, 2001). At the Beijing Conference, 30% political representation of women was endorsed. Although, women have held some key positions in the political arena in Nigeria since the inception of democratic governance, it needs to be stressed that Nigeria is yet to meet the bench mark. Men are therefore called upon to co-operate in the movement to "eradicate the oppression and exploitation of women, the personal prejudices that lead to hostility, and the institutionalization of male privileges" (Falola, 2010).

Political Violence: Political violence has constituted a bane in the electoral process in Nigeria. For a nation such as Nigeria, political violence should be minimized and if possible, eradicated from our electoral process. It is disturbing to note that right into the 21st century, elections in the country are characterized by snatching of ballot boxes from the polling units, the circulation of hidden thumb printed ballot papers and boxes prior to or on the day of election thus, rigging in favour of a particular political party leading to political violence. Indeed, how else can one explain the snatching of ballot boxes at the point of a dagger, machete, knife or a gun (Analysis Magazine, 2003) or the inflation of election result figures in favour of a given political party? Crisis over election related issues have maimed many and even claimed lives. Election in Nigeria is being viewed by some as "a do or die affair." It tended to portray the scenario that "the winners take all and losers loss all." Little wonder the inflow of election petitions filed before election tribunals by

the losing parties. Democracy anchored on such notion is not true democracy and it threatens political stability in the country.

CONCLUSION

Development denotes a process in which a system or institution is transformed into a stronger or more organized, efficient and effective form in a way that it meets human aspirations and wants. It could also be viewed as a deliberate process put in place by a given people, society and country to obtain a far-reaching transformation in their economic, social and political structures in order to achieve a specific goal (Gauba, 2003). However, a more encompassing meaning of development is connected with modernization, material advancement, industrialization, scientific and technological progress, the emergence of nuclear energy, electronic and biological revolution, new knowledge about man and the universe. It also connotes urbanization, socio-cultural transformation, mass literacy, vertical and horizontal mobility, employment opportunities, the evolution and preponderance of specialized and independent occupational roles (Aghenta, 2001). National development therefore is the manifestation of the foregoing features in a particular country. It therefore follows that a process or action in opposite direction of the above translates to under-development.

Based on the foregoing, the government should be more focussed in its policies. Realistic policies that would better the lot of Nigerians in the area of housing, water and power supply, communication and in fact, basic infrastructures should be made and implemented. Water should be viewed as a common heritage to humanity with everyone having an inalienable political and social right to it. The government should do something positive to ensure that clean and safe water gets to everyone by the reclamation of damaged water systems, the utilization of drip irrigation to supersede flood irrigation, infrastructure repairs, water conservation, radical changes in production method and watershed management. Laws should be passed banning the contamination of water in order to conserve it. The commercialization and commoditisation of water is wrong and most of the water industries involved as rightly asserted by Barlow and Clarke (2002) are merely interested in profit maximization than water conservation.

The current administration should take up the challenge of electricity power supply and ensure that there is adequate power supply to all Nigerians by the year 2020. The integration question should be taken very seriously because no country can attain sustainable development with frequent incidence of ethno-religious and inter ethnic conflicts. Though government attempt at integration at the national level through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the Federal Character Principle, the nationalisation of the army, police, customs, immigration, and others is recognised, yet a lot is still needed to be done in the area of fostering unity amongst the populace. It is also necessary to stamp out corruption and electoral misconduct from society.

There is the need to learn from the electoral process of the developed nations of the world as a bench mark for assessing and modifying what is obtained in Nigeria for sustainable development and nation building. In addition, the internal and external security of the country and its peoples, coupled with those in Diaspora should be up-held. All forms of discrimination and violence against women should be eradicated in society. And, women should be empowered to enable them function effectively, confront the challenges of globalization in the 21st century and contribute to national development.

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