

National Integration as a *Sine Qua-Non* For National Unity

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Abstract

National integration is a multi-dimensional concept, with many interlocking elements that operate independently to some degree. The paper emphasized the meaning and value of national integration. Introduction of Unity Schools, National Youth Service Corps, Quota system etc, as efforts towards promoting national integration and unity were extensively discussed. Several obstacles in the way of national integration such as extremism, regionalism, language variation, religious intolerance etc were x-rayed. Recommendations and conclusion were made.

Keywords: National Integration, Casteism, Extremism, Regionalism

Introduction

Nigeria as a nation is an aggregation of several nationalities and therefore, from the beginning, even before the advent of the colonialism, ethnic identity and ethnicity have defined the scope of political intercourse in heterogeneous and pluralistic societies of Nigeria. The integration of several nationalities into one entity, Nigeria, calls for the promulgation of rules and laws which brings different groups of people together towards achievement of common goals whether they are economic, social, political etc. The achievement of national integration can only be possible when we hold our national interest to be independent entity separated from the interest of the subordinate areas. National integration is the awareness of a common identity among the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions and regions and speak different languages we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation.

National Integration Defined

The dictionary meaning of *integrate* is to join in the life and customs of the group or society that you live in so that you are accepted by them. Then integration is the combining of two or more things so that they work together effectively. It originated from French *integrate* or Latin *integritas*, meaning integral, and integrate. Nigeria nation is composed of the different people with many religious and cultural beliefs but are unified by certain emotional forces. This is the idea of national integration.

National integration is a complex concept. It is the creation of feeling of oneness where the diversities are recognized and respected by imbibing a sense of nationhood. National integration is the awareness of a common identity among the citizens of a country. Though we belong to different castes, religions and regions and speak different languages, we recognize the fact that we are all one. According to Onwuasoanya (2014), National integration is referred to as the process of creating awareness of a single identity by which people from different socio-economic, political, religion and cultural group are being identified for the purpose of achieving a national goal. It is a progressive attempt to reduce cultural, political, tribal and religious tensions in the process of creating a homogenous political community. Etzioni (1965) believes that a community is integrated when it has:

- An effective control over the means of violence;
- A centre of decision-making that significantly affect the allocation of resources and rewards, and
- A dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of national citizens who are politically aware.

According to Kaur (2013), National integration refers to a sense of territorialnationality which overshadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. For national integration to occur in a nation, a significant number of citizens must develop identification with the nation that supersede identification with ethnic, cultural or religious groups, acquire political awareness, share common norms and values and develop attitudes favorable to the display of integrative behavior among people of different groups. Mazrui (1972) identifies five interrelated aspects of national integration:

- The fusion of norms and cultures (including the sharing of values, mode of expression, lifestyles and a common language);
- The promotion of economic interdependence,
- The narrowing of the gap between the elites and the masses, the urban and rural areas, rich and poor etc.
- The resolution of emergent conflicts; and
- The sharing of mutual experiences so that people can discover that they have undergone some important experiences together.

Efforts towards Promoting National Integration and Unity in Nigeria

There are various efforts of the government towards promoting National integration and unity

Introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was a step towards achieving national unity and integration. The essence of this scheme was to correct the biases already harbored by some ethnic groups against other ethnic groups. The recitation of the National Pledge, the singing of the National Anthem and hoisting of the National Flag by the Nigerian government are equally progressive steps towards ensuring national integration and unity.

Our National Symbols like the National Flag, the National Anthem, and the National Emblem also help to remind us that we are all identity. For this reason we stress on the importance of showing proper respect to these symbols. These act as strong unifying forces both in times of celebration and adversity.

Other forces like the communication system and the mass media help in the exposure to all the cultures of different regions of the country, thus, bringing the whole country together as one nation. The setting up of some projects such as the National Television Authority, Nigeria Airways etc. are all efforts to install national integration and unity by the Nigerian government.

Quota system or Federal character was established by the Nigerian government to facilitate appointment distribution through the commission known as the Federal Character Commission. By this, Federal appointments are to be justified in such a way that no part of the federation feels cheated. Another effort towards attaining national integration was the introduction of unitary system of government by the military.

Introduction of Unity Schools (Federal Government Colleges) in all states of the federation and ensuring that students from different ethnic groups are brought together in each school and groomed together to see common values in their love for one another, their school and their community and the nation as a whole.

National festivals also act as an important unifying force. Independence Day, Democracy Day are festivals that are celebrated by all Nigerians and in all parts of the country, regardless of language, religion or culture. They remind us of our common nationality.

Challenges in the Way of National Integration and Unity

There are several obstacles in the way of national integration of our country such as:

Language Variation: Linguistic differences also create problems. This is something important in a country such as ours. It is also essential to impart education in the mother tongue for quick and easy learning for the convenience of the people of a State it is also necessary to carry on official

work in it. This also helps a language to develop and grow. Nigeria is a multi-lingual country. We have seen that the Nigerian constitution recognizes the 3 main languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo). English language is the official language. About 521 languages are spoken by various sections of the Nigerian society. Linguistic jingoism has become an important factor that hinders national integration. However, sometimes people display hostility towards the language of other people. This again harms the cause of our national unity. As responsible citizens we must give due respect to other languages and cultures and realize that they add to the greatness of our country. To tackle the problems; the three major languages were often used to promoting national integration and exchange among states.

The Politics of Caste: Casteism also poses a great threat to our unity. People of one caste support each other and oppose the progress and development of people belonging to other castes. Appointments in jobs, admissions in educational institutions are often on the basis of caste considerations. People also avoid social interaction with other castes. Politicians often exploit such feelings at the time of elections. This leads to feelings of resentment and hostility that threaten the integrity of our country. It creates enmity among the other castes. These factor prevent national integration.

Regionalism: It is the politics of deprivation. Regionalism gives more importance to one's own region than to one's nation. Regionalism creates parochial outlook and narrow mindedness.

Extremism: It is the act of spreading fear by threatening the people through illegal means for personal aggrandizement. It ignores human values. The feeling that they do not get what they deserved, unemployment, lack of proper education and inadequate means of livelihood lead to extremism. Niger-Delta militancy, youth restiveness are good examples of extremism

Religious Intolerance: Poses a serious threat to national integration in Nigeria. The two dominant religions in Nigeria-Christianity and Islam are so much attached to geo-political zones. People have often misconstrued this religious crisis to be ethnic conflicts. If not properly checked, it will surely disintegrate the unity of the nation.

Poor Distribution of National Wealth: The distribution of the national wealth posed a serious problem to national integration because there has never been acceptable method of distribution of national wealth in Nigeria. This has resulted to further contradiction in the process of implementation as, the area that produce the resources mostly are left underdeveloped.

Communalism is one factor that poses a great danger to our unity. The formation of the State, Local and the Community boundaries had led to terrible communal riots. A very large number of people lost their lives and their homes and had to undergo a lot of suffering to resettle.

There is a perception that some Northerners see the economic power of the country as being in the hands of the Southerners. Hence, they would want to keep the political power at all cost. This is the case of the 'tyranny of population versus the tyranny of economic power. The situation is because the South embraced western education earlier than the North and therefore, was able to occupy the economic structures. In any case, western education has become the most relevant skill required in the modern state. The problematic is that the northern governments would prefer foreign worker to employees from the southern part of Nigeria in their employment. Empirical experiences exist of Southerners who were employed on renewable contract terms in the North. The current state of affairs has made it problematic for Southerners to desire to settle down in the north. This, certainly, is an anti-integration phenomenon.

Conclusion

There cannot be national integration without understanding the character of the nation and there cannot be communal unity unless we intrinsically believe in the validity of different beliefs and approaches. It is beyond doubt that the threats of disintegration are staring us in the face. If we keep on remaining disunited in the name of religion, or language, the country will be in trouble. In fact, there is urgent need to rethink about our basic political and cultural concepts, reinterpret them, and be bold to emphasize them through educational system, political behavior and social environment. We must realize that we have the strong bond of same cultural heritage and must not let ourselves fall apart and disintegrate. Tolerance, co-operation and feeling of brotherhood should guide us in maintaining the national unity of our country. Let us echo that "there is no division between North and South, East and West of Nigeria. There is only one Nigeria of which all of us are inheritors, it belongs to all of us".

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made

- i. There is need to redefine what Nigerian citizenship and statism is all about and the need for national loyalty other than ethnic loyalty.

- ii. To maintain balance using quota system, the issue of birth or place of origin should be handled carefully for the interest of national integration.
- iii. Rotation of the presidency as currently advocated for, if strictly adhered to will go a long way in strengthening national unity and integration. The establishment of a norm which would guarantee access to all the citadel of political offices in the state. For instance when there is an arrangement to ensure that each integrated group would have their turn to produce the President, Governor, Chairman of the Local Government and counselors respectively, this would certainly reinforce the interest of the integrating units towards national integration in Nigeria. This is indeed the answer to majoritarian tyranny.
- iv. A genuine commitment to anti-corruption war and the 'due process principles', would be a confidence-building measure towards integration. This would curb tax evasion which denies the government of enormous resources. This is because there are many individuals and corporate organizations which under-value and in extreme cases refuse to pay taxes. Their complaints being that the funds would never be utilized for socio democratic developments, hence, there is no reason to pay taxes.
- v. Leadership has always been a problem in Nigeria, hence Professor Chinua Achebe's epic novel, 'The trouble with Nigeria'. There is an urgent need for a leadership which understands the dynamics of integration and incorporates it into its budget and judiciously implementing same. This would go a long way to build the confidence needed among the people for integration.
- vi. The fiscal imbalance in Nigerian federalism, could be addressed using the Pigou thesis, which posited that the costs imposed on one section of the community by another should be the basis of a tax on the beneficiary, which could be re-distributed to compensate those suffering the costs. The problematic of the current situation is that those enjoying the resources do not produce enough, therefore making it difficult to impose taxation to achieve this purpose.

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