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**FEDERALISM AND THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA****(1999 – 2011)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study examines the role of federalism in the quest for national development in Nigeria with reference to the Fourth Republic (1999-2011). The study used secondary sources of data to analyse the nature of Nigeria's federal system and factors militating against the implementation of principles of federalism. The research findings indicate that federalism represents a compromise arrangement whereby power and resources were deliberately and consciously shared between the centre and the federating units for the purpose of unity and national development. Federalism in the real sense has not been practiced in Nigeria. Nigeria's federalism is bedevilled by challenges of over-concentration of governmental powers at the centre, sectional domination of powers and political leadership, inherited structural imbalance of the Nigerian state, long period of military rule, primordial politics and incessant ethno-religious antagonism, persistent antagonism over power sharing and resources control, revenue allocation formula antagonism, lack of local government autonomy and indigene/settler phenomenon. It is concluded that there would be no meaningful development without effective practice of federalism and its core principles in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends effective application of federal principles and rules, including equitable and just re-distribution of powers/resources amongst the federating units, balanced development among states and local governments, nationalist feelings and local government autonomy. These would facilitate Nigeria's quest for national development.

**Keywords:** Federalism, National Development, National Unity, Political Modernization

## INTRODUCTION

The major rationale behind Nigeria's practicing of federalism is to promote national unity that can help in achieving national development. The core objectives of federalism are unity and development. Federalism represents a compromise arrangement whereby power and resources are deliberately and consciously shared between the centre and the federating units, states or regional. The term 'federalism' is most commonly employed to denote an organizational principle of a political system, emphasizing both vertical – sharing across different levels of governance (centre-regions) and, at the same time, the integration of different territorial and socio-economic units, cultural and ethnic groups in one single polity. The factors which actually dictate the adoption of federalism are linguistic, religious, ethnic, economic, social and cultural pluralism. Hence federalism is often viewed as combining 'unity in diversity'. National unity is key to Nigeria's adoption of a federal political system. Therefore, federalism has a role to play in facilitating the nation's development. However, there would be no any meaningful development without national unity and integration in the country. Federalism or federal political system has passed many stages and phases in Nigeria right from colonial to post-colonial period. The emergence of Lyttleton's Constitution (1954) paved way for the adoption of a true federal form of government, where distinct governmental powers are shared between the central government and the regional governments (Awofeso, 2014). In line with the federal philosophy, the Nigerian State has evolved to be structured into Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja (centre), and thirty-six (36) States clustered into six geopolitical zones of the North-east, North-west, North-central, South-south, South-east and South-west, and which are in turn divided into 774 Local Government Areas

(LGAs) as entrenched in the 1999 Constitution (as amended). It is evident, however, that the practice of federalism since independence in 1960 has been conflict-prone with incessant clamour for 'true federalism'.

Furthermore, Suberu & Abaje (2003, cited in Kamilu & Alabi, 2017) argued that, in the post-colonial history of federalism in Nigeria, two distinct phase in relation to military rule are discernible. The first phase was between 1966 and 1978 and was marked by relative autonomy in the states; incorporation of notable and credible Nigerian politicians into military governance; and the implementation of a fairly successful re-democratisation process which culminated in the emergence of the second republic in 1979. The second phase coincided with military rule beginning from 1983 till 1999. In comparison with the first phase, this era was characterised by excessive concentration of state powers in military heads of state; substantial weakening of federal system through an unmitigated control of the sub-federal units of government; deliberate frustration and abortion of the country's democratic aspirations; and almost total dependence of the states and local authorities on central funding; and the proliferation of new units of centrally funded states and local governments as part of a strategy to consolidate the centre hegemony which undermined national development.

As stated by the Nigerian constitution, the indivisibility and indissolubility of the Nigerian state (Section 2 [1] of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria), as stated in the preamble of the constitution, indicates the resolution made by Nigerians to live in unity, harmony and as one indivisible and indissoluble nation. This is one of the objectives of federal constitution. Unity and harmony are essential to any meaningful and sustainable development. Unfortunately,

Nigeria has failed in the practice of federalism due to over-concentration of power at the centre, ethnocentrism and religious intolerance, and lack of local government autonomy, resource control and power sharing antagonism. These challenges continue to negatively affect the quest for national unity and development in the country. Therefore, the current study assesses the role of federalism in the quest for national development in Nigeria; examines the relationship between federalism and national development; identifies the challenges undermining the effective practice of federalism; and recommends possible measures that could improve the practice of federal principles. The study relied heavily on secondary source of data. The data were drawn from available relevant literature (like text books, journals, newspapers, magazines and publications on the internet) as related to the dimension of the study.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

### Federalism

Federations are known for compromise and accommodation. Hence, Ali Mazrui once described federalism as the “institutionalization of compromise relations” (Mazrui 1969:338). Federalism is a system of government in which government powers are divided between a central or federal government and the constituent or component government also called the federating government units. Therefore, federalism principle is all about the division of power among levels of government; written constitution showing the division of government; cardinal supremacy of the levels of government with regard of their respective functions; sharing of resources among the levels of government; and the supremacy of the constitution. Furthermore, according to Nkwede, et al (2018), federalism implies a philosophy, methodology, principle or

theory that describes how a plural state should be governed, governmental powers shared, and inter-governmental relationship among sovereign states maintained.

### National Unity

Maurice Duvenger (1976:177) sees national unity as the “process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon an order, its members is regarded as equitably harmonious”. National unity or integration “is the extent that the minimal units (individual political actors) develop in the course of political interaction a pool of commonly acceptable norms regarding political behaviour patterns legitimized by these norms (Ake, 1967:3). For Leonard Binder (1964:630), national unity involves the creation of a very high degree of comprehensiveness. James Coleman and Carl Rosbery (1964:9) refer to national unity as a progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community. On the other hand, Amitai Etzioni (1965:4) argued that a community is united when “(a) it has effective control over the use of the means of violence, (b) it is a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens” (c) it has a centre of decision making capable of effecting the allocation of resources and rewards”. For the purpose of this study, national unity is “a process leading to political cohesion and sentiments of loyalty towards a central political authority and institutions by individuals belonging to different social groups or ..... political units” (Ogunojemite, 1987:224).

### Political Modernization

Johari (2011:162) sees political modernization as a comprehensive phenomenon which brings about radical

changes in the field of economic development, mainly in the direction of industrialization and material advancement, changes in the nature and content of the political system and also changes in the social and psychological spheres of life. Welch, cited in Mahajan (2015:195) describes political modernization as process based upon the rational utilization of resources and aimed at the establishment of rational society. However, violation of established law would not allow the establishment of rational society. Mahajan further argued that political modernization is a process which means a positive change in all fields, whether social, cultural, psychological, economic or political.

### **National Development**

Development has been viewed as “multi-dimensional, referring to positive changes which affect the majority and which lie in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of societal life (Sanda, 1981, cited in Kamilu & Alabi, 2017). Todaro & Smith (2004) conceived development as the multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, unemployment and the eradication of poverty. Habu (2019, p 36) sees development as a process of change in the productive activities of a society, which could lead to qualitative and quantitative improvement in the political, economic and socio-cultural aspects of the people. In other words, development is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional concepts; it goes beyond a mere increase in macro-economic variables or indicators. It involves the re-organization and re-orientation of the economy towards improved standard of living, social justice and greater participation in activities that would transform the socio-economic well-being of the society. These definitions show that development is multi-dimensional

encompassing dynamic improvement in political, economic, social and cultural institutions. Federalism thus addresses national unity and resources utilization which would facilitate national development.

### **Federalism: Facilitating the Quest for National Development**

Federalism in real sense is not practiced in Nigeria. Ifeanyi & Innocent (2014) argue that federalism as practiced in Nigeria today is a far cry from what true federalism represents. As the nation awakens to the realities of its ethnic, religious, political diversities and corporate existence, the structure of her federalist claims has to be revisited and refocused. Federalism in the real sense of the word promotes accelerated economic development, unifies and binds people together, triggers intellectual dialogue, and provokes a healthy rivalry in revenue generation. A federal system, according to Elazara, cited in Johari (2011), provides a mechanism which unites separate polities within an over-arching political system so as to allow each to maintain its fundamental political integrity. This mechanism is constituted by the distribution of powers and resources between two governments, central and state governments, in a way designed to protect their existence. Obviously, uniting separate entities, political integrity, distribution and sharing of power and resources, protection of existence are the essential roles of federalism which promotes national integration and development. The essence of federalism is determined by the type of constitution or the nature of the constitution. This means that economic, social, political and cultural factors play important roles in the constitution of nations. This signifies that federalism is all about national unity and development.

Where observes that federalism should be seen as a group of states united by one or

more common goals or objectives, but retaining their distinctive group character or identity in other spheres. Thus, federalism incorporates unity and diversity, respect of identity or cultural tolerance, integration and development. The primary objective of federalism is unity in diversity, and unity is one of the prerequisites for national development. Nigeria as a diverse nation and the federal system is expected to help it achieve national unity, integration and development. Unfortunately, that has not been the case. Carl Fredrick further argued that federalism results from the unwillingness of groups of people to subject themselves to one government in all matters. He further stated that the mere drafting of a federal constitution does not put an end to these forces of different interest, values and beliefs. Conflicts over the distribution of power and resources persist, but the arena is changed by legislatures, the executive commands and, above all, courts of justice or constitution.

Conflict is almost inevitable in societies with intense diversity. In Nigeria, the political elite resolve their differences with primordial politics of ethnicity, regionalism, nepotism and favouritism which often result to ethno-religious conflicts, political violence, recurrent Sovereign National Conferences (SNC) and demand for self-determination. This distorts the practice of federal system and national development. Federalism is thus a process by which a number of separate organizations, be the states or any kind of associations like Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba and others enter into sustainable arrangements. As rightly observed by Johari, (2011), federalism provides a convenient and workable arrangement to unite political forces with certain unpolitical forces – ideological, sociological, psychological etc. He further asserted that the principle of federalism reveals its flexible and cooperative character in such a way that neither level

of government “is wholly dependent on the other nor wholly independent of the other”. Therefore, there is an intimacy which exists between federalism and national transformation or unity in pluralistic and heterogeneous communities like Nigeria where the urge for self-determination, group expression and autonomy is boundless and directly related to national development. In essence, “political theorists adjudge federalism as an ideal constitutional approach or practice to the problem of diversity and political integration” (Alkali, 2005, cited in Kamilu & Alabi, 2017). Alkali further argued that federalism is predicated on the assumption that it would preserve group identity, reduce inter-group conflicts and promote rapid economic development of the constituent states and people. There is no doubt that federalism has a vital role to play in facilitating the quest for national development.

According to Alabi, a true federalism is a sine-qua-non for Nigeria’s integration and development. Unfortunately, Nigeria’s federalism is faced with challenges and contradictions which undermine its true practice. Sabeu (2000, cited in Kamilu & Alabi, 2017) asserts that experience has revealed that the Nigerian federalism is a “pseudo” one characterised by the promotion of the cake-sharing syndrome; the augmentation of the centre’s political and economic hegemony via the erosion of the size and resource base of sub-national governments; the proliferation of unproductive, corrupt, wasteful and unviable political and administrative unit; the intensification of ethnic, regional and communal tension over the beneficences and modalities of territorial restructuring; the stimulation of neo-ethnicity, or new form of parochial, divisive and exclusionary identifies. Undoubtedly, these are some of the challenges that are undermining the practice of federalism and the quest for national development in Nigeria. Kamilu & Alabi, (2017) submit

that true federalism in Nigeria will foster relative political and economic autonomy, substantial cultural and ethno-religious affinities; promote a patriotic and committed ruling elite that possess the capability and drive to adequately manage the contradictions and the national question arising from the management of a diverse, complex and multi-religious society; reduce the current powers allocated to the centre which has turned it into a leviathan that rides rough-shod on the sub-national units; re-arrange the present sub-national units taking cognizance of the fact that most of the current thirty-six states are federally dependent and grossly unviable.

Federalism is an attempt to reflect the diverse political, social, cultural and economic interests within the broader framework of unity and democratic stability for a country of Nigeria's size and diversity. Federal principles and norms enhance political modernization. Johari (2011:162) states that political modernization is a comprehensive phenomenon which brings about radical changes in the field of economic development, mainly in the direction of industrialization and material advancement, changes the nature and content of the political system and also changes the social and psychological spheres of life. Welch, cited in Mahajan (2015:195) also describes political modernization as process based upon the rational utilization of resources and aimed at the establishment of rational society. However, violation of established law would not allow the establishment of rational society which is key to federalism. Mahajan further argued that political modernization is a process which means a change in all fields, whether social, cultural, psychological, economic or political. Therefore, political modernization entails positive and dynamic changes in political, economic, social and cultural institutions. Primordial

politics is one of the outcomes of pseudo-federalism and which destroyed political modernization in Nigeria. Primitive beliefs of ethnicity, nepotism, regionalism and religion have destroyed federalism and negatively affected the quest for national development in Nigeria. Federalism is seen as an effective political constitutional designed for managing complex governmental/societal problems usually associated with regional, ethnic and cultural diversity. Federalism has failed to perform the role of acting as a mechanism for national unity and development in Nigeria.

Nkwede, et al, (2018) argued that no doubt, the philosophical foundation upon which federalism is laid has the tendency to and serves as a viable option for national unity and development, as well as platform for good governance. Federalism is considered an effective way of achieving and preserving both unity and stability in deeply divided societies. Thus, federalism is believed to be capable of mediating the potential and actual conflicts arising from the heterogeneity and facilitating national unity and development in Nigeria. However, Wheare, K.C (1963) identify essential principle features of true federalism as follows: (a) there must be at least two levels of government and there must be constitutional division of powers among the levels of governments; (b) each level of government must be co-ordinate and independent; (c) each level of government must be financially independent. He argued that this will afford each level of government the opportunity of performing their functions without depending or appealing to others for financial assistance; (d) there must be Supreme Court of the independent judiciary. He argued that in terms of power sharing, there is likely to be conflict hence, there must be independent judiciary to resolve the case; and (e) in terms of the amendment of the constitution, no level of government should have undue power over

the amendment process. This would not only promote federalism, it would equally sustain peace and unity which would guarantee national development in Nigeria. Effective application of federal principles and norms would enable a heterogeneous country like Nigeria to achieve national unity and development. As rightly observed by (Aliyu & Mohammed, 2014), national development is a task involving federal, states and local governments, diverse interests, policies and processes.

### **Nigerian Pseudo Federalism: Challenges and Contradictions which Adversely Affected National Development in Nigeria (1999-2011)**

Nigeria returned to civil democratic rule on May 29, 1999, after about 13 years of military rule. When the military handed over power to the civilian in 1999, the federation was characterized by a very strong central government; popular agitation for a more decentralized structure, dissatisfaction with the distribution of powers, communal/ethnic conflicts, dissatisfaction with the revenue sharing formula, resource control, national question and local government autonomy. As rightly observed by (Kamilu & Alabi, 2017) Nigeria's federalism is a pseudo one, mediated by colonialism, prolong military rule, elite greed and lack of patriotism. Indeed, these negative forces constitute enormous problems and predicaments which are seriously antithetical to the attainment of national unity and development in the country. Onifade & Imhonopi (2013:75) disclosed that the national unity crises facing Nigeria is manifest in the minority question, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, ethnic politics, indigene-settler dialectic, resource control, youth restiveness and militancy. Thus, Nigeria's efforts at achieving national unity and development have remained largely unrealized and

mirage due to inability to practice the principles federal system.

### **Politics of Resource Control/Revenue Allocation in Nigeria**

There is no doubt that resource control and revenue allocation conflict have become one of the challenges of practicing federalism which of course undermined the national unity and development in Nigeria. As rightly argued by Nkwede, et al (2018) crisis on resource control and sharing formula are another factors affecting the effective working of federalism in Nigeria. There has always been crisis in lieu of the control and management of resources from the jurisdictions of states or local governments such resources are extracted since independence till date. No doubt resource control has remained the most contentious issue among the three tiers of government in the country. Nigeria operates a system in which the federal government harnesses the natural resources and shares revenue with the states and local governments, which is a departure from an ideal federal system, in which the regions or states as the federating units control resources located in their territories (Dickson & Asua, 2016).

Adelegan (2009), while subscribing to the problem of sharing formula in Nigeria, argues that the unrests and widespread disturbances in many parts of the federation are attributable to issues of fiscal federalism which must be thoroughly and critically examined within the context of federalism. In a similar vein, Nkwede and Orga (2013) stated that one of the greatest challenges of federalism in Nigeria is that of sharing formula as regards to the fiscal resources generated and jointly owned by the federating units (Nkwede, et al 2018). Odiya Ofeimun (2005) in his in-depth study of the derivation principle in Nigeria's revenue allocation formula disclosed that from a

historical perspective, the revenue allocation formula based on derivation which stood at 100% in 1946, reduced to 50% between 1951 and 1960. By 1970, it was reduced to 45% under the General Yakubu Gowon's administration, while under the Murtala- Obasanjo regime, it oscillated between 20% and 25%. He elucidated further that the Shehu Shagari administration reduced it to 5% and under General Muhammadu Buhari government, it was further altered to 1.5%. Babangida regime increased it to 3% and following series of agitations, it presently stood at 13%. These are some of the contradictions which degenerated to disunity and undermined the application of federalism in Nigeria.

Resource control and revenue sharing formula had led to demand for and series of political/constitutional conferences in Nigeria. Nothing come out of the conferences except a degenerating perpetual hatreds and disunity which continue to undermine federalism and national unity in Nigeria. Resource control: The controversy between the Nigeria government and nine oil producing states of Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Ondo, Abia and Imo states are agitating for resource control in Nigeria, ranks as one of the major issues (Sanyaolu & Dunmoye, 2004). The natural resources derived from both onshore-offshore are national security irrespective of their territory and thereof entitled to 13% percent derivation formula set aside for oil states as provided in section 162, 1999 Constitution (Supreme Court, 5 April 2002). The oil producing states are now collectively demanding for 100% from the national revenue. The issue of resource control has been a subject of controversy since 1999 till date, even the unanimous judgment of the Supreme Court could not put it to rest. This is one of the challenges which undermine the practice of federalism and threatening the national unity and development in Nigeria. The

lop-sidedness in revenue allocation formula which gives 50% to federal, 35% to states and 15% to local governments. This is unbalanced as 36 states share 35% while 774 local governments share only 15% where is the justice and equity. Federal system always advocate for justice and equity in resource and revenue sharing among the federating units. This would help in facilitating national unity and development in Nigeria.

### **Power Sharing Politics/Federal Character and National Development**

Another disturbing issue which affects the practice of federalism is poor implementation of federal character and principle power sharing in all ramifications. Federalism entails application of principle of power/resource sharing as provided by the provision of constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. Unfortunately, power/resource sharing had continue to be great challenge to the federalism and national development in Nigeria. This led to persistent constitutional review and sovereign constitutional conferences in Nigeria. Federal character principle as a strategy adopted to allay the fears of domination and marginalization of some ethnic groups in Nigeria, has failed to prevent tribal or regional dominance of any government, its institutions and agencies. As rightly observed by Nkwede, et al (2018) it is an unimaginable trend that out of fifty-seven (57) years of Nigeria's political independence, the North had ruled the country for over 35 years, while the South altogether had ruled only for about 22 years. Moreover, the North has 19 States, while the South possesses 17 States. In the distribution of head of ministries, security chiefs and so on, the North carry majority. The implication of this is that other ethnic groups and regions have been made subservient to the Northern region since inception till date. This is one of the motives behind Rotational Presidency Advocacy, creation of Federal Character



Commission, recurrent Sovereign/Constitutional Conferences, and creation of Ministry of Niger Delta, and Niger Delta Development Commission in Nigeria not for the sake of national development. Adherence to the principles and norms of federal system in power sharing would go a long way in facilitating national unity and development in Nigeria.

### **Primordial Politics and National Development**

Primordial politics, which entails the use and belief of ethnicity, religion and regionalism in Nigerian politics and government, has become one of the challenges which has distorted the practice of federalism in the country. Primordial politics continues to undermine the national unity and development in Nigeria. The inevitable negative outcome of primordial politics is ethno-religious conflicts which continue to destroy the peace, unity, integration and development in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a deeply divided and plural society. It is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with over 250 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states (Ojo, 2009; 384). Onwujeogwu in Ojo (2009) recalled that at the beginning of the 1960s, there were over 3,000 ethnic groups in the world, with about 1000 represented in Africa. Of these, about 445 were represented in Nigeria. This shows the plurality and diversity of ethnic groups in Nigeria. However, one of the factors responsible for the ethno-religious conflicts and regional conflicts in Nigeria is the 1951 constitutional framework which encouraged ethnicity and regionalism in Nigeria's political system as the political parties became increasingly regionally based, which further encouraged a solidification of the North-South dichotomy during the decolonization process from 1952-1960, and intensification of rivalries and mutual

distrust. This was an evidence of the structural weakness and manifest deficiencies of 1951 constitution which was unable to address the problem of national integration in an evolving nation-state like Nigeria. It was in an attempt to unite ethno-religious and linguistic entities that the political restructuring leading to the 1954 constitution established a federal framework for Nigeria national unity and integration. Friction and tension among the ethnic/regional groups are recurrent phenomenon. The country is also permanently assailed by curious and depressing distribution and sharing of power and resources crises triggered by a dubious formula for sharing of national assets. The impact of this is that from 1960 to the beginning of the civil war in July, 1967, Nigeria had a very low degree of national unity among its diverse ethnic/regional nationalities. Socio-political integration was further affected by the lack of meaningful national symbols such as common heritage, common history, common geographical area, and common black identity that could have bounded the Nigerian people together. This could have promoted national unity and integration in the country.

Nigeria however remains a fragile polity with deep-seated but latent inter-ethnics suspicions and religious conflicts which continue to undermine national development. The imbalance in Nigeria's federal structure explains the recurring fears and suspicions. As rightly argued by Kamilu & Alabi (2017), ethno-religious conflicts, especially in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, have been further aggravated by agitation for local resource allocation, the citizen/indigene syndrome, land disputes and mal-administration. The term 'ethno-religious conflict' is used to describe conflict which has both ingredients of ethnicity and religion or conflict which started in form of ethnic pressure and metamorphosed into religious conflict. Religious conflict is more sensitive,

destructive, and very dangerous. It mostly occurs in multi-religious cosmopolitan societies. Islam and Christianity are the dominant religions in Nigeria. Religious conflicts mostly have severe consequences (Al-Kasim et al, 2017). For Ibrahim (2005) cited in Al-Kasim et al (2017), ethno-religious conflict refers to disputes arising from ethnic and religious differences. Such conflicts are often associated with ethnic or religious sentiments. Thus, the usage of the concept denotes the crises that have religious and ethnic undertones.

Salawu (2010) cited in Al-Kasim et al (2017) posits that ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have historical antecedent. This is because many governmental actions during the colonial rule and after independence encouraged, to a large extent, the sowing of the seeds of ethno-religious conflicts that are rampant in the nation today. It was believed that national integration through true federalism is the solution to these conflicts in Nigeria. Nigeria has had its fair share of skirmishes of ethno-religious crises throughout its history.

In a country of over 190 million people who belong to more than 400 ethnic groups, and largely split between Muslims and Christians under the umbrella of ethnicity, ethno-religious conflicts have become order of the day and prevalent especially in Northern parts of Nigeria. In Kaduna between February and May 2000, over 1000 people were killed in riot over the introduction of Sharia laws in the state. Hundreds of ethnic Hausa were killed and properties worth of millions were destroyed in reprisal attacks in south-eastern Nigeria. Sharia riots also spilled over to Jos in September 2001 were over three thousand 3000 killed. Some more religious riots occurred in Northern Nigeria, in cities such as Katsina, Bauchi, Kano, Minna, Patoskum, etc. over the depiction of Prophet Muhammad Cartoons in Denmark. Many people were killed,

properties and farm land were destroyed. In May 16, 2011, post-election violence which turned to religious/ethnic conflict all over Northern Nigeria left several hundred dead (Maikasuwa, 2017).

From 1999 to 2011, over fifty thousand Nigerians were brutally massacred in various ethno-religious and politically motivated conflicts all over Nigeria, mostly in the Northern part of the country. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced in virtually every region of the nation due to an upsurge in ethnic strife. This compromised the needs of the present population and ability of the future generations and also undermined the process of achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. It is essential to note that most of the ethno-religious crises paved way for merciless killings and destructions of properties (Sarkin Dori, 2019). However, ethnic, religious and regional conflicts were aggravated by political elites who instigated respective youth militant groups. Ethno-religious conflict is the increasing recruitment and mobilisation of ethnic and regional militias, vigilantes and other armed groups such as the Oodua People's Congress in Yoruba land in the West, the Arewa People's Congress in the North, the Bakassi Boys in the East, the Egbesu in the south, and the emergence of supercilious army of terror merchants who represent contending interests to Nigeria's detriment (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2013). The implication of these hydra-headed conflicts is that national unity suffers; there is increasing insecurity of citizens and property in the country; foreign direct investment is deterred and national development is stymied. Ethno-religious and sectional divides also affect the operation of Nigerian federalism and militate against national development. This is worst in the north where for example over the last ten years, a total of 201 indigene/settler and or ethno-religious conflicts occurred and recurred with

Plateau State having 74 conflicts and over 3000 people lost their lives in Kaduna and Plateau states during the last three years (Daily Trust, August 23, 2013:13; Human Rights Watch, 2013) cited in (Aliyu & Mohammed, 2014).

The North-South dichotomy along geographical and religious lines has also impeded the success of federalism and development as it is myopically seen by manipulative politicians as demarcation of North to Muslims and South (especially the South-East) to Christians despite the presence and influence of both religions in every part of the country. As such, ethno-religious and identity politics among Hausa-Fulani is categorized as North and Muslim (at the expense of other northern minorities) and South, especially Igbos as Christians (also at the expense of southern minorities) while the Yorubas are placed in between.

Incidences of conflicts abound across the nation and predominantly in Borno, Plateau, Kaduna, Adamawa, Kano, Ibadan, Benue, Anambra, Zamfara States and so on, as fallouts of strong ethno-religious and political cleavages arising from decades of distrust, misunderstandings and the zeal for political power and control over the machineries of government (Umoh, & Adeyi, 2019). Consequently, a major challenge on the path of nationalist feelings, nation-building, federalism and development in Nigeria has been a regenerative breed of selfish and greedy political gladiators or elites who seize power either through the barrel of the gun or through stolen electoral mandates. As they competed for power, prestige and associated benefits, the political elite in a bid to secure the support of members of their own ethnic/religious groups accentuate ethnic differences and demonize members of other ethnic groups. Therefore, ethno-religious belief is one of the challenges to federalism and this continues to threaten the unity and

development of Nigeria. Effective practice of federal principles and norms would promote unity and facilitate the quest for national development in the country.

### **Local Government Autonomy and Grassroots National Development**

Absence of local government autonomy is another challenge that distorted the application of federalism in Nigeria. There will be no any meaningful national development from the grassroots or local level without local government autonomy. Federal principles and norms contains local government autonomy and devolution of powers from the centre to states and local levels. Okotie (2010: 15) asserts that “devolution is associated with local autonomy and with increase scope for popular participation in governmental activities. Under the devolution category, local governments are granted powers to source for their revenue control, their finances as well as recruit their own personnel. Devolution indicates status and policy making power. Devolution of power is also designed to create a political environment in which power to access political, economic and social resources is distributed between the central government and lower levels of government. State authority is divided among a wide range of actors, making politics less threatening and therefore encouraging joint problem solving. Devolution creates a fairer political ground, protects groups and individual human rights, establishes check and balances to central power and prevents political violence among rival groups” (Nkwede, et al 2018).

Local government autonomy is a key to rural and national development. Unfortunately, the states in collaboration with federal government deny local levels their political, economic, financial and administrative freedom which will enrich federalism and grassroots development. Another contradiction with regard to local

government autonomy is made by Nigerian constitution. As rightly observed by Ifeanyi & Innocent (2013), revenue allocation among various units of government in Nigeria is replete with agitations, controversies and outright rejections due to the nature of politics in vogue. Section 149 (7) of the 1979 Constitution provides for state-local government fiscal relations, while Section 162 (5) of the 1999 Constitution regards local government as an extension of the state tier. This leads to disharmonious fiscal federalism. One of the important motives behind federalism is the need to foster local autonomy and grassroots development. According to Guidelines for Local Government Reform, (1976 p.1), local government is “government at local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas and to ensure through devolution of functions/power to these council and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions.

Furthermore, United Nations Division of Public Administration cited in Remi & Francis (2008 p 317) see the local government as a political division of a nation (or in a federal system, a state) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or utilize labour for prescribed purposes. Local government autonomy (as one of the cardinals of federalism) refers to the extent to which local governments are free from the control of the state and federal government in the management of local

affairs. As rightly argued by Ozor (1987), local government as a local body where the legal personality and autonomy for government at the grass root is absent in local administration. The central/state governments directly appoints and control both the staff and finance of the local body. There was no election and devolution of powers and functions. However, the administration at local level exercises its functions at the will of the central/state governments to which it acts as an agent for translating policies and programmes. There is federal constitutional provisions guaranteeing local government autonomy, there is always a problem in safeguarding this autonomy in practice which also attributed to the character of pseudo federalism in Nigeria. The autonomy is eroded and limited by states and federal government. There is no doubt that lack of local autonomy perpetuates local agitations and undermined national and grass root development in Nigeria. The state government politicised the creation of new local governments and recruitments of staff. The local governments have no powers in change of boundaries, dissolution, recruitment and suspension of staff despite the fact that the 1989 and 1999 constitutions have reduced the power of the state to interfere with the structural autonomy of the local government.

The states of federation control election into local government council; the states violated the local governments’ allocation of functions; the states diverted local governments’ funds through State Joint Local Government Account (Joint Allocation Account System) to states accounts; the states have direct control of local government financial affairs; direct supervision of local government affairs by state governor and Ministry of Local Government affairs and spending ceiling. Diversion of local governments’ funds is the one of the major challenges of local authorities which made them financially

incapacitated to handle their activities and execute developmental projects. Very worrisome is the fact that local governments have no legislative power over any major tax revenue source although they have administrative and collective jurisdiction on two sources. These are the major challenges of local government which eroded the practice of federalism in Nigeria. Development at grass root cannot be realised without local government autonomy as one of cardinal principles of federalism.

### **Over-Concentration of Power at the Centre**

Over-concentration of powers at the centre has become one of the challenges of Nigerian federalism. As rightly observed by Nkwede, et al (2018), Nigerian federalism is characterised with over-concentration of powers at the centre as against the philosophy of a true federalism. Federalism presupposes autonomy of each tier of government, which means that both the state and local governments must be independent of the central government in terms of powers (legislative and judicial), finance, appointment, etc. This essential element of a Federal state is found wanting in Nigeria. This challenge has been programmed to remain so as reflected in the Nigeria's 1999 Constitution with exclusive, concurrent and residual powers.

This submission was supported by Nkwede (2013: 76) that the components of the federation depend almost entirely on the centre for security, finance, roads, schools, health facilities, power, employment, water, industries, etc. Incontrovertibly, smaller units of government in Nigeria lack requisite power, geographic span of control, and knowledge of resources, to cope with inescapable issues related to economic stability and development, and are unable to assume satisfaction of basic needs and broadening wants, not to be neglected in

the age of the common man. This encourages powerful centre and weak states and local governments. It is difficult in this situation to achieve federalism that can lead to national development. A federalism as observed by Opoth & Bassey (2017: 73) cited in Nkwede, et al (2018) entails "system of government whereby governmental powers and economic structures of a country are shared between central government and component federating units". Therefore, federalism in Nigeria is intended to reconcile national unity and power with the maintenance of state rights, and satisfy federal and states interests in checks and balances. The federal military government took over assets owned by states or group of states like television stations, sports stadia and newspapers, thereby strengthening the federal government at the expense of the states in terms of assets ownership. This denied the states of their means of livelihood and the opportunity to develop independently. This also made the contest for political power at the federal level a lot more intense among the different federating units and laid the foundation for crisis and instability (Policy Briefs, October, 1999) cited in Daniel, (2015).

Finally, King (1998) cited in (Aliyu & Mohammed, 2014) sees national development as a state of maturity resulting from interplay of political, social and economic forces which transform diverse people that share a common geographical area. National development is a task involving federal, states and local governments, diverse interests, policies and processes.

An integral part of this transformation is the establishment political system and acceptance/allegiance to state capable of securing legitimacy, establishing and maintaining order, fostering unity, employing and encouraging popular participation thereby meeting popular needs and expectations of the people and making the citizens productive towards

attaining development in the various spheres of life and sectors of the state in economy and politics (Aliyu & Mohammed, 2014). This shows the intimate relationship between federalism and national development.

### **Conclusion**

The study shows that there was an organic linkage between federalism and national development. Lack of proper and effective application of principles of federalism in Nigeria undermined the process of national development. There are challenges in the Nigerian federal system such as over-concentration of powers at centre, ethnic and religious belief, lack of local government autonomy, resource/power sharing politics and revenue allocation. These issues aggravated political, economic and socio-cultural crises in Nigeria. The crises include ethno-religious crisis, electoral violence, and leadership crisis, mismanagement of resources, economic predicaments and unbalanced resources utilization and development which undermined the quest for national development in the country. Therefore, federalism is a sine-qua-non for Nigeria's development because effective application and practice of principles of federalism would foster political and economic autonomy, cultural and ethno-religious affinities, patriotic feelings among citizens and ruling class, resources utilization, equity and efficient management of resources which would enormously aid national development in the country.

### **Recommendations**

A strong commitment should be made to end primordialism in Nigerian politics through building patriotic leaders with a national outlook or consciousness, establishment of a just and egalitarian social order, establishment of a free democratic society which enables active participation in the country's political processes and of course the need of greater national consciousness by leaders or

political elites and followers alike. Application of federal principles would foster relative political and economic autonomy, substantial cultural and ethno-religious affinities; promote a patriotic and committed political elites/ruling elites that possess the capability and drive to adequately manage the contradictions and national question arising from the management of a diverse and spread common unity and feelings that would facilitate nation-building and development in Nigeria. Ethnic differences and sectional interest should not be seen as something that cannot be handled rather, efforts should be made to transcend them, and to harness and incorporate their virtues in the march to stable and integrated nationhood.

Efforts should be made through appropriate legislation to remove the indigene syndrome engendered by the federal character principle; and the discriminatory policies, laws and regulations which legalize its operation. It is an aberration of nation building and national unity to see a fellow citizen, some of whom were born and may have lived in a place all their lives, being thrown out of jobs and discriminated against because they are not indigenes of the area. Local government autonomy should be granted to realize national development from the grass root; reduce tension and unbalanced development; to promote just and equitable sharing of resources through direct allocation of revenue from federal to local governments.

The lopsidedness in revenue allocation formula which gives 50% to federal, 35% to states and 15% to local governments should be restructured to 60% to states and local governments while 40% to federal, 30% to local governments to increase their capacity towards national development in their respective areas. There should be equitable and just re-distribution of power/responsibilities and resources amongst the federating three federating units. A relatively balanced development is

needed, especially among the states and local governments to reduce tension on resource control. Sustainable institutional, legal policies and instruments should be created to foster greater accommodation and tolerance among the diversity of Nigeria.

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