

ETHNICITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

OGBE, Henry Ejotubu¹

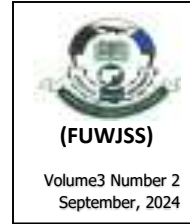
ONYEMEKIHIAN, Jude²

^{1&2}Department of Political Science and Public
Administration

University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria

Email: *ogbetubu@yahoo.com*

jude.onyemekihian@unidel.edu.ng



Abstract

The paper examined challenges of ethnicity on national integration as well as obstacle to nation-building for national development in Nigeria. The paper adopted observation and secondary methods of data gathering, and transformational leadership theory. The paper reaffirmed that British colonial government integrated over 250 Nigerian ethnic groups in the 1914 amalgamation without consultation of concerned nationalities. So, the integration which supposed to have served as pathway toward nation-building for national development suffered social structural 'set-backs'. This is because both the dominant and minority ethnic groups are unwilling to transfer their loyalties to the central government. Findings revealed that bad political culture and socialization, weak national integration and politics of bitterness as a result of ethnicity affect the quest for strong nation-building owing to the unwillingness of the leaders and the people to form a Nigerian nation. The paper concludes that challenges of ethnicity and bad political culture and socialization have given rise to a corrupt value system, election rigging and insecurity in Nigeria. The paper recommends among others strict adhere to the rule of law, non-practice of parochialism and practice of meritocratic system as a way forward for development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethnicity, national integration, nation-building, national development

Introduction

Before the British colonial activities and the 1914 amalgamation that led to the formation of Nigeria, there were ethnic groups with organised political systems in their various communities that provide for their yearnings. The amalgamation formed the union known as Nigeria. The

purpose of any union is for the benefits of its members. However, the union which brought about Nigeria through the instrumentality of British government on the basis of colonialism is in contrary because the integration of these various ethnic groups into protectorates and later as a country in 1914 by Lord Lugard as noted by Agidi and Ugbeyavwighren (2013), and Gbadeyan and Awe (2021) was designed for administrative convenience and minimised cost. Therefore, the amalgamation was done to suit the British colonial administration at the detriment of the ethnic groups formed political entity named Nigeria. Though, the 1914 event marked the sense of belonging Nigeria state by Nigerians.

In spite of the sense of belongingness brought about by the merger, the parochial attitude of Nigerians of identifying with their ethnic of origins rather than the centre authority acidic that destroy the quest for strong nation building for Nigeria development. Nation-building is being pursued by states because it promotes harmony among co-existing ethnic groups with attendant effect of good foundation for socio-economic and political development for human comfort in such society. Nation-building is efforts of people of the same origin and their leaders to promote socio-economic reforms that would bring about sustainable development and peace in a country (Ochoga and Shakira, 2021). National integration is the merger of different nations (ethnic groups) for purpose of pursuing socio-economic development and peace in such territory, which is nation-building. Consequently, national integration is a roadmap to nation-building. So, nation-building evolution in a country demands programmes/activities that are capable of bringing about peace, harmony, unity and development for the comfort and progress of the people of such country by the efforts of their leaders. A nation connotes the homogeneity of a group of people. It is the collection of people linked by the same factors, which include shared values, tradition(s), language, custom, religion, history and living in a specific territorial space with a sense of homogeneity and mutual interest. A nation exhibits a stable, historically developed community of people with territory, economic life, distinctive common culture and language (Eregha, 2008).

Scholars have asserted that the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria founded the challenge of national integration due to suspicions and conspiracies since independence. Nigeria is a country with over two 250 ethnic groups (Odhe, 1999; Etekpe, 2007), which were amalgamated. The desire for unity for national development calls for (strong) nation-building which by simple explanation, seeing oneself as national rather

than a member of an ethnic group of one's origin which begins with national integration. The ethnic diversity nature of Nigeria is pungent to strong nation building for the country's development as both dominant and minority ethnic do not believe in the union /integration brought about through the amalgamation of 1914. This is why Odoh (2021) echoed scholars' position that 1914 amalgamation done by Lord Lugard is at centre of the problem/challenge of nation-building, which damaging the corporate existence Nigeria into the present times. Therefore, the ethnic groups are unwilling to transfer their loyalties to the national government. The Nigeria leaders since independence have failed to transform the amalgamated ethnic groups into a strong nation for national development.

The unwillingness of Nigerians to see themselves as Nigerians first rather than members of their ethnic of origin was affirmed by the Nigeria prime-minister, a leader of Northern Peoples Congress, Abubaka Balewa Tafewa in Legislative Council in 1948 as documented by Coleman (1986) that: "since 1914 the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their background in their religious, beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite. . . Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country". Similarly, then Premier Obafemi Awolowo, the founder and leader of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, and the Action Group asserted that: Nigeria is not a nation. It is a more geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English", "Welsh", or "French". The word "Nigerian" is merely a distinctive application to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not (Obafemi, 1947). The primordial believe of regionalism since independence has occasioned varied as noted by Obulor and Amadi(2021) that ethnic suspicions, conspiracies and antagonism among the country's ethnic groups that threaten national integration despite several efforts(such as National Youth Corps, Federal character principle, Quota system, Unity school programme among others) to forge national integration.

Moreso, the incentives for intra-ethnic cooperation, strong inter-ethnic suspicions and ethnic based political associations counter national integration efforts by Nigerian government is foundationed by the failure of the colonial administration of British to rendered essential services , urban poverty, Nigerian regionalism by Richard constitution of 1945 and the struggle for the country's independence(Ogroh, Weldone and Abari,2021). The regionalism foundation birth the ethnic and regionally

based Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) led by Alhaji Sir Ahamadu Bello from the North, the National Convention of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe from East and Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo from the West, which reflected then the Nigerian regions (Adagbabiri, 2018).

Consequently, the desire for nation-building of Nigeria is an idea which has not yielded desirable fruit. In their consciousness, Obi and Abonyi (2004) observed that most political issues are still viewed from ethnic perspective in Nigeria; hence various ethnic groups battle over political offices and appointments in Nigeria. Ethnicity with nepotism attendant is the chief clog in the quest for strong nation building for Nigeria's development as national interests are either abandoned or being pursued with ethnic interest rather than national perspective, which affects the yearning for national development. The needed national consensus for dealing with the country's security threats have become more difficult, thus causes challenges to national integration (Ibaba and Sanubi, 2021). The paper is of the view that any country that experiences nation-building has passed the pathway of national integration. Thus, nation-building is post-event of such country's national integration. In this regard, the paper attempts to unfold the factors encourage ethnicity and the dimensional impacts on Nigerian nation-building as well as on the country's development.

Conceptualising Ethnicity

There are many definitions and explanations of ethnicity but that of Nnoli (1978) gives clearer picture of ethnicity. To Nnoli, "ethnicity exists only within a political society consisting of diverse ethnic groups, it is characterized by a common consciousness of being one in relation to the other relevant ethnic groups and to a great extent conflict is equally its important aspect". Ethnicity is capable of ignite tension and political instability in a heterogeneous state because it ensues suspicion and inter-ethnic bitterness which weaken efforts in achieving national building.

In addition, this paper sees ethnicity as a demonstration of cleavage(s) that occasioned exclusiveness of an ethnic group from the other ethnic groups in a socio-economic or political setting in order to procure satisfaction with available scarce resources.

National Integration, Nation-Building and development in Nigeria.

A country that is characterised by heterogeneous groups need to adopt integration strategy in attempt to create homogeneous

country/society for the sake of national development. Genyi (2016) noted that “national integration thesis is anchored on the foundation of nation-building as a political concept with a wide range of usage as a political phenomenon”. Hence, he said the two concepts (national integration and nation-building) can be used interchangeably to mean efforts to shape a mosaic cultures into one.

However, Eregha (2008) argued that national integration is a pathway or process to nation-building. He asserts that national integration leads to nation-building since integrated society exhibits the attributes of a nation (i.e mutual interest, oneness etc). Therefore, national integration is the creation of higher loyalties that supersede ethnic or parochial loyalties, which is nation-building. Nation-building requires creation of an integrating ideology. Adagbabiri (2018) opines that a nation is one of the pre-requisites for nation-building demands ideology that legitimised and justifies a “national” self-interpretation of respective community. He maintains among others integrating ideology does not necessarily removes past ideologies and identities, but has to exist and to be strong enough to convince the sub-groups members that they also have something meaningful and essential in common. He further emphasised that nation-building requires the different groups and sub-groups do not just only communicate among themselves but with other groups as well as sub-groups on a national level. The various communicative networks and intercourse that existing, both intellectual and material have to be integrated into a common network to overcome regional, ethnic/other forms of isolation and self-centeredness. This is why Almond and Powell (1966) see nation-building as the process whereby people of small tribes, villages or petty principalities transfer their commitment and loyalties to the larger central political system. Also, Airachuobhor in Ikani (2005) opines that nation-building is a collective sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny and a collective imagination of belonging to one nation. Therefore, this paper see nation-building as the end of national integration in which the minds of members of the various ethnic groups integrated that make up the country (nation) are constructed for acceptance and committed to the central government for national development/goals/interests with patriotic spirit.

The word development connotes different meanings to different people depending on their views and applications, particularly if adjective such as economic, political, or national is used to qualify the phenomenon (development). Generally, development is centred around improvement on existing status. Some persons like Shut (2003) sees

development as human activities with a deliberate efforts to enhance conditions of living through creative and intellectual use of resources to transform society from a condition(s) of backwardness to a better prosperous condition(s) of living.

National development can be seen from an economic perspective as it talks about capacity of a country economy for long period to generate and sustain annual increase in its Gross National Product (GNP). This view on development from economic perspective positioned countries with high GNP as those that have attained national development, which as noted by Okonkwo and Voke (2010) led to a refocus on the actual meaning of development. Therefore, the refocus/new thinking are arose strong feeling among scholars that development should be people-oriented. Hence, according to this conceptual rethinking on development, emphasises that the basic concern of development of a country should be the people's welfare, which spurred seers (1969:26) to raised three fundamental questions about nation's (national) development as; (a) what has been happening to poverty? (b) What has been happening to unemployment? (c) what has been happening to inequality? To him, if all the three elements in the questions raised have reduced from high levels beyond doubt, then this has been an era of development for such nation concerned; if one or more of the aforesaid elements/challenges have been growing worse, particularly if the all the three have, it would be strong to call the result development even if per-capita income is double. Similarly, UNO spotted the following according to Agbeyeke (2017) as key for what should constitute meaningful national development; (i) equal standards of living for all (ii) equal share of all in profit (iii) equal distribution of income and capital (iv) expansion of facilities regarding education, health, shelter and social welfare (v) preservation of environment.

Considering what should be the components of political development, Burnell (2003) asserted that the following should be the focus; development of institutions, attitudes and values that form a society's political power. Moreso, it has been noted that domestically designed constitutional order and political stability achieved via an organised framework of government, reliable procedures for leadership succession and consideration of administrative government institutions, should be collectively seen as political development (Okonkwo and Voke, 2010), Collectively, the view of Burnell (2003) and Okonkwo and Voke (2010) strengthened the assertion of Saliu (2006) that national development is a process of positive changes in the economy

infrastructural, politics and education towards the advancement of a nation.

In conclusion, this paper sees nation development as a development that does not restricted to economic sphere alone but to non-economic components of social life. It is the provisions of basic needs of man and improvements in certain social indicators such as housing provisions and other physical quality of life like life expectancy (Gubak, 2015). National development is that development meant to transform a country in desired direction using available commonwealth. Hence, national development is conglomeration of positive changes that occur through governance which affect the lives of people of a country positively as a result of the satisfaction of basic needs of man and include others such as infrastructural provisions that are capable of increasing the comfortable living of man.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational leadership theory developed by Burns is adopted in this study. This theory was developed by Burns in his book titled *Leadership* in 1978, in the course of his study on political leadership. However, the theory was later refined and enhanced by Bass in 1985 and 1998 as noted by Philip and Kussah (2017). Burns believes that transformational leadership behaviour is not arrange of behaviours but on going process in which leaders and their followers raise each another to higher level of morality and motivation (Burns, 1978). In other words, a transformational lower could raise followers from leader level of needs (disintegration) to a higher level (integration). Bass (1985) in his own contribution, went further he than we originally expected to do". He opined that leaders encourage their followers to go beyond self-interest for the good of the team/or country.

Transformational leader has four components, namely; influence, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation consideration (Bass, 1985), which such leaders use to transform and motivate followers to attain set goal(s). Transformational leaders are committed to human and economic development through transformational strategies. Therefore, transformational leadership theory is all about as noted by Warrilow (2012), "a leadership that creates positive change in followers whereby they take care of each other's interest and act in the interests of the group as a whole". Therefore, this theory is adopted in this study because despite the unity and belongingness brought about by the 1914 amalgamation, the parochial attitude of some Nigerians who choose to

identify with their ethnic of origin rather than the central authority/government is disintegrating the nation and it potent threats to the quest for strong nation for national development.

Consequently, Nigeria lacks transformational leaders since her independence in 1960 because the leaders then and now do not believe in national integration process for strong nation that will bring about national development. For example, Tafewa Belewa, the leader of Northern peoples congress (NPC) and the first Nigeria prime-minister, expressed no confidence in the quest for Nigeria unity in legislative council in 1948, that Nigerians are different in their background and that Nigeria's unity is only a British intention for the country (Coleman, 1984). This assertion implies that the foremost Nigerian leaders could not embark on a transformational leadership style to integrate the various ethnic groups into a strong nation through the process of nation-building for Nigeria national development. The ethnic emphasis by Nigeria leaders/elites weaken the nation-building process (national integration), which bring about tribalism, nepotism and developmental dilatory in Nigeria.

From the above explanation, the missing link between Nigerian leaders and national development is their failure to firmly integrate the amalgamated ethnic groups by the British colonial government into strong nation through the process of nation-building. Therefore, political leaders are being elected based on ethnic consideration just as the appointments are made on the basis of nepotism and tribalism against national interest/development. These are the challenges of ethnicity to national development in Nigeria today, it is unpalatable and acidic to the nation's development.

Research Methodology

The study used primary and secondary sources of data collection for this study; the primary source relied on observational method while the secondary method relied on historical method for secondary data generation respectively.

The heterogeneous Nature of Nigeria State

Nigeria is made up of three major ethnic groups; the Hausa in the North, the Yoruba in the West and the Ibo, that is Igbo speaking ethnic group in the East. Apart from the major ethnic groups mentioned, there are other minority ethnic groups as noted by Eregba (2006), which the paper concisely discussed below.

The Hausa is a dominant ethnic group that absorbed other ethnic groups in the North by its language and the Islamic faith. Therefore, the Northern Nigeria is made up of the people of the far North and Middle-belt, they are; the Hausa, the Fulani, the Tiv, the Nupe, the Junku and the Gwari people, which includes the Kanuri.

The Yoruba except the Ijebu, the sub-tribes were united into a kingdom ruled from old Oyo. By 1780, they split into four states, that is Oyo, Egba, Ketu and Ijebu, and by 1850 as a result of the Fulani conquest of Ilorin four new states emerged; Ibadan, Ilesha, Ife and the Ekiti parapo. Despite the Yorubas difference and variations in religious, dialect and ceremonial forms of slave raids and wars, and political fragmentation, the Yoruba consciousness persisted due to common origin – Omo Oduduwa. The minor ethnic groups in the Western region are the Midwest people, presently the Edos and Deltans. They are mainly of Yoruba descendant but exhibit different culture. In Edo State, there are; Esan, Owanin, Akoko, Etsako (ethnic groups). In Delta State, there are; the Ika (Delta Igbo speaking), Ukwani, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw and Isoko (ethnic groups).

In the Southern and Eastern part of Nigeria, there are; the Ogoja people of Cross River, Efik and Ibibio people of Akwa-Ibom and the Ijaws of Rivers. Apart from the Igbos, the Ibibios, Efiks and Ijaws, other people of Eastern area are divided among nine small groups speaking different languages. However, currently, the Eastern people are mainly found in the South-east zone comprising Anambra, Abia, Imo, Enugu and Ebonyi States. The Ijaws are more in Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo and Ondo State respectively.

Factors that Encourage Ethnicity in Nigeria

The following were observed as the factors that spur ethnicity in Nigeria;

Greed: Selfish desire for more public/political positions by ethnic groups makes some ethnic groups to strongly attached to a bigger and popular political party as an avenue to secure firmly political powers and influence over other ethnic groups in Nigeria in order to dominate the federal bureaucracy while at the state level, the same but with the aim of one ethnic group suppressing and dominating other ethnic groups in a state, which often occasioned election rigging and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria.

Unfair Treatments: Sometimes, a member of an ethnic group may be unfairly treated by member of another ethnic group and if such unfair

treatment is narrated with the intention of revenge, it fuels ethnicity, a situation that breeds discrimination and nepotism in Nigeria.

Lack of Merit System Operation: Meritocracy has been swept under the carpet in Nigeria. A situation where national wealth and social status are assigned not on the basis of competition or laid down rule but on the ethnic favourism. This leads to having square pegs in round holes.

Ethnic Politics: Nigeria politics is being played along ethnicism, and most political parties are equally formed in this direction. For example, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in 1949, the Action Group in 1951, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) in 1998 among others. According to Mordi (2005) political parties use structure of ethnic unions as obvious channels of communication to urban voters as well as recruitment of membership for political parties. Most times manifestoes of the political parties are regionally designed on the altar of ethnicism. Therefore, ethnic problem pose threat to the legality of the national government and its capability to offers leadership appropriately to the request of nation-building (Adagbabiri, 2018). Erunke (2012) noted that ethnic factors (ethnicity) are largely parameters to assess group representation in government as well as to allocate sumptuous political offices among others

Desperate Desire to rule by politicians: Strong desire to rule the country and state(s) as the case may be, at all cost by desperate politicians incite their ethnic group(s) on parochialism thereby crying of what Okereka and Ogbe (2016) called “our turn”.

The above factors fuel ethnicity which equally occasion tribalism and nepotism in Nigeria.

Impacts of Ethnicity on Nation Building in Nigeria

The following have been observed as impacts of ethnicity on Nigerian nation building;

- *Weak National Integration:* National Integration brings about nation building due to the newly acquired status of newly integrated society that is capable of demonstrating oneness (Nationhood) but in Nigeria, ethnicity weakens the process of national integration, therefore in Nigeria, nation building is experiencing weakness.
- *Bad Political Culture and Socialisation:* Ethnic emphases unfold political distrust, discrimination and disunity between and among

ethnic groups in a country, and when it continues, becomes culture which must be transferred from one generation to another, a situation Nigeria has found herself.

- *Disloyalty to the centre*: Nation building lay emphases both in character and practice of citizens paying regards, respect, full supports and participation to central/national government and its activities rather than the regional/state government of their origin. But the reverse is the case in Nigeria, as ethnicism is being displayed by Nigerians when it comes to socio-economic and political issues.
- *Politics of Bitterness*: Strong nation building promotes nationhood which is capable of breeding peaceful atmosphere for politics. In Nigeria, as observed, politics of enmity is being played between and among ethnic groups because of weak nation building.

Effects of Ethnicity on National Development in Nigeria

The identified factors that encourage ethnicity have caused weak nation building of Nigeria and the resultant effect is poor development of the country.

Ethnicity is now the instrumentality of the Nigerian politicians to get into political positions, which has made some ethnic groups more powerful than the others. Consequently, the weaker ethnic groups are equally struggling with the same phenomenon to get their share. In effect, issue of national consciousness by Nigerians for national advancement is being relegated. Eyo Ita in 1945 earlier sensed the repercussions of the emerging and growing power of ethnic groups (parochialism) in Nigeria and warned, as reported by Nnoli (1978) that “the greatest need of Nigerians today is to become a community... to evolve a national self-hood”, he urged Nigerians to “seek coordination among themselves in a way that will help to build a strong national consciousness.”

Today, Eyo Ita’s foretold dangers exist in Nigeria. The spirit of national consciousness for national transformation that can bring national development is still in the idealistic stage in Nigeria. Politicians of the various ethnic groups cause political disunity and violence through their selfish ambitions to seek political seats encourage ethnicism, which weaken the co-existence between and among ethnic groups in period of electoral campaigns and elections with negative carry-over effects on the country advancement, hence, the whole political system is experiencing dysfunction. Ethnicity as observed by Soludo (2005) is organised as a

useful framework in struggle for state's power, in turn, the 'Big Men' dispensed patronage by publicly displaying that they had cornered their part of national cake for their people, which the people condoned and publicly celebrate corruption in so far as their son brought home and shared the loots from the government treasury. From Soludo is emphasis, public treasury that is supposed to have been used for national development is looted for the sake of ethnic sentiments.

Below are some other observed effects of ethnicity on Nigeria's development;

De-emphasis of meritocratic system: Ethnicity promotes nepotism which encourages operation of un-meritocracy. The consequences of the said system is that incompetent hands and people of no integrity who are incapable of making developmental policies and decisions to bring about national development, are appointed to be in-charge of public affairs, which is the current situation in Nigeria.

Weak Rule of law: Nigeria rule of law which by nature tall above everybody is now either bent to suit ethnic patrons because they are at the helm of affairs. Hence, not complying with the rule of law by the government and the governed in Nigeria has resulted in poor governance and in turn insignificance development of Nigerian state.

Corrupt value system: When the rule of law is not being observed by politicians and public office holders in order to favour their ethnic groups members, it creates avenue for the practice of corrupt value system, which is affecting Nigeria development as the issues of competency, effective and efficient use of available commonwealth have been thrown to the wind, and other related issues have been ethnically discussed at the altar of ethnicism for implementation.

Promotes election rigging and insecurity: Ethnicity promotes election rigging as various ethnic groups are in rivalry to secure political offices for their sons and daughters and this has caused political violence, killings, kidnappings and above all national insecurity. Consequently, national wealth/resources which are capable of turning Nigeria into advanced nation are channeled to internal peace keeping and building camps for internally displaced persons to secure lives. The able Nigerians that could have contributed to the transformation of Nigeria for development are being killed in crises, e.g Boko Haram in the North East.

Promotes uneven infrastructural development: Ethnicity is a key factor to the problem of even spread of infrastructural development such as provision of quality roads, hospitals and health-centres, sitting of higher institutions among others in Nigeria. This is because the man that is at the helm of affairs with his ethnic 'syndrome' would adopted nepotism approach in governmental allocation or sitting of infrastructural facilities or social amenities to his ethnic zone/area to the detriment to other areas that needed such facilities most. Hence, there exists abundance of infrastructural development in one region/area than the others.

Parochialism in Nigerian Government and Politics to a large extent has brought about incompetency, inefficiency and unprofessionalism in the public service which have made Nigeria development slow if not impossible. Ethnicity in Nigeria has devastates the socio-economic growth, scientific and technological developments as issues of expertise are being take over by nepotism and favourism, as the products of ethnicity. Nigeria resources are wastefully spent because as observed by Eregha (2008) ethnicity is a basis for voting for candidate in an election, which (the writers' emphasis) is capable of enthroning incompetent leaders into public offices in Nigeria

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper reaffirmed that British colonial administration in 1914 amalgamated over 250 Nigerian ethnic groups un-consulted. The members of the ethnic groups found themselves integrated which occasioned unwillingness to total commitment and national consciousness as parochialism weaken the quest for strong nation building for Nigeria development. Nigerian state experiences lack of nation-building because the 1914 amalgamation of Nigerian ethnic groups has failed national integration, which supposed to have transited into nation-building. Hence, ethnic emphases on socio-economic and political issues in Nigeria have caused developmental distractions, nepotism and national development dilatory. Nigeria can only be genuinely built to advanced nation by Nigerians through the demonstration of national consciousness and nationalistic spirit that would bring about strong nationhood. Therefore, the following are recommended to encounter the factors that encourage ethnicity against national integration as a process for nation-building in Nigeria. There is need for the spirit of national consciousness should promoted by government through organized continuous political education to serves

as an antidote to ethnic politics in Nigeria. The rule of law should be strictly obeyed by every Nigerian. Nepotism, tribalism and favoritism should be practically stopped in bureaucratic institutions in Nigeria. National consciousness should prevail in the execution of developmental policies and programmes. Government should design good value system and re-orientate Nigerians in that direction and should be rigorously and vigorously implemented with guiding rules-laws. There should be strong emphasis on meritocratic practice in Nigeria to promote professionalism and competency which will bring about development of the nation.

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