

## **Nation Building in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Challenges And Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

This paper critically examined the challenges of nation-building in Nigeria's Fourth Republic to find viable solutions. The paper highlighted the challenges of leadership, socio-economic inequalities, and institutional fragility as the major impediments which have stifled nation-building efforts in Nigeria. The paper employed national integration theory as the theoretical framework for critical study and insightful analysis of the challenges of nation-building in Nigeria. The study also utilized secondary data for critical assessment and content analysis of the challenges of nation-building in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study found that the management of the challenges of Nation-building in Nigeria has degenerated due to the inability of its leadership to ensure proper management of diversity, socio-economic injustice and lack of good governance are responsible for the escalation of the problems which snowballed and translated to the current security challenges of Boko Haram Insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle

rustling and rapid increase in other crimes and criminality deeply rooted in youth unemployment, illiteracy, abject absolute poverty, socio-economic injustice, corruption and poor leadership. The paper therefore, recommended among other things, that political leaders should exhibit and provide responsive and responsible leadership to guarantee good governance to all Nigerians and also ensure social justice, sound economic management, transparency, and public accountability in governance to achieve peace and unity, national integration and stability.

**Key words:** Nation, Nation-Building, National Integration Theory

## Introduction

The restoration of democracy in Nigeria on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1999, marked the inception of the Fourth Republic after a prolonged period of Military rule, most Nigerians were full of hope and expectations that under democratic rule their lives would be significantly bettered. Unfortunately, after twenty-five years of democratic rule in the country, Nigeria has experienced several conflicts such as identity-based conflict, resource-based conflict, and political power-based conflict and all these posed existential threats and challenges of nation building in Nigeria. Elaigwu in Abubakar (2018) observes that, ‘... in the first eight years of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, Nigeria is said to have witnessed over 140 cases of violent ethno-religious, communal, political and other conflicts of varying intensities and magnitude’.

Consequently, the unity, integration, understanding, and peaceful co-existence among the diverse ethnic groups in recent times is increasingly and progressively deteriorating. In other words, the nature of social relations between the various ethnic groups in the country in recent times, has displayed a kind of politics of mistrust and intolerance. The situation is well understood when observing the serious mutual suspicion and divisions between the North and South, between the

Christians and the Muslims, the Urban and the Rural, and the rich and the poor in recent times is a cause for serious concern.

In addition, all seemed to agree that the same challenges still abound even though Nigerians disagreed on how to tackle them. One such challenge is the reality that at 64, the Nigerian people are still debating whether to continue as a country or that the country should break into different nations. This much was recently admitted by the Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, (SAN), while speaking at a church service to commemorate the nation's independence anniversary. He said: "Fortunately, for us, our walls are not yet broken. But there are obvious cracks that could lead to a break if not properly addressed. Before the vice president spoke, former president Olusegun Obasanjo had declared that "Nigeria is fast drifting to a failed and badly divided state. Economically, our country is becoming a basket case and poverty capital of the world, and socially, we are firming up as an unwholesome and insecure country" (Soniya, 2020).

However, Gambari (2008) in Osioma (2019), asserted that in Nigeria, some people represent our national importance by calling us the 'Giant of Africa'. This is an ascriptive perspective. We are seen as giants not necessarily because of the quality of our national institutions and values, but simply by our large population and oil wealth. But in reality, the greatness of a nation has to be earned and is not determined just by the size of its population or the abundance of its natural resources. China and India have the largest population in the world, but they are only now rising as important global players. On the other hand, Japan has few natural resources but has long managed to turn itself into a global economic powerhouse.

Now, the real question is why has the task of nation-building been so difficult in Nigeria, and the fruits so patchy, despite our enormous human and natural resources? Bad governance, lack of responsive and responsible leadership with the absence of transparency and accountability, miscarriage of justice, nepotism, tribalism, ethnicity and systemic endemic scourge of corruption etc., have all constituted existential threats to national unity and stability which manifested themselves and snowballed into the current security challenges of Boko Haram insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, cattle rustling, farmers-herders crises, and threats of secession orchestrated by secessionists agitations that the country is now facing. In addition, there is also the existence of widespread injustice and poor governance which lead to poverty, youth unemployment, illiteracy as well as political and economic isolation of the youth in Nigeria's development enterprise. This constitute some of the underlying factors responsible for the contemporary challenges of nation-building in Nigeria, and these have threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria as a political entity.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine the challenges of nation-building in Nigeria's Fourth Republic to provide an enduring lasting panacea.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Nation**

Harrison and Boyd (2018), believes that the concept of nation he as it's origin in Western Europe during the post-Reformation struggles of the sixteen and seventeenth centuries, which was shaped by the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, they defined a nation as "composed of a people that share certain characteristics and have a sense of belonging to that

nation". Meanwhile, Osisioma (2019), conceived it as a group or race of people with shared history, tradition, culture, religion, and language. Basically, the central theme of the concept, has to do with the issue of common identity that a group of people shares.

However, the contemporary understanding and usage of the term is fast corroding the older order and is now synonymous with the state, only that a state is more properly the governmental apparatus by which a nation governs itself. In this sense, nationhood would give the state the legitimacy to operate, once a nation is built to an enviable standard, state failure becomes difficult and security guaranteed. With this in mind, a nation is here seen strictly in the civic sense which de-emphasizes ethnic monolithic in a place of political commonality irrespective of the number of ethnic groups that make up the nation–states. Therefore, nations are built by exemplary men and women and sustained by institutions that promote good governance and thus socio-economic development. Thus, it is imperative at this juncture to emphasize that, nations do not just happen by historical accident; rather they are built by men and women with vision and resolve.

### **Nation-Building**

Alesina and Reich in Umar and Baba (2019) conceived nation-building as a process that leads to the formation of countries in which citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interest, goals, and preferences so that they do not wish to separate from each other. According to Gambari (2008) in Osisioma (2019), nation-building is the product of conscious statecraft, not happenstance. Nation-building is always a work-in-progress; a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and re-invention. Nation-building never stops and true nation-builders never rest because all nations are constantly facing new challenges that demands new ways of solving them.

Gambari noted that, nation-building has many important aspects. First, it is about building a political entity that corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles, and a common citizenship. Secondly, it is also about building institutions that symbolize the political entity – institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service, and civil society organizations. Above all else, however, nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, and a collective imagination of belonging (Gambari, 2008 in Osisoma, 2019). Nation-building is therefore a conscious and a deliberate attempt by political leaders to unite and socially integrate the citizens through good governance, and social justice to instill a sense of national identity and shared destiny and prosperity to foster national unity, national integration, and stability. It is about building the institutions and values which sustain the collective community in this modern times. Even in these days of globalization and rapid international flows of people and ideas, having a viable nation remains synonymous with achieving modernity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopted the National Integration theory to provide a rational basis for explaining or interpreting its basic argument for critical study and insightful analysis of the challenges of nation-building in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. National integration means that all the various organs or parts of government must work cooperatively for the development of the economy, education, bureaucracy, and politics in the nation. The central thesis of national integration theory are that, the pursuit of nation-building becomes a lot much simpler in the face of workable and functional national integration. Myron Weiner in Nelson and Ojakorotu, (2021), argued that any conception

of national integration that aimed towards nation-building accomplishments must be looked at as the fusion of culturally, socially, politically, and ethnically disparate groups or people in a given geopolitical setting into a closely knit cohesive group involve in repetitive cordiality, dominated human interaction geared towards building a territorial nationality.

Thus, before one could talk about national integration for nation-building, the following must be taken into consideration:

- a. Existence of an ethnically heterogeneous society with each ethnic group firmly attached to her ethnic roots.
- b. A determination to dismantle ethnic primordial ties, welding all ethnic groups into one functional geo-polity and therefore, shifting loyalties towards a homogeneous nation.
- c. Minimized tension, conflict, acrimony, suspicion, prejudice, segregation and engineering harmonious co-existence, interactive adjustment, high level of tolerance, highly geared cordial social interaction.
- d. Perceiving a geo-polity a genuinely ours not there's and having a true sense of belonging to a larger political community.
- e. Commitment to the aspirations and ideals of a single entity to which everybody is happily identified and participate in actuality.
- f. A mechanism holding a society together. (Mezieobi in Garpia and Baba, 2019).

Therefore, nation-building efforts cannot thrive where there are elements of disintegration. These disintegrative elements include disunity, perpetual rivalry, clash of interest, ethnic chauvinism, ethnic suspicion and prejudice, fear of domination of one group by the other, mutual distrust, ethnic

discrimination, and where the ideology of the swallow hypothesis holds sway (Carl et'al in Nelson and Ojakorotu, 2021).

Consequently, this theory therefore is adopted majorly, to critically examine it's essence within the Nigerian context in order to determine whether its integrative elements are applied or abused in the political and economic sojourn of the country.

### **Methodology**

The paper made use of mainly secondary data that were obtained from text books, journals, and conference papers, including sources from the internet. All these were used in order to enhance the validity of the findings of the study. All data collected were presented and analyzed qualitatively through content analysis.

### **Efforts of Government Towards Nation-Building in Nigeria**

Nigeria since independence has made some efforts targeted at nation-building. Some of these efforts came after the civil war which understandably was ample time to engineer nation-building to enhance proper integration of the warring elements. Among the efforts was the institution of the policy of “no victor, no vanquished”, the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, and the convocation of several political reform conferences among others. The policy of Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Rehabilitation was also initiated to demobilize the Biafrans and reintegrate them into national life (Igbini, 2020). Though while the objectives of this policy were laudable, actual implementation was not fully successful. However, the policy remained a nation-building effort in Nigeria whether it yielded any meaningful results or not.



More importantly, the convocation of national political reform conferences over the years in Nigeria has remained an attempt at nation- building, these conferences were often mandated to draw the way forward for Nigeria but each time, failures have continued to be recorded; either as a result of the character of the delegates and the nature of selection processes of members. And where the delegates succeeded at reaching a genuine and feasible conclusion, their recommendations are often not binding and are therefore confined to the dustbin of history simply because of a lack of political will from our leaders. This is why people are increasingly becoming jittery with political reform conferences in Nigeria especially as they have turned into avenues for political settlements (Igbini, 2020). Unfortunately, the only success of nation-building recorded in Nigeria is adorning our public institutions with national symbols like the flag, coat-of-arm, and pictures of the Nigeria President and governors within their respective states as well as the recitation of the National Anthem in official gatherings which in effect, does not guarantee oneness but at least, it is a sign of togetherness. However, while this effort is not bad because it reminds us of our national identity, it is not sufficient to guarantee nation-building which comes from personal conviction and patriotic stand. The obvious lack of attainment of most of the above efforts of government at nation-building accomplishment resulted in re-occurring, persistent, and emerging challenges of nation-building in contemporary Nigeria over the years (Igbini, 2020)

### **Hurdles to Nation-Building in Nigeria**

Nigeria at 64 still faces an existential threat to nation-building efforts and many factors are responsible for this. Soniyi (2020), argues that these factors ranges from challenges of national unity, challenges of diversity management, bad governance, lack of responsive and responsible

leadership with the absence of transparency and accountability, miscarriage of justice, nepotism, tribalism, ethnicity, and systemic endemic scourge of corruption. It is important to note that, all these constituted existential threats to national unity and stability which manifested themselves and snowballed into the current security challenges of Boko Haram insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, cattle rustling, and farmers-herders crises. Gambari (2008) in Ikenna and Victoria (2022), argues that, Nigeria faces some challenges in nation-building. Some of these challenges include: -

### **The Leadership Challenge**

According to a distinguished compatriot, Chinua Achebe of blessed memory, the trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership. Leadership is a critical factor in nation-building and it should be understood in two important but related ways. Firstly, there are the personal qualities of integrity, honesty, commitment, and competence of individual leaders at the top. Secondly, there are the collective qualities of common vision, focus, and desire for the development of the elites as a whole. The standards for recruitment and the performance of our leaders over the years have left much to be desired. Nigeria do not need leaders who see themselves as champions of only some sections of its population. Nigeria do not need leaders who do not understand the economic and political problems of the country, not to talk of finding durable solutions for them. Nigeria do not need leaders who are more interested in silencing their opponents, than in pursuing justice. Nigeria do not need leaders, who preach one thing, and do the exact opposite. Nigeria do not need leaders who place themselves above the constitution and the laws of the country, but leaders who lead by upholding and respecting the law. Nigeria do not need leaders who have no sense of tomorrow, other than that of their private bank accounts.

If Nigeria is to succeed in nation-building, she must have a leadership that is committed to the rule of law and has a demonstrable sense of fair play and democratic tolerance; a leadership with ability and integrity; above all else, Nigeria must have a leadership that can see beyond the ostentatious pomp of office. Nigeria must have leaders who have a vision for a Nigeria better than the one they inherited; leaders who will lead by deeds and not by words; achievers, not deceivers. Nigeria need leaders that will not only leave its footprints on the sands of time, but one that, by dint of hard work, fair play, dedication, and commitment, will live forever in the hearts of Nigerians. Leadership is not everything, but it is an extremely important factor. Unless we have leaders with ability, integrity, commitment, and vision, we cannot succeed at nation-building. (Gambari 2008 in Ikenna and Victoria, 2022).

Therefore, considering the above critical requirement for good leadership, it can be argued that till date, one of the problems that is bedevilling nation-building efforts in Nigeria's fourth republic is squarely a problem of leadership. Anietie (2024) argues that, despite the removal of fuel subsidy, the current administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, has failed to address the basic fundamental development challenges of providing adequate security for lives and properties, quality and equal access to education at all level, healthcare, reduce poverty, create wealth, as well as generate employment. Consequently, all these has led to an increase in criminality in the form of widespread kidnapping, banditry, Boko Haram terrorism, cattle rustling, armed robbery to mention but a few that we are witnessing today in Nigeria.

### **The Challenge of Socio-Economic Inequalities**

An important aspect of nation-building is the building of a common citizenship. But how can we have a common citizenship when the person in Ilorin for instance has a radically different quality

of life from the person in Yenagoa? Or when the woman in Gusau is more likely to die in childbirth than the woman in Ibadan? Through the development of the economy and equal opportunities for all, or the development of social welfare safety nets, mature nations try to establish a baseline of social and economic rights that all members of the national community must enjoy. Not enjoying these socio-economic rights means that the people involved are marginalized from national life. This is why in many Western European countries, contemporary nation-building is about preventing 'social exclusion' or the exclusion of significant segments of the population from enjoying basic social and economic rights. In Nigeria, however, not only are many of our citizens denied basic rights such as the right to education and health, but there is also serious variation in the enjoyment of these rights across the country.

As a consequence, the citizen is not motivated to support the state and society, because he or she does not feel that society is adequately concerned about their welfare. Secondly, socio-economic inequalities across the country fuel fears and suspicions which keep our people divided. Some of these socio-economic inequalities for instance that if we take the education of the girl-child as an indicator, one will see a pattern of inequality with the South-East having an enrolment rate of 85%, South-West 89%, South-South 75%, North-East 20%, and North-West 25%. (Babatunde Et'al, 2019).

If we take admissions into Nigerian universities in the academic year 2022, we see that the North-West had only 5% of the admissions, while the South-East had 39%. As for poverty, the erstwhile Governor of the Central Bank, Charles Soludo, pointed out that while 95% of the population of Jigawa State is classified as poor, only 20% of Bayelsa State is so classified. While 85% of Kwara State is classified as poor, only 32% of Osun is in the same boat (Suleiman and Ocheni, 2022).

These inequalities pose two related challenges to nation-building. Firstly, high levels of socio-economic inequalities mean that different Nigerians live different lives in different parts of the country. The chances of surviving childbirth, receiving education and skills, all vary across the country. If different parts of Nigeria were separate countries, some parts would be middle-income countries, while others would be poorer than the poorest countries in the world! A common nationhood cannot be achieved while citizens are living such parallel lives. Inequalities are a threat to common citizenship. Secondly, even in those parts of the country that are relatively better off, the level of social provision and protection is still low by world standards. The 20% that are poor and unemployed in Bayelsa State are still excluded from common citizenship benefits. We therefore need a Social Contract between the people on the one hand, and the state and nation on the other. The state and nation must put meeting the needs of the disadvantaged as a key objective of public policy. Such an approach can make possible a common experience of life for Nigerians living in different parts of the country and elicit their commitment to the nation. Instead of resorting to the divisive politics of indigene against settler as a means of accessing resources, a generalized commitment to social citizenship will create a civic structure of rights that will unite people around shared rights and goals.

Poverty and nation-building are strange bedfellows, whether the poor are 20% or 85% of the population. A largely marginalized citizenry, increasingly crippled by poverty and the lack of basic needs, can hardly be expected to play its proper role in the development of the nation. Nations are built by healthy and skilled citizens. On grounds of both equity and efficiency, we need to promote the access of the bulk of the Nigerian population to basic education, health,

and housing. Nigeria needs a social contract with its citizens as a basis for demanding their loyalty and support.(Gambari 2008 in Ikenna and Victoria, 2022).

However, recent developments has deepened and widened socio-economic inequality in the country reflected in a summary of the year 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index Report released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) shows that 133 million equivalent to 63% of the population of Nigerians experience one form of poverty or the other and 65% equivalent to 86 million people live in Northern Nigeria. Thus, 35% equivalent to 47 million people live in Southern Nigeria. Sokoto has the highest number of people affected having 91% of its population experiencing one form of poverty or the other and Ondo has the lowest with 27% of its population experiencing one form of poverty or the other. Rural people are mostly affected by multidimensional poverty where 72% of them suffer from one form of poverty or the other. Meanwhile, only 42% of urban people suffer from multidimensional poverty (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022)

The most daunting of all is child poverty which constitutes 67.5% of the total children in Nigeria. Northern children suffer more from multidimensional poverty than their Southern counterparts. In rural areas, child poverty appears to be scary with about 90% of children experiencing multidimensional poverty. The incidence of child poverty is above 50% in all states while higher than 95% in states like Bayelsa, Gombe, Sokoto, and Kebbi (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Therefore, poverty measurement is said to be more comprehensive when issues such as income, housing, access to education, freedom of choices, access to power, access to sanitation, access to

healthcare services, etc are put into consideration. Multidimensional poverty survey attempts to look into the aforementioned variables. It is important to emphasize that approximately 63 percent of the entire population is multi-dimensionally poor, and this has further validated the opinions of several other non-state actors who hold the view that the existential realities in the country are suggestive of a fundamental socio-economic crisis. To change this ugly narrative, it is imperative to re-think our socio-economic policies to make them largely people-centered to engineer national integration and achieve nation-building accomplishments.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, therefore, it is important to note that challenges of nation-building are reflected in the way and manner our various ethnic groups today talk about marginalization and domination, virtually all the groups are affected in one way or the other by issues of national question. For the Niger Delta and oil-producing minority, it is exploitation and environmental degradation; for the Igbo it is marginalization; for the Hausa Fulani it is uneven development; for the minorities of the North, particularly the middle belt it is one of internal colonialism, etc. In addition, the management of the challenges of Nation-building in Nigeria has degenerated due to the inability of its leadership to ensure proper management of diversity and lack of good governance are responsible for the escalation of the problems which snowballed and translated to the current security challenges of Boko Haram Insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle rustling and increase in other crime and criminality deeply rooted in youth unemployment, illiteracy, abject absolute poverty, corruption, and poor leadership. These are some of the challenges confronting and undermining the national integration efforts. The author opines that for the country to achieve genuine nation-building, there should be good governance through

transparent and accountable leadership, socio-economic justice, and the building of strong public institutions for democracy and development.

### **Prospects**

After 64 years of Nigeria's independence, it must be emphasized here that despite the challenges of nation-building the country has faced, important progress has been achieved but there is potential for further reforms to strengthen democratic institutions through good governance. Many Nigerians are yet to experience the economic liberation that comes with independence; youth unemployment remains a threat to the security of the country, and many young people feel that their dreams can only be achieved abroad. As long as opportunities and enabling environments remain limited, the quest for nation-building, national integration, and stability will continue to be a mirage for many Nigerians. Ultimately, the country's future can only be determined and shaped by visionary, responsible, and accountable leadership. The political leaders should demonstrate their readiness to operate an open-door policy to receive new ideas and information that would improve service delivery and promote national cohesion.

### **Recommendations**

In the final analysis, the following recommendation are made for ensuring and achieving national unity, national integration, and stability through proactive nation-building efforts:-

- a) There should be economic development and equal opportunities for all through the development of social welfare safety nets to promote nation-building to achieve national integration and stability.
- b) Political leaders should exhibit and display responsive and responsible leadership to guarantee good governance to all Nigerians and also ensure social justice, sound economic



management, transparency, and public accountability in governance to achieve peace and unity, national integration, and stability.

- c) There should be enthrone of fiscal federalism and a just and equitable revenue sharing formulae should be fashioned out for ensuring social and economic justice in the distribution of economic resources.
- d) There should be promotion of fundamental human rights, social and economic justice, and the rule of law.
- e) Fair and equitable distribution of the benefits of development thereby achieving enduring nation-building.
- f) Poverty reduction strategies and programs should be formulated and implemented for the citizens to have a sense of belonging and a sense of common identity.
- g) For nation-building and national integration to be achieved, no citizen should suffer discrimination because of his or her origin, sex, religion, status, or ethnic or linguistic ties.
- h) The government should provide adequate facilities, goods, and services for the citizens. This is to promote nation-building.
- i) There should be equal opportunities in the provision of education and healthcare for every citizen of the country.
- j) There should be rigorous pursuit of vertical and horizontal integration of the people. Thus, vertical integration means a process of how to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have not as well as the elites and the masses while horizontal integration is a process of integrating the various elements of society through dynamic and good leadership with diversity management skills.

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