



ETHNIC – BASED SOCIAL GROUPS AND AGITATIONS FOR/AGAINST RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The gradual enthronement of individualism and atmosphere of freedom under the present democratic dispensation has led to resurgence of different agitations by ethnic-based social groups in Africa. In Nigeria, social groups formed by ethnic minorities from different geo-political zones continued to engage the State on issues relating to unity, peace, security, and equitable development. In recent times, on the basis of identity politics, some of these ethnic – based social groups such as Movement of the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), 'Afenifere', 'Oha N'Eze Ndigbo' The Middle Belt Forum (MBF), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) etc. and their leaders have either canvassed for or against restructuring as panacea to challenges of unity and peace in the country. The dilemma here is that, their agitations, continued to threaten the unity, peace and security of Nigeria and their interest always clash with national interest. This paper seeks to identify and explain the sources of agitation for/against restructuring and the implication of this identity politics in Nigeria and Africa in general. The main argument of this paper is that agitations on the basis of identity politics in Nigeria and other African federal systems are expected where new demands by hitherto neglected and marginalised social groups are unattended to by the existing federal structures and institutions. (Word Count: 220)

Keywords: Ethnic –based Social groups, Restructuring, Federal system, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of federalism as a political tool for the management of diversities and promotion of unity is often considered significant in the analysis of the fortunes and misfortunes of most pluralistic societies in the world. For Nigeria and other African countries that shared the same colonial experiences, this is the only significant thing that came out of the various constitutional changes that spanned from 1922 to 1960. However, the gradual enthronement of individualism and atmosphere of freedom under the present democratic dispensation has led to resurgence of different agitations by ethnic-based social groups in Africa. Federal system as a political tool and instrument of governance is most probably at the heart of the agitation for and against restructuring since Nigeria transitioned to democracy in May 1999.

In Nigeria, social groups formed by ethnic minorities from different geo-political zones continued to engage the State on issues relating to unity, peace, security, and equitable development after independence in 1960. In recent times, on the basis of identity politics, some of these ethnic – based social groups such as Movement of the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), 'Afenifere', 'Oha N'Eze Ndigbo' The Middle Belt Forum (MBF), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) etc. and their leaders have either canvassed for or against restructuring as panacea to challenges of unity, peace and development in the country. The dilemma here is that, their agitations, continued to threaten the unity, peace and security of Nigeria and their interest always clash with national interest. For instance, the IPOB had issued several threats with regard to secession of Igbos from the Nigerian entity and the creation of Biafra republic. The Boko Haram insurgents are contending with the sovereignty of the Nigerian state with intention to establish the Islamic state, mostly in the Northern part of the country. Restructuring of the Nigeria's federal system has become a topical issue for discussion for both politicians and non-politicians alike. This is because of the importance of a 'real' or true federalism to political and economic development of any pluralistic society like Nigeria. This topic, in addition to its currency has many dimensions. The paper just

concentrates on just a few critical but limited areas. In view of this, this paper seeks to identify and explain the sources of agitation for/against restructuring and the implication of this identity politics in Nigeria and Africa in general.

After the introduction, the next section provides explanation on the meaning of ethnic based-social groups and restructuring in federal systems. The paper takes a cursory overview of Nigeria's federal system in retrospect. Before the concluding remarks, the chapter attempts to provide explanation on the agitation for/against restructuring and the implication of identity politics in Nigeria and Africa in general.

Theoretical Framework and Assumptions

Some of the orientations of theory of pluralism are used in this paper. Generally, pluralism is a theory that centres on the idea of how power is distributed. The pluralist model shows that power is distributed among many groups, which may include coalitions of like-minded or culture-bound people, unions, professional associations and business lobbyists.

Classical pluralism as advocated by Robert Dahl, Seymour Martin Lipset and David Truman is concerned with the view that politics and decision making are located mostly in the framework of government, but that many non-governmental groups use their resources to exert influence. The central problem for classical pluralism is how power and influence are distributed in a political process. Groups of individuals try to maximize their interests. Lines of conflict are multiple and shifting as power is a continuous bargaining process between competing groups. Theorists of pluralism believe that there may be inequalities but they tend to be distributed and evened out by the various forms and distributions of resources throughout a population. Pluralists stress civil rights, such as freedom of expression and organization, and an electoral system with at least two parties. Dahl in Polsby¹ argued that because "political heterogeneity follows socioeconomic heterogeneity," social differentiation increasingly disperses power.

Three of the major tenets of the pluralist school are (1) resources and hence potential power are widely scattered throughout society; (2) at least some resources are available to nearly everyone; and (3) at any time the amount of potential power exceeds the amount of actual power. Finally, and perhaps most important, no one is all-powerful unless proven so through empirical observation. An individual or group that is influential in one realm may be weak in another.

The theory of Pluralism of the state and policy formation, which gained its most traction during the 1950s and 1960s in America, was criticized to be too simplistic. This led to the formulation of neo-pluralism. Views differed about the division of power in democratic society. Although neo-pluralism sees multiple pressure groups competing over political influence, the political agenda is biased towards corporate power. Neo-pluralism no longer sees the state as an umpire mediating and adjudicating between the demands of different interest groups, but as a relatively autonomous actor (with different departments) that forges and looks after its own (sectional) interests. Constitutional rules, which in pluralism are embedded in a supportive political culture, should be seen in the context of a diverse, and not necessarily supportive, political culture and a system of radically uneven economic sources. This diverse culture exists because of an uneven distribution of socioeconomic power. This creates possibilities for some groups – while limiting others – in their political options. This theory is critical to this paper as it helps to understand the competition between interest groups (in this case ethnic based social groups) in the policy process and the influence of these groups on the political system and the policy process.

¹ Polsby, Nelson W. "How to Study Community Power: The Pluralist Alternative." *The Journal of Politics*, (22), No 3, 1960.

Moreover, most of the views expressed in relation to ethnic based social groups in Nigeria and their agitation for or against restructuring are predicated on five main assumptions.

- First, that the crisis of Nigeria's federalism was accentuated when the military regime transformed the country away from its federal and democratic path of development as a result of oil revenue windfall and its own operational structure of a unified command.
- Second, that since transition to civil rule in 1999, our political leaders have misconceived and mismanaged the call for restructuring of Nigeria's federal system.
- The third assumption is that unless we revisit the agitation for restructuring of Nigeria's federalism within the context of national development, the "nation will continue to be hostage to a dysfunctional and disempowering governance system in the country"².
- The fourth assumption is that ethnic-based social groups are critical components of the Nigerian system capable of influencing the inputs and outputs of the system.
- The fifth assumption is that ethnic identity is one of many identities that could become the motivation for political action.

Understanding Ethnic Based Social Groups and Restructuring in a Federal System **Federalism**

A federal system, according to Elazara, provides a mechanism which "unites separate polities with an overarching political system so as to allow each to maintain its fundamental political integrity"³. To Garner, "federal government is a system in which the totality of governmental power is distributed by the national constitution or the organic act of parliament creating it, between a central (federal) government and the government of individual states, or other territorial subdivisions of which the federation is composed"⁴.

Ideally and obviously, a federal system is a dual set of government. This is because while the central or federal government is charged with the administration of affairs of national importance, matters of regional or local importance are given to the government of the units variously known as states in USA, Nigeria and India, cantons as in Switzerland and provinces as in Canada. In Nigeria, in addition to the states, there exist local governments that are constitutionally recognized with specific functions; primarily to cater for grassroots developmental issues. It is important to state that both the governments should be coordinate in relation to each other. As Wheare, puts it in his definition of federalism "as the method of dividing powers so that the regional and general governments are each within a sphere coordinate and independent"⁵. In other words, the government of sub-national units should not be taken as subordinate governments nor "do they have the power of making foreign treaties, declaring war and peace, issuing currency, keeping armies, and, above all, leaving the union as per their will"⁶. By implication, the federating units have no right to leave the union because the

² Aboyade, Akin. "Issues and challenges of Governance in Nigeria." Proceedings at the launching of the Oba (DR) S K detona Professorial Chair in Governance in the Department of Political Science, Olabisi Onabanjo (OOU) Ago Iwoye at Oriental Hotel Lagos on Thursday March 10, 2016. 2

³ Daniel J. Elazara cited in Johari, J. C. *Principles of Modern Political Science*, New Delhi: Sterling Private Ltd, 2012. 339

⁴ J. W. Garner cited in Johari, *Principles of Modern Political Science*, 339

⁵ Wheare, K. *Federal Government*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963. 10

⁶ Johari, *Principles of Modern Political Science*, 340

union is indissoluble or indestructible in a federal system. This may be the reason why the call for secession by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) of South-eastern part of Nigeria is considered illogical and illegal. The question is: do these people have right for self – determination in a federal system?

To Akinyemi⁷, federalism implies the existence of differences, that are perceived to be so fundamental as to have the capability of blossoming into conflicts, but which if properly handled, will not develop into irreconcilable conflicts. This statement needs to be explained for better understanding. First, for federalism as a structural system to be considered, those in charge of the management of the system must perceive that there are differences among the groups enclosed by the system. Second, they must perceive that these differences are not completely insignificant in nature but that they are of such a fundamental nature as to pose very serious problems that could put in jeopardy the whole existence of the system. Third, they must perceive that if properly managed these differences can be accommodated through the granting of sufficient autonomy. Fourth, if preserved, the system will be beneficial to all parts of the system, not just a section of it. It is this mutuality of benefits that justifies the expense, the energy and the frustrations incurred in operating the system.

Ethnic-based Groups

Generally speaking, an ethnic group or an ethnicity, particularly in African context, is a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, language, history, society, culture or nation. It is a group of people who identify with each other through a common heritage, which generally consists of a common culture and shared language or dialect. The group's ethos or ideology may also stress common ancestry, religion, or race. Ethnic-based social groups, for the purpose of this paper, consist of all associations or pressure groups formed on the basis of ethnic group or ethnicity, using various forms of advocacy in order to influence public opinion and/or public policy. As one of the important parts of the political system, they have played and continue to play significant role in the development of Nigeria's political system.

Restructuring

Restructuring has been defined in various ways to mean different things. Literarily, restructuring is the process or an instance of changing the way in which something is organized or arranged. It is not surprising that different political actors would give different perspectives to the concept of restructuring, if the concept is related to federalism.

According to Ibrahim Babangida, a former military president, restructuring was synonymous to devolution of powers to the states and delimiting the power of the Federal Government to oversee foreign policy, defence, and the national economy⁸. He warned that restructuring and devolution of powers would certainly not provide all the answers to the country's developmental challenges. Rather, it would help to reposition the mind-set of Nigerians.

⁷ Akinyemi, Bolaji A. "Federalism, Intergovernmental Relationship, Partisan Politics and Development: A Critical Assessment Of Nigeria (1999-2004)." Delivered At The First Intergovernmental Quarterly Roundtable On Development, Held Under The Auspices Of The Lagos State House Of Assembly, November 23, 2004.

⁸ AMIN NEWS. "NIGERIA: What is restructuring?" accessed On June 30, 2017 at <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/06/nigeria-what-is-restructuring/>

Atiku Abubakar, a former Vice President, conceived restructuring as devolving more powers and resources from the federal government to the component units, and de-emphasising federal allocations as the source of sustenance of states⁹. Akin Osuntokun defined it as a call for the restoration of federalism, the foundational constitution structure to which all Nigerians subscribed as encapsulated in the independence constitution of 1960¹⁰. To Kokori, Former General Secretary, National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers Union, NUPENG, restructuring is not what we need but a functional structure. Others see restructuring as:

It is the manifestation of frustration – Bashir Tofa

Restructuring is nothing but politics – Paul Unongo

It means giving powers to regions – Chief Anabs Sara Igbe , a prominent Ijaw leader.

It is a political ballgame – Prof Yadudu

It is a call for return to pre-1966 system – Mr Yinka Odumakin

It is a means to capture power in 2019 – Agbakoba

It is about regional government and ... – Balarabe Musa

It represents enthronement of justice, fairness, equity – Chief Bode George

It will give more effect to our federalism – Chekwes Okorie¹¹

Within the context of Nigeria's federalism and for the purpose of analysis in this paper, restructuring is assumed to be the Nigeria's approach to true federalism. It is the process of increasing or decreasing the number of component parts that makes up a system and re-defining the inter-relationship between them in such a way that the entire system performs more efficiently and promotes unity, peace and harmonious relationship among the component units. It is the process of redefining the composition and the structural arrangement of the federal system, to increase the fiscal strength of the component units for national development.

No matter how we define restructuring, for the process to lead to national development, emphasis must be on the following:

- (a) Systematic changes designed to lead to more efficient and responsive governance;
- (b) Deliberate effort to reinvigorate a system that is near collapse to become an engine of development;
- (c) Improve capacity of socio-economic and political institutions to make policy and deliver services in an efficient, effective, responsive and accountable manner and
- (d) Reconstruct administrative and political structures to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

The Agitation for/Against Restructuring in Nigeria: What We Need To Know

It is significant to point out that the tempo, frequency, and the spread of agitation for and against restructuring are increasing by the day. Indeed, restructuring became a major campaign issue before the 2019 general election. Also the persistent call for restructuring shows that the present federal structure is bedevilled with critical challenges that must be addressed as soon as possible. Yacub¹² concludes after assessing the first tenure of President Buhari's administration of the country that:

There is so much division in the country. Poverty and deprivation had enveloped the country. There is much misgiving towards the

⁹ AMIN NEWS. 2017

¹⁰ AMIN NEWS. 2017

¹¹ For details see Vanguard, July 9, 2017.

¹² Yacub, Nuhu. "Politics and Cabinet Selection." In *The Buhari Presidency: 2015-2019*, edited by John A. A. Ayoade and Adeoye A. Akinsanya, 1-16. Ibadan: John Archers, 2019. 14

Buhari Administration. There is much insecurity in the land, despite the efforts to checkmate the insurgent Boko Haram.

The diverse opinions on the call for and against restructuring somehow affected the voting pattern and the results of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria on geo-political basis. It is not surprising that the ruling party All Progressive Congress (APC) lost to the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) in those areas where agitators for restructuring are predominant, particularly from the South-east and South-south geo-political zones. To buttress this, it has been argued that the level of backing by way of total number of votes per State, region or geo-political zone cast for a ruling party will certainly influence the extent to which a State, region or geo-political zone will benefit from any existing political patronage. It is not surprising that South-east and South-south geo-political zones “complained stridently about marginalization in political appointments by the Buhari administration”¹³ after 2015 general elections. The clamour for restructuring prior to the conduct of 2015 general elections was more intense in these zones where Buhari’s APC lost to Atiku’s PDP. See the table below:

Table 1: Results of the 2015 Presidential Results

State	Geo-Political Zone	APC	PDP
Abia	South- East	13,394	368,303
Akwa Ibom	South – South	58,411	958,304
Anambra	South – East	17,926	660,762
Bayelsa	South – South	5,194	361,209
Cross River	South – South	28,368	414,863
Delta	South – South	48,910	211,405
Ebonyi	South – East	19,518	323,658
Edo	South – South	208,669	286,869
Enugu	South – East	14,157	553,003
Imo	South – East	133,253	559,185
Rivers	South – South	69,238	1,487,075
TOTAL		617,038	6,184,636

Source: Extracted from Results released by Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), May 2015

The total votes cast for PDP was 12,853,162, out of which 48.11% (6,184,636) came from these two geo-political zones, representing 90.93% of the total votes cast in the two zones. Overall, the ruling party APC won in 22 out of 36 states. Restructuring debate also characterised political discourses prior to 2019 general election. According to Akinsanya ¹⁴:

*To be sure, political parties and presidential candidates of the two major political parties during the 2019 General Election Campaigns have either publicly announced their positions on restructuring or made **true federalism**, whatever that term means, the centre piece of their parties’ manifestoes for a future and better nation called Nigeria.*

However, it is important to note that the recent agitation for restructuring of the Nigeria’s federalism is much more than creating more states and local governments. The restructuring has now become part of the agenda of the top political elite in their struggle for political power and resource control. Recent observation has shown that majority of the agitators are from the southern part of the country as much of the opinion of the North is different from that of the South. Up till the time 2015 general elections were conducted, most of the calls for restructuring

¹³ Adebisi, Pius Ademola, Cletus Egugbo and Yusuf A. Ogwuzebe. “Political Appointments and the Principle of Federal Character.” In *The Buhari Presidency: 2015-2019*, edited by John A. A. Ayoade and Adeoye A. Akinsanya, 17-50. Ibadan: John Archers, 2019.

¹⁴ Akinsanya, A. Adeoye, Ademola Pius Adebisi and Sylvanus M. Itodo. “That The House Called ‘Nigeria’ Would Not Collapse: Restructuring the Nigerian Federation.” In *The Buhari Presidency: 2015-2019*, edited by John A. A. Ayoade and Adeoye A. Akinsanya. Ibadan: John Archers, 2019. 177

had been from individuals and groups from the southern part of Nigeria, especially South-South geo-political zone. Others from the North probably think that the agitation for restructuring was because the south controls the major mineral resources that constitute the bulk of Nigeria's wealth. It is obvious that the presidency through body language and some specific policy statements (rejection of 2014 National Political Conference Report) as at present not interested in or not ready to carry out any restructuring. This may not be unconnected with the central focus of the agitation, which is devolution of powers aimed at decongesting the centre and resource mobilization and control by the states. Meanwhile, there is no consensus about the nature, content, implementation and case for restructuring.

More importantly, the role of identity politics being played by some key ethnic-based social groups as far as the issue of restructuring is concerned cannot be overstated. Paul et. al.¹⁵ argued that the socio-political and economic implications of the agitations by the ethnic groups is better imagined than being real as they include civil unrest; and war, social, political, and economic crises; emergence of a failed state and persistence of corruption. A major assumption that underlies the study of ethnicity and national restructuring question in Nigeria is that, it constitutes the fundamental basis for multiple identities, diversity, and the framework of a single, integrated political system in the country¹⁶. Restructuring meant different things to these different ethnic groups representing different zones especially those in favour of it. For instance, as it shall be shown later, the Yoruba (in the south west) definition of restructuring is regionalism and fiscal federalism and that the perception of Igbos (from the South-east) on restructuring is confederation, while the South-south is gunning for economic self-determination through restructuring.

The Movement of the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND); Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB); and 'Ijaw Youth Council (IYC); are examples of ethnic-based social groups representing the opinions and interests of the people of Niger Delta. MEND as one of the militant groups considered the agitation for restructuring as part of its liberation struggle, which the Nigerian state and the oil companies refused to take cognizance of. According to Omotola; "In the reading of militias' activities, there is a simultaneous convergence and divergence between the state and the oil majors. Both refuse to attribute rising violence to liberation struggles, as claimed by the militants."¹⁷. It is significant to note that the recent agitations in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is not restricted to the factors already in the public knowledge but rather, other emerging factors which are more of personal and political in nature than collective to the communities. These include the release of IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, the establishment of Maritime University in Delta state and the funding of amnesty programme. These are some of the reasons for the resurgence of terrorism in the region after President Buhari resumed office as the President of Nigeria in 2015¹⁸.

In the South –East, there is a divided opinion on the issue of agitation for restructuring among the recognized ethnic-based social groups. 'Oha N'Eze Ndigbo', the apex socio cultural organization in the Igbo land supported peaceful agitation for the restructuring of the polity. The most significant effort towards the realisation of their search for equitable governance structure that should be acceptable by Nigerians from all walks of life is the Awka Declaration. This

¹⁵ Paul, Salisu Ojonemi, Audu Enojo & Eri Kayode. "Ethnic Agitations and Restructuring Question in Nigeria: The Aftermath of 2015 General Elections." *International Journal of Innovative Social Sciences & Humanities Research* 5(3):14-24, July-Sept., 2017. Accessed at © SEAHIPAJ PUBLICATIONS, 2017 www.seahipaj.org ISSN: 2354-2926

¹⁶ Paul, Salisu Ojonemi. "Ethnic Agitations and Restructuring Question in Nigeria, 2017

¹⁷ Omotola, J. Shola. "Liberation Movements" and Rising Violence in the Niger Delta: The New Contentious Site of Oil and Environmental Politics." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33:1, DOI: 10.1080/10576100903400597, 2009. 1

¹⁸ Paul, Salisu Ojonemi. "Ethnic Agitations and Restructuring Question in Nigeria, 2017. 118

declaration supported by some leaders from the Southwest, Middle Belt, South-south and compatriots from Southern Kaduna contained a 10 point demand that included resource control, regional government based on the six existing geo political zones, fiscal federalism, devolution of power, additional state for the Southeast before further creation of states, removal of local government creation and funding from Federal Government, rotational presidency, six year single term with six Vice-Presidents, among others¹⁹. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) rejected the Awka summit and its outcome. In a statement by its Spokesperson, Emma Powerful, described the summit as being “sponsored by those who have continued to kill Biafra indigenes in the name of herdsmen”²⁰. In the same vein, leader of the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Uchenna Madu resolved to pursue Biafra restoration. According to him, “(W)e don’t believe in this geographical expression called Nigeria project because this entity is a failed state. The death of hundreds of our comrades in the cause of Biafra self-determination for actualisation and restoration can never be in vain. We cannot betray them.”²¹

According to Okorocho²², it seems every geo-political zone has its own interpretation of restructuring. To the South-East, restructuring means creation of an additional state. This is not unrelated to the fact the South-East remained the only geo-political zone with less than six states. Apart from the North –West with seven states, others have six states each. For the South-South, restructuring means resource control. This agitation is also not surprising coming from the people of the Niger-Delta, since crude oil is the major source of revenue to the country. For the South-West, it means devolution of power, as many Yoruba social groups such as, Afenifere and Oodua Peoples’ Congress had complained of marginalization; in terms of sharing of political offices and exercise of powers at the centre. This agitation for devolution of power via restructuring became more pronounced when former President Olusegun Obasanjo exited the seat of power in 2007.

The North sees it differently, as the pan-northern socio-cultural group, the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), rejected the call for restructuring, “saying what the country needs at the moment is competent leadership at all levels”²³. The main reason for this position, quoting the ACF spokesman, Alhaji Mohammed Ibrahim, is that restructuring would weaken the centre and promote disunity, which is against unity that Nigerians fought for at independence²⁴. It is opined that eminent citizens pushing for restructuring are trying to blackmail Nigerians into a blurred and spurious system of government. Also, the Secretary General of the ACF, Anthony Sani, confirmed that the northern group cannot throw its weight behind the call for restructuring because there is no clear-cut definition for it. In addition, he claimed that “if restructuring is in the manifesto of the All-Progressives Congress, President Muhammadu Buhari and Vice President Yemi Osinbajo would certainly not be indifferent to it”²⁵. He stressed further:

“I doubt it because the vice president once raised issues about what is meant by the term ‘restructuring’, considering the fact that some people talk of ‘true federalism’; some talk of ‘fiscal federalism’. Others talk of ‘resource control’ and still others talk about ‘resource ownership’. ACF is

¹⁹ The Guardian. n.p. 25 May 2018

²⁰ The Guardian. 2018

²¹ The Guardian. 2018

²² Paul, Salisu Ojonemi. “Ethnic Agitations ...”, 2017. 17

²³ Salaudeen, Leke. “Controversy over agitation for Restructuring”, *The Nation*. July 9, 2017

²⁴ Salaudeen, Leke. “Controversy over agitation.”, 2017

²⁵ Akinloye, Bayo. “Why we don’t support restructuring –ACF”, *PUNCH*. July 2, 2017

*not for restructuring. ACF cannot be for a restructuring whose definition is not clear,*²⁶

However, restructuring, particularly the one that will alter the present fiscal federal arrangements has become one of the campaign issues of the standard bearer of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2019 presidential election, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, a northerner. This is not surprising, since his major contender, President Muhammadu Buhari, a northerner had expressed pessimism towards restructuring. In his nationwide broadcast on August 21, 2017, he quashed the call for restructuring the country, saying the National Assembly and the National Council of State are the legitimate and appropriate bodies for national discourse. This may be one of the reasons why President Buhari chose not to implement the recommendations of National Political Conference set up by Jonathan's government in 2014. It is important to note that the call for and against restructuring, no matter how it is defined, relates to the perceived interest of certain identified groups with respect to their perception of the existing Nigeria's federal system, which is mostly expressed by the opinion-elites of these groups. Most of the times, these groups are ethnic based, promoting socio-cultural and social-economic interests. As at present, there seems to be no consensus on how to address critical issues on restructuring agenda. Recently, it was reported that the Speaker, Hon. Dogara suggested constitutional amendment that will deliver the local governments from the hand of governors, which he perceived as the actual form of agitation for restructuring. Some of the items highlighted to be included in the restructuring agenda include; devolution of power to the states, reduction in federal government exclusive list (87) in favour of concurrent list (15) and developing our own model of fiscal federalism. Others are, reduction in number of federating units, administrative restructuring, leaner bureaucracy, local government autonomy (state control), federal ownership of interstate roads, resource sharing. Others have also raised issues such as resource control, state police, federal character principle etc.

Historically, as noted by the Report of Political Bureau (1987: 204):

*Political charges, accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, social exploitation, domination, victimization, nepotism, discrimination and bigotry, have over the years since the dawn of anti- colonial nationalist movement in the late 1940s, assumed major salience because concrete socio-cultural and socio-economic groups actually experience these forms of maltreatment*²⁷.

As a result of the above, over the years, there has been a variety of agitation and articulation of, concrete calls for redress and remedies. Such suggested remedies have included the call for re-organization of political and administrative units, social welfare policies, programmes and institutions, special legislation and constitutional provisions emphasising one form of restructuring or the other. For example, due to poverty, backwardness and neglect of the Niger Delta region, the Niger Delta has been in the forefront of the agitation for the convocation of a broad-based and authoritative national constitutional assembly – or a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) – to reassess and restructure Nigeria's federal compact²⁸. There has been a struggle for true federalism as a result of perceived over-centralization of the Nigerian federation. The criticism of this feature of the country's constitutional architecture resonates powerfully in the Niger Delta, where there is overwhelming support for the restructuring of Nigeria into a more decentralized federation²⁹. Ethnic-based Associations such as Ohaneze, Afenifere and other groups except the Northern Elders Forum supported restructuring of the

²⁶ Akinloye, Bayo. "Why we don't support restructuring." 2017

²⁷ Federal Government of Nigeria. *Report of the Political Bureau*. Lagos, Government Printer, 1987. 204

²⁸ Suberu, Rotimi. *Constitutional Reform Dialogues: The South- South Agenda for Constitutional Reform*. Ibadan: Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies, 2005. 3

²⁹ Suberu, Rotimi. *Constitutional Reform Dialogues..* 2005. 4

Nigeria's federal system as a solution to secessionist agitations by MASSOB/IPOB and an answer to 'feeling of marginalization' by different segments of Nigeria's population³⁰. However, President Buhari condemned the proponents of restructuring on the basis that:

*No President who has sworn to uphold the Constitution will agree with that kind of restructuring that they are trumpeting. Restructuring is good. The governing party believes in it because devolution of powers is a form of restructuring, but restructuring that is turned to trumpeting evil and doomsday for our country is not what any government will stomach.*³¹

There are a broad range of intertwined issues regarding constitutional politics and federal governance in Nigeria as far as the people of Niger Delta are concerned. These include the process for crafting a democratic constitution, the requisites for true or decentralized federalism, the control of natural resources, environmental security and sustainability, the social responsibility of the oil companies, community governance structures, governmental accountability and transparency, the integrity of the electoral process, and minority, citizenship and human rights³².

What is the Trouble with Nigeria?

After many years of the first and second amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorate in 1906 and 1914 respectively by Lord Lugard, Nigeria has never rested from agitations by her ethnic groups. At the early stage of independence, Nigeria was regarded as the giant and hope of Africa because of its immense human and material resources. It was believed that Nigeria will one day become one of the super powers in the world. Many called Nigeria an exception to the tragedy that had befallen post-colonial states in Africa. With many crises bedeviling the country today – insecurity, economic recession, political instability, ethnic cum religious conflict, threat of secession, violence agitations, terrorism and insurgencies etc. many commentators and scholars have begun to refer to the country's descent to decline. The question is: what is really the trouble with Nigeria?

Some have argued that the present Nigeria's challenges are as a result of the country's complexity. It is claimed that Nigeria belongs to the category of the most troubled complex societies called deeply divided societies. Others talk of the pervasive corruption, gross mismanagement and flagrant impunity that have made the country to join of the poorest countries of the world (by all international standards) as the major factor responsible for the present predicament in Nigeria. Still a few others consider Nigeria's inability to determine its fate in the global system and its susceptibility to the crisis of external intervention as a major factor why Nigeria is foundering so badly. Let ask ourselves could all these be the problem?

In the opinion of Osaghae³³, Nigeria has found itself in the present predicament because the country is a crippled state. To him, Nigeria "was crippled from the beginning by the nature of its colonial creation and integration into the global economy, and has remained crippled by corrupt and authoritarian regimes, the inability to overcome its divisions, and the inability to determine its manifest destiny in the face of a hegemonic world order"³⁴. The major manifestation of the crippling of the state is Nigeria's failure to realise its vast potential.

³⁰ Akinsanya, A. Adeoye, . "That The House Called 'Nigeria....", 2019. 210

³¹ Jibueze, J. "Presidency: Buhari Not Opposed to Restructuring." In *The Nation*, Lagos, September 9, 2017. 4,9

³² Suberu, Rotimi. *Constitutional Reform Dialogues..* 2005. 4

³³ Osaghae, E. Eghosa. *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*. Ibadan: John Archers for PEFS, 2002.

³⁴ Osaghae, E. Eghosa. *Crippled Giant....*, 2002. x

Explaining Crisis and Travail of Nigeria's Federalism as the Basis for Agitation for/against Restructuring

Between 1970s and 1980s, Nigeria's model of federalism was widely acclaimed as a major success and model for divided societies. This is not unrelated to the introduction of innovative instrumentalities of state creation, elevation of local government to the third-tier of the federal system, adaptive revenue allocation systems, establishment of National Youth Service Corps, and federal character principle among others. These instrumentalities were all believed to enhance the accommodative prodigy of the federal solution in Nigeria³⁵. Soon after, especially since the late 1980s, crisis and instability engulfed Nigeria's federal system. This crisis which has taken the form of articulations of deep-seated grievances and contestations against the alleged imperfections and injustices of the federal structure, which ranged from mild to legal constitutional petitions and protests to violent and uncompromising conflicts, uprising and clamouring for secession. The crisis has transformed away from accommodative nationalism to self-determination nationalism. The crisis is all about hierarchical and contested citizenship, inequitable access to power and resources accentuated by perceptions of relative deprivation, exclusion, marginalization and domination, local autonomy including control of local resources by state and local governments rather than the federal government and the establishment of state police. Others include bargained constitutional engineering to effectuate the restructuring of the polity to the end of what is commonly called true federalism.

Three major explanations can be advanced for the travail of Nigerian federalism and the present agitation for or against restructuring. First and foremost is the inability of the system to respond or adapt to the changing nature of demands from political society. As pointed out by William Livingston's sociological thesis, as the nature of the demand changes, federal instrumentalities are also expected to change; where they do not, as has clearly been the case in Nigeria, the dissonance or incongruence between the changes demanded and the state of the federal system in itself becomes a major source of tension, conflict, instability and crisis. The unwillingness of the all-powerful federal governments, including the post-1999 civilian democratic governments of Obasanjo and Jonathan, to install structures of the region (state) centred federal trajectory demanded by political society, which continues to support the agitation for true federalism is therefore, a major explanation of the present crisis of federation.

The second explanatory factor has more to do with the underlying character of politics and in particular, state politics. As it is fairly well known, politics is majorly about struggle for access to state resources, with rent seeking and patronage to boot. This form of politics, which encourages predatory behaviours on the part of the elite is very supportive of centralization. It is therefore, not surprising that Nigerian federalism has moved more in that direction. Indeed, one of the contradictions of the present federalist movement in Nigeria is that only a few of those advocating for restructuring actually have a proper understanding or political commitment to the true federal system beyond the immediate benefits that are likely accrue from the agitation. The question is how many of the registered political parties have a well-articulated view on federalism?

The third major explanation lies in the non-resolution of the question of what the federating units in Nigeria actually are. Although, like 1963 republican and 1979 presidential constitutions, the 1999 constitution recognizes states and local governments as the legal components of the federation (regions in the case of 1963 constitution), references to ethnic groups, religious

³⁵ Onwudiwe, Ebere and Rotimi T, Suberu. *Nigeria Federalism in Crisis: Critical Perspectives and Political Options* (ed.) Ibadan: John Archers for PEFS, 2005.

groups, place of origins and indigenous groups elsewhere in the constitution confer some legitimacy on these other categories as building blocks of the federation if not federating units. The ambiguity is particularly striking in the theory and practice of federal character principle which at once take states, ethnic groups, religious groups, geopolitical zones and regions as simultaneous bases of the country's federal character, In normal day-to-day politics, the situation is no less problematic, because most claims on the state are made more on the grounds of ethnic, communal, religious, indigenous, regional and geopolitical (zonal) identities.

In essence, groups such as 'Myeti Allah', IPOB, Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, MEND, Niger Delta Avengers, Afenifere, Odua People's Congress, Middle-Belt Congress etc. have intermediated political relations, including matters that belong to states as of right, and related with the federal government in ways that imply that ethnic nationalities and pan-regional groupings are more fundamental to the federal bargain than the states whose dis-aggregative origins make some of them artificial. These special groups have spearheaded the movements for the convoking a national conference and resource control. A situation where the powers of a state Governor are exercised at the discretion of a much more powerful pan-regional group/ association, or where the associations assume the roles constitutionally assigned to states is certainly not healthy for federalism. This has implications for Nigerian federalism. The recognition accorded these associations has provided ample space and weapons for discriminatory claims and practices, contested citizenship and conflicts along the divides of indigene-non-indigene/migrant/settler, religion and ethnicity. It also weakens the emergence of states and local governments as determinate centres of power and responsibility in the federation, thereby weakening the overall conflict management capacity of the system.³⁶

Conclusion: Restructuring Towards National Development and not Disintegration

Notwithstanding the crisis into which the federalist project has fallen in Nigeria, the adoption of the federal solution in the management of the country's diversity and political tensions has never been in doubt. Even military regimes resolutely upheld the sanctity of federalism as the basis for unity and national development. To Chief Bisi Akande, federalism is a necessity for Nigeria³⁷ to attain greater heights.

Recent developments have shown that a stronger central government undermines the federal system and should not be encouraged. It is not surprising that there are agitations for restructuring. According to Akande³⁸ "(t)oday, in Nigeria, all powers are already with the central government. At one time or the other, the central government has been tyrannical, inefficient and impotent and it is so much constituting a weight of big burden on the states' path to progress" and development. He called for an urgent review. However, there are several things that we need to put into consideration if the process of restructuring would yield desired effects.

Attention must be given to the three attributes of a federal system that are directly related to promotion of long term economic development. These are (i) efficient allocation of resources, (ii) fostering political participation and (iii) the protection of basic liberties and freedom³⁹. These attributes may be incorporated into any of the restructuring models.

³⁶ Onwudiwe, Ebere and Rotimi T, Suberu. *Nigeria Federalism in Crisis..* 2005.

³⁷ Akande, Bisi. *Restructuring: Nigeria's Approach to True Federalism*, Osun State Government, 2003.

³⁸ Akande, Bisi. *Restructuring*, 2003. 2

³⁹ Okediji, Tade. "Pluralism, Federalism and Economic Development". In *Federalism in Africa Vol. 1: Framing the National Question*. ed. Aaron T Gana and Samuel G. Egwu, Eriteria: Africa World Press, 2003. 198



The overall lesson of Nigeria's recent federal experience, notably the crisis and challenges as well as the search for true federalism, is that federal solutions are a function of the nature of society, to be specific, the demands made by political society. Federalism is true only when the restructuring process responds to and is capable of satisfying or managing societal demands and not planting seeds of discord and disunity. This is made manifest through identity politics being played by different ethnic –based socio cultural groups in Nigeria. The Nigerian system has been in crisis largely because the federal apparatuses have failed to respond to the changing demands from political society. The search for true federalism, is basically a search for a fit between demands and instrumentalities. It is worthy to note that this something that the federal government in spite of its dominant position can unilaterally ordain, if the process is to be legitimate and produce enduring "settlement". First, the constituent units from where the demands have emerged have to be part of the bargaining process. Second, this bargaining should be done with an open and democratic framework. If these necessary, but not sufficient conditions are met, the transformation of identity politics to politics of violent agitations may be averted.

It is significant, as a matter of emphasis, to point out that the nature of federalism is not static, it is dynamic and adaptive. This is so because it is driven by the forces that were bargained to bring it into being and that have to be periodically bargained as the nature of forces requiring resolution and management transforms.