

Challenges of Implementing the Federal Character Principles for National Unity in Nigeria

AbdulRasheed Hamza Bamidele

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Politics and Governance, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria

Email: abdulrasheedhbamidele@gmail.com

Dr. Raji Shittu

Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

Amin Amin

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Politics and Governance, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The federal character principle was adopted in Nigeria to promote unity in diversity and ensure equitable development in all the geo-political zones of the country within the range of socio-political and economic equity. However, the implementation of the federal character policies, especially at the federal level of governance has been criticized for favoring the Northern part of Nigeria against the other parts of the country. The objective of this paper was to examine the implications of the federal character principle for socio-economy equity and political stability in Nigeria. Findings from the study, which relied on secondary sources as its method of inquiry, were that the federal character principle was designed to create fairness, justice, and equity among different geo-political zones in Nigeria and reduce the fear of sectional domination. The policy has enthroned some measure of fairness, justice, and equity in public policies in Nigeria, including those related to employment opportunities, promotion in public service, geographical representation, and quota admission policies in federal educational higher institutions. However, the federal character policy is still bedeviled by nepotism and sectional interest in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Federal Character and National Unity*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria operates a federal system of government in which there is constitutional division of power among the three tiers of government, including the federal state and local government levels. There are many reasons for the adoption of a federal structure in Nigeria, which include the need to allow for the autonomy of the over 300 ethnic groups in Nigeria to develop at their own pace while federalism was also designed to bring governance closer to the people, especially at the community level (Dibie, 2017). The large size of the country along its diversities in culture also encourages each region to develop without any fear of domination of the minority tribes by the majority tribes of the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo.

Fifty-Nine years after independence, Nigeria is still battling with one of the major fall-outs of federalism, bordering on the federal character principle, which revolves around the equitable allocation of elective and appointive political offices, quota system admission policy along the desire for fiscal federalism. This equitable distribution of collective economic resources and political equity has become necessary because access to national positions and resources is still subject to intense controversy in Nigeria. This is partly due to the multi-ethnic nature of the country without proper implementation of the constitutional provision for equitable distribution of the economic resources to each region.

Since the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, the country has recorded nine constitutional amendments (1914, 1922, 1939, 1946, 1951, 1954, 1957, 1960 and 1999) all geared towards ensuring that Nigeria stays together as a single political entity within the confines of fairness, justice, and equity. Towards achieving this overriding objective, several devices have been invented to cope with the multifaceted diversity of Nigeria, one of which is the federal character policy, which was included in the proposition of the Constitution Drafting Committee initiated by late General Murtala Mohammed on the 18th of October, 1975.

Section 14(3) of the 1979 constitution of Nigeria presented the federal character principle with the proposition that:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria in order to promote national unity in such a way that there shall be no predominance of person or persons from a few states or a few ethnic or other sectional groups through marginal appointments by the government or in any of its agencies.

The federal character principle was included in the 1979 constitution to discourage sectional or regional loyalty. Thus, the federal character policy was included in the constitution to promote inter regional equity and achieve national unity by minimizing the disadvantages of the minority ethnic groups that stand to lose in a plain contest for political power due to their limited population and national geographical spread. The assumption inherent in the phrase "federal character" is that Nigeria has many different component units, who should be represented in the development compass of Nigeria as a constituent part of the whole. The federal character principle therefore envisaged that no particular group in the country should be kept out of the Nigeria developmental projects in preference of a particular group. The main objective of the federal character principle was expressed implicitly in section 15 (Sub-section D) of the 1979 constitution which states that "the motto of the federal republic of Nigeria shall be unity and faith, peace and progress". The necessity for unity within the federal character principle in the above sub-section and Nigeria polity as a whole become justified when we consider the peculiarity of Nigeria situation, a country with about 300 ethnic groups using over 400 languages and dialects, geographical and physical disparity all these made the unity of Nigeria to be more complicated by the socio-economic diversity in Nigeria, which is largely characterized by a plural society. The federal character principle is therefore focused on unifying the diverse socio-cultural and political interests in Nigeria towards national unity and peaceful co-existence without any form of marginalization. The Nigeria government, therefore, adopted federalism as a route towards national integration.

Despite the lofty idea surrounding the establishment of the federal character principle today, a major setback to the policy is the large scale violation of the federal character policies in the appointment, promotion and selection processes in the public service, which has undermined objective selection process, and undue politicization of issues of national importance. Such lopsided application of the federal character

principle has enthroned ethno-centrism and ethno-nationalism that is tilted towards national disintegration, which is what the federal character principle was established to eliminate, thus giving the impression that the advantages of the federal character principle far outweigh its usefulness as a means of obtaining national unity in diversity. This paper examines the federal character policies and its implications for Nigeria unity in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted by Charles (2014), the idea of federal character principle was first promoted under the Murtala/Obasanjo system (1975 – 1979 Regime) having been included in the Constitution Drafting Committee. The federal character principle as an integrative mechanism stands for fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status, and influence as it ensure broad public participation in the nation's affairs while stimulating development (Osagie, 2013). However, the application of the principle had remained problematic because of the disparity in the standard of western education attained among the states in the federation (Mohammed, 1998). In underscoring the inadequacies of the utilization of the Federal Character principle in Nigeria, Gboyega (1998) argues that issues of making public institutions reflect the federal character was taken up haphazardly giving rise to arbitrariness and victimization of some unfortunate public servants. Ekeh (1989: 34) taking a comparative position argues that "the most radical and damaging application of federal character has been in the bureaucracies and public services of the federation, where many specialists were not employed just because their quotas have been filled through the federal character principle. The argument of Ekeh (1989: 34) is that the federal character principle has undermined the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy, which largely revolves around objective selection process.

The Federal character principle is perceived differently by Nigerians from different regions (Suberu, 2001). While the Northern part of the country consider the policy as a good principle to enthrone fairness and equity, many southerners part of the country sees the policy as being established to give unhindered socio-political and economic power to the North, who does not have the required educational qualification for such favorable reservation. Thus, the federal character principle is one of the most disputable issues in contemporary Nigeria. While some Nigerians sees it as a credible avenue for promoting fairness, justice and equity, others sees it as an attempt to confer socio-political and economic advantages on the Northern part of Nigeria ahead of the other sub-regions.

Theoretical Framework

Equity theory is adopted for this study as its theoretical framework of analysis. The theory focuses on determining whether the distribution of resources is fair to all the contending parties in a power relation. Equity theory was first developed in the 1960s by J. Stacy Adams, who asserted that partners seek to maintain equity between the inputs that they bring to a nation and outcomes that they receive from it against the perceived inputs and outcomes of others (Adams, 1963). As noted by Stacy, equity is measured by comparing the ratio of contribution and benefits (rewards) for each person in power a relation. To maximize individuals' rewards, there is need for a distributing system where resources can be fairly divided amongst members of a group. As noted by the author, inequality in relationships will cause those within the power equation to be unhappy to a degree proportional to the amount of inequality. The belief is that nations value fair treatment which causes them to be loyal within the relationship of co-partners in the state. Equity theory is concerned with the perceptions of power contending unit in the Nigerian federation have about how they are treated as compared to others. Equity theory proposes that a person's motivation is based on what he or

she considers being fair when compared to others (Redmond, 2010). As noted by Gogia (2010), when applied to the nation or state, equity theory focuses on state compensation when compared to others. Nations or state want to be compensated fairly for their contributions but if a nation or state feel unfairly treated may be compelled to disloyal and sabotages government properties and even lead to social unrest.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A secondary source was largely adopted for this study as paper made use of journals, textbooks, newspapers, and government documents that are central to the federalism and federal character principle.

The Principle and Practice of Federal Character and its Implications for Nigeria's National Unity

The Federal character principle is characterized by fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in Nigeria towards equitable distribution of public appointments, political representation and promotion in the federal civil service, among others. It was designed to address minority issue, discrimination based on ethnicity and other parochial interests. The federal principle was also designed to address inequity in resource allocation, lopsided power-sharing, and employment and admission placement in higher institutions. It therefore represents the interest of the different segments of Nigeria in the political economy of the Nigeria through the zoning and quota system. The federal character principle applies to all the three tiers of government in Nigeria to strengthen and play down all centrifugal and centripetal forces which can disintegrate the polity. This is why at the national level; all the states of the federation are adequately represented in the federal executive council. Similarly, all the local governments are represented at the state executive council, and in all forms of appointments and promotion. The focus of the federal character principle is to:

- i. Promote national unity in a multi-ethnic society.
- ii. Reduced to the barest minimum, the tension of inter-ethnic and sectional rivalry as witnessed in the first republic.
- iii. Foster national loyalty by giving every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging notwithstanding the diversity by ethnic origin, culture, language, or religion.
- iv. Promote the interest of the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria
- v. Prevent the domination of Nigerian affairs by a section of the country or a few ethnic group
- vi. Promote equitable distribution of national resources and revenue allocation
- vii. Ensure equal representation and access to political power.

An appreciation of the need for the concept of federal character was therefore based on those issues as highlighted above which were seen as solution to the conflict triggers of the past, which has undermine national integration in Nigeria. The federal character principle is also embedded in the political process in the following areas that concerns the election of the president, who must be elected by two third of the Nigerian states irrespective of which geo-political zone is producing the president. Virtually all the political

parties in Nigeria also have the rotational principle in their elective principle for all the geo-political zones have fair representation in political power sharing. The composition of the cabinet and the recruitment of the armed forces are also being done with the representation of each geo-political zone in the process.

The Challenges of Implementing the Federal Character Principles

The doctrine of federal character principle is still bugged by loyalty to the state rather than the federal government, thus affecting the national unity and integration as envisaged in the federal character principle. More so, the federal character principle has not worked adequately because of the following:

- i. There was overgeneralization in the formulation of the principle of federal character in the constitution. The problems before the constitution-makers concerned inter-ethnic group conflict and attachment to the ethnic group with resulting tenuous development of national loyalty in adopting federal character solution, the principle was generalized to the area where the problem did not exist within the same ethnic groups.
- ii. Federal character as a principle seeks a permanent solution to what ought to be and may well turn out to be a temporary problem of ethnicity. Ethnic boundaries should not be cast in iron, as the principle of federal character threatens to do, these boundaries do changes and may ease up in the course of history.
- iii. The principle of federal character overloads and overburdens the political system. It takes a lot to service the government machine of federal character with its insistence that ethnic groups must be satisfied in terms of appointment. The federal character has not been promoted to national loyalty but alienation. Those who hail from states and ethnic group which has suffered from federal character discrimination became resentful and alienated from the overall body politics while those who gain through federal character maneuvers are grateful and presumably loyal to the federal character units that flavored them rather than nation.

COMPOSITION OF FEDERAL CHARACTER – EXECUTIVE COUNCILS 1960 – 2020

KEY MINISTRIES

REGIME S/ ADMINIS TRATION	DEFENSE	INTERNA L AFFAIRS	AGRICUL TURAL RESOURCE S	PETROLE UM	STEEL	WATER RESOURC ES	WORKS & HOUSING	COMMERC E TRADE	TRANSPOR T AVIATION	COMMUNI CATION	EDUCATIO N	Mines & POWER	FINANCE	INDUSTR IES	F.C.T
Balewa (1960-66)	1. Ribadu 2. M.I Wada	UsamnSamu & Alli	AladeLamuye				Inuwawada, A. Ogunsanya& S. Shagan	ZB Dipochaima& K.O. Mbadiwe	R.A Njoku& Z.B Dipocharama	Akifosile& R.A. Njoku	AjaNwachuk wu& R.O.A Akinjide	Maitamasu le			
Gowon (1966-74)	Yakubu Gowon	Kan Salem	Alh. Gasau & J.O.J. Okezie				Femi Okunnu&Se gunObasanjo	AlhMonguro & W. Briggs	J. Tarka& R.A.B Dikko	Aminu Kano, J. Tarka& M. Mhuammed	W. Briggs & A. Y Eke	R.A.B Dikko& Ali Manguno			
M. Muhamm ad (1975-76)	I.D. Bisalla	O.A Shikafi	E.D. Mafemi	M.T.O. Abobo		William Osisiogu	R. A. Adeleye&Ca pt O. Olumide	M. Shuwa	Lt. Col M. Yar'dua	S. O. Williams	A. A. Ali	E. D Ekong			
Obasanjo (1976-79)	O. Obasanjo	O.A Shikafi	B.O Mafemi	M. Buhari		Ibrahim El Yakub	MuktarMuh' d	M. Shuwa	Magoro S. Bakare	S. O Williams	A. A Ali	KachallaBa rku			AjoseAdeo gun
Shagari (1979-83)	IyaAbubak ar & A. Oniyangi	B. Maitamasule, IyaAbubakar & Ali Baba	Ibrahim Gausu	YahayaGusa u	P. Onango, M. Morele& A. Ogbeh	NdaguMamu du	V.I Masik, W. Dosunmu& S.M Essang	Shahu I & B. Maitama Yusuf	V. Dikko, S. Mafyai& Dam Musa I. A	A. Oniyangi, E. O Obulu, A. Ogbeli& I. Shaahu	O. Madueke& G. Usman	M. Hassan			J. Kadiya
Buhari (1984-85)	M. Buhari	M. Magoro	B. Shaib	Tam David West	R. Lukman	B. Shaib	Ibrahim Y. &Abdullahi	Y. M. Tukur	P. S. Koshoni	Ahmed Abdullahi	A. Ibrahim	R. Lukman			M. Vatsa
Babangida (1985-83)	Domkat Bali	John Shagaya	Akinrinmade & M.G. Nasko	David West & R. Lukman	R. Kulman, T. David West & B. S. Musa		A. Abdullahi& A. Umar	M. G Nasko& Ismail Mamman	J. T. Useni	A. T. Ayasa	J. Aminu	R. Lkuman, David West & B. S. Musa			M. Vatsa& A. Abdullahi
Shonekan (1993-93)	SaniAbach a	E.S. Yusuf	Prof. Jerry Gana	Don Etiebet	Alh. Hassan Adamu	Isa Mohammed	LateefJakan de& Kareem Adisa	Bola KuforijiOlubi	Bashir Dalhatu	DapoSarumi	Prof Abraham Inofie& A. Y Eke				GadoNask o
Abacha (1993-98)	Abacha	Alex Ibru B. Dalhatu Kingibe	AdamuCirom a & NalawiBuwai	Don Etiebet, Umaru Baba,	B. Dalhatu& B.	Isa Mohammed	LateefJakan de& Kareem Adisa	AilfredOkilo &OdoguEmm an	Ebenezer B & Ibrahim G	AbubakarRimi & Patrick Aziza	IyorchiaAyu& DaudaBoruma				J. T. Useni

				UmaruDembo	GanaKingibe										
Abubakar (1998-99)	Abubakar	Musa Yakubu	Alh. Alfa Wali	Abubakar	Bello Suleiman	HamzaSakwaa	Gen. G. Muhammed	Patrick Aziza	Benoni Briggs & Festus Porbeni	A. D. M Uwenwairi	Samuel Oni				M. Kotangora
Obasanjo (1999-07)	T.Y. Danjuma & Mrs. D. Adelaja	S.m. Afolabi	Sanni S. Saura & Mr. U Agbobu		Bola Ige&DanjumaGoje	M. B Kaliel& Precious Nigeiale	Tony Anenih&IsiahBalat	Mustapha Bello &YomiEdu	KewaChikwa &Alh Bello Tafida	Muhammed A. &HarunaElewi	TundeAdenira n&AlhBatagarawa		AdamuCiroma& Mature Kuye	IyorchiaAyu&LwarenceMwuruku	Ibrahim Bunu& Solomon Ewuga
ADMINISTRATION	DEFENSE	N. PLANNING COMMISSION	AGRICULTURAL & WATER R.	PETROLEUM	INTERIOR	MINE AND STEEL DEVELOPMENT	WORKS & HOUSING	POLICE AFFAIRS	TRANSPORT	COMMUNICATION	EDUCATION	POWER	FINANCE	JUSTICE	F.C.T
Yar'Adua (2007-10)	Yayale Ahmed, Shettima M & Godwin Abbe	M. SanusiDagash&ShamsuddenUsman	Abba Sayyadi R.	RidwanLukman	Godwin Abbe &Shettima Mustapha	.S. TunjiIshola &Diezani A	Hassan Muh'dLawal	IbrahimLame	D. Alison-Madueke& Ibrahim Bio	John Odey& Dora Akunyili	IgweAja-Nwachukwe& Sam Egwu	RilwanLanre B	ShamsuddeenUsman& Mansur M	M. Aondoakaa &Adetokunbo K	A. Modibbo U &AdamuAliero
ADMINISTRATION	DEFENSE	N. PLANNING COMMISSION	MINES & STEEL DEVELOPMENT	PETROLEUM	INTERIOR	POLICE AFFAIRS	WORKS	HEALTH	TRANSPORT	INFO & COMMUNICATION	EDUCATION	POWER	FINANCE	JUSTICE	F.C.T
JONATHAN (2010-15)	Adetokunbo K. &Murtala S. Yar'Adua	ShansuddeenUsman	Musa Muh'dSada	D. Alison-Madueke	E. Iheanacho & Humphrey Enemakwu A	AlhAdamu Waziri	S. Sanusi& Chris O.	Suleiman Bello	Yusuf Sulaiman	Prof Dora Akuyili&LabaranMaku	Prof Ruqayyatu A. Rufa'i	Nuhu S. W	O. O. Aganga&Adere W. B	Adoke Bello	BalaMuhammed
ADMINISTRATION	UMANITARIAN AFFAIRS	SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY	AVIATION	PETROLEUM	INTERIOR	COMMUNICATION	WORKS & HOUSING	TRADE & INVESTMENT	TRANSPORT	WATER RESOURCES	EDUCATION	POWER	FINANCE, BUDGET & NATIONAL PLANNING	JUSTICE	F.C.T
BUHARI (2015 TILL DATE)	Sadiya Umar Faruk	Mohammed Abdullahi	SirikaHadi	M. Buhari	RaufAregbesola	Ali Isa P.	BabatundeFashola	MaryaKatagum	RotimiAmaechi	Suleiman Adamu	AddamuAdamu	SalehMamman	Zainab Ahmed	AbubakriMalam	Muh'd Musa B.

Source: Wikipedia

The above table speaks for itself. The key ministries are regarded as being important to continued safeguard of Northern interests although each state has a representative in the cabinet Northerners occupied key ministries.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper sees that the practice of the federal character principle in Nigeria experiences a significant inconsistency, because it brings about division amongst Nigerians rather than foster national unity as was originally intended by its proponents as a policy option for managing the challenge of equal representation of people from different segments of the society in a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria. It is a fact that Northerner's tribe has held on to power since independence and it has benefited them more than any ethnic group relative to public offices, economic issues, and military posting among other issues all in the name of federal character. Meanwhile, other ethnic groups like the Southern minority that contribute much more to the Nigerian economy than any other ethnic group had less benefited from federal character. It is polite and imperative to submit that the federal character has shifted to "Northern supremacy" in the Nigeria polity and since we are in the journey to another republic the principle must be re-calculated and also Nigerians have become an embodiment of deceit, egocentric and hypersensitive because no tribe wants to be dominated by another.

If Nigeria wants to fight the domination of one tribe by another it must understand what it is out to. For instance, wishful thinking will not help us. The narrow egotistical striving and sadistic impulses for one's advantage as it had characterized the past years must be thrown into the dustbin. But before a change can be effective, there must be a total education and socialization of all Nigerians. With full education, ignorance and deceit will be eradicated. In achieving this, the Nigeria leaders should evolve a system where all Nigerians communities or individuals who have the talent or know-how to do so far the benefits of all Nigerians.

The federal character principle must be fairly applied and Nigerians no matter their place of origin must be made to have a feeling of belonging. The country is too far complex for a narrow power game or for the enthronement of the domination of select groups of the elite who masquerade as ethnic, religion, or sectional champion such maneuvers and manipulation are doomed to fail. Conclusively, the lop-side aspects of our national life among various groups were only historical. With proper planning, dedication, and sacrifice it require, Nigeria would in a matter of time redress whatever imbalanced there rather than creating cracks in its national life and thereby keeping animosities.

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