International Journal for Social Studies
Available at https://journals.pen2print.org/index.php/ijss

ISSN: 2455-3220
Volume 05 Issue 03
March 2019

Nigeria's Federalism; a study of its Evolution, Development, Practice and its Restructuring

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1.0 Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the Possibilities inherent in Nigeria's Federalism; with a critical appraisal of its Evolution, Development, Practice and issues relating to the persistent demand for Nigeria's Political Restructuring.In applying Riker's Political Theory of Federal Formations,the study discovered that although federalism is generally conceived as a system meant to integrate diverse groups, especially when these groups are characterized by institutional diversity and organized into a single polity, Nigeria's federalism has overtime failed to meet this criteria, thus the persistent and consistent call for the restructuring of Nigeria's federalism.

Keywords:*Federalism, Restructuring, Development*

2.0 Introduction

Federalism connotes the existences of two levels of government; each constitutionally or jurisdictionally empowered to make decision independent of each other within the legislature sphere assigned to it. The classic definition of a federal government, as provided by Wheare (1963:1), sees it as a system of government in which sovereignty is divided between the central and state governments. Wheare (1967) added that in this form of government, central and regional governments are co-ordinate in the sense that neither level of government is subordinate to the other in legal authority. He concluded that in this system of government, each level of government should be limited to its own sphere and, within that sphere, should be independent of the other. This system of government can therefore be

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contrasted with a Unitary System in which the component units are legally subordinate to the central government (Wheare, 1967). This form of government is more suitable for societies with complexity of diversities viz, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, racial, religious and so on, as well as other cleavages which are territorially defined.

However, the nature of diversities helps in a nation's decision to adopt the aggregative (occurs when a single/unitary sovereign State desires to transfer or share its sovereign power i.e., centralization) or dis-aggregative (de-centralization) type of federalism. Nigeria therefore falls into the latter because of the wide diversities. Under this type, there exist a balkanization of formerly unitary state near disintegration and its diversities which progress to a state. Thus, from 1914 to 1946, 1963, 1967, 1976, 1987 and 1993 the Nigerian Federation experienced a great deal of splits. The demand for state creation increased during the Second Republic (1979-1983) due to lack of proper attention to all sections of such communities and such inequality could only be corrected if states are further divided (Ajagun, 2004). In 1976 when the late General Murtala Mohammed was creating additional seven states, he stipulated that the demand for state had been on the increase because of poor leadership. Such poor leadership results from deficiency in satisfying all sections of the community (Mohammed, 1975). A disaggregative federation is therefore a reconciliation mid-point between the polar perils of imperium and anarchy.

To this extent, federalism is a system meant to integrate diverse groups, especially when these groups are characterized by institutional diversity and organized into a single polity. However, in theory, Nigeria is said to be practicing Federalism since 1954. In fact, evidence on ground points to the opposite direction. That is that the government is tending progressively toward a unitary state. This is especially so in the area of sharing of functions and resources available in the country between the central government and the component units on the one hand and between the government and citizens on the other (Ajagun, 2004).

In line with this historical evolution of Nigerian federalism, it should be noted that, the choice of federalism as the preferred system of government for Nigeria was not accidental. Given the heterogeneity of Nigerian polity, the founding fathers of Nigeria adopted the federal system as the most viable option of protecting the core interest of the federating units. This was demonstrated in the federal constitution, especially in the 1963 federal republican constitution, that clearly defined the jurisdictions of the federating units. For example, each of the federating units had its own constitution, one of the key properties of federalism. It should be noted that, before the attainment of independence by Nigeria in 1960, the federating units – Eastern Nigeria, Northern Nigeria and Western Nigeria – were, in all intents and purposes independent entities. That the three federating units attained their independent in 1957 (Eastern and Western Nigeria) and 1959 (Northern Nigeria) further buttressed their respective sovereignty. If they had wanted, there was nothing preventing any

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of them to go their separate ways as independent states in the international community in 1957 and 1959 respectively. Thus, when some contemporary analysts of Nigerian politics blame the British amalgamation of 1914 as the source of Nigeria problems, they should be reminded of the lost opportunity exhibited by Nigerian leaders to disengage from the forced amalgamation when they had the choice in 1957. Like Nigeria, the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was also a creation of British rule. It is significant to note that, unlike Nigeria, the constituent units of Rhodesia and Nyasaland elected to go their separate ways by becoming the independent state of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi respectively.

The recent security challenges the Nigerian state has been subjected to have also led to calls for the restructuring of the country. There is Boko Haram insurgency in the North East and illegal oil bunkering in the South-South. Religious extremism, kidnapping, murder and other acts of criminality currently confront the Nigerian state. The thinking of some state rightists is that Nigeria needs to remove police affairs from the exclusive legislative list and repost it to the concurrent legislative list so that even the states can have their own police formations. Nwabueze (2004: 56) aver that almost all the other federations in the world have the police in the concurrent list and that there is no justifiable reason why Nigeria should be an exception. Nwabueze argued further that a state governor cannot be called chief security officer of his state, as he is presently described, when he does not have even a police formation under his command. He contended that the constitution should be amended to empower states that can afford to establish their own police. For those on this side of the fence, the absence of constitutional provision for state police makes Nigerian federalism not to be true. Even though the police is currently in the exclusive list, it was in the concurrent list in the 1950s. The movement of the item from one list to the other reflects the dynamics of federalism in Nigeria.

Federalism is a formidable mechanism for managing plural societies. However, ethno-religious conflicts have tended to impact the effectiveness of the federalist logic in countries such as Nigeria. With different development plans by the government towards sustaining the nation, little or no results seem to be forthcoming because Nigeria is continuously weighed-down by ethno-religious burdens. This research explores the impact of ethno-religious conflicts on Nigeria's federalism and sustainability, with greater emphasis on the increasing saga of Political Restructuring and Political Stability in Nigeria. The research argues that the numerous crises facing the Nigerian State not only undermines the effectiveness of federalism to foster national unity and security, but also threatens the stability of the federation and sustainable development.

Furthermore, the desire of every federal state is to ensure unity across the nation, because it seeks to promote peace and unity in diversity which is a solution to seemingly differences and contestation among people. However while federalism benefits most western

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countries the reverse is the case for Nigeria considering the high level of political instability, ethnic crises and ethno-religious crises amongst others. The reason is not farfetched Nigeria is operating a federal system in an awkward manner and this has made frictions and clashes possible which are currently posing a threat to her political development. Nigeria state has over the years been faced by so many problems and has become a conflict ridden terrain which kills innocent citizens. The most recent of these problems is the Boko Haram, Farmers/Herdsmen crisis and these stand as a big threat to the co-operate existence of the Nigeria federal state thus necessitating calls for the Political Restructuring of the Nigerian State.

Interestingly, Nigeria's federal system seems to be saddled with a lot of challenges. This is especially true when looked at from the perspective its politics have contributed to rising tensions which threaten the stability of the country. The tension has led to a no-hold-barred struggle between the various ethnic and interest groups to capture the state and its attendant resources. The resultant effect is a deep sense of alienation felt by the diverse groups that has led to politics of ethnic identity. The major challenge associated with the practice of federalism as practiced in Nigeria was experienced immediately after independence when Nigeria adopted the republican form of government. The practice of federalism in Nigeria has been as problematic as it involved diverse ethnic groups. The major problem which this research is set out to tackle is to identify imminent problems of federalism in Nigeria's democratic setting. From this background the researcher wants to investigate federalism and restructuring in Nigeria, its challenges and prospects.

Additionally, the litany of challenges confronting Nigeria is that of leadership, the result of which has brought Nigeria to its knees. Chinua Achebe (1984:15) once averred,

> The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air or anything else.…The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are hallmarks of true leadership.

The assertion by Achebe summarizes the dilemma of the Nigerian State; hence the persistent call for restructuring. Based on Achebe's analysis of why things are the way they are in Nigeria, it has been assumed in several quarters that the leaders are largely ethnicists in orientation; they present false image of Nigeria, they lack patriotism, promote the culture of social injustice, impunity and mediocrity and they lack discipline. All these have contributed to the present scenario Nigeria finds herself hence the need for this study on restructuring federalism in Nigeria.

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3.0 Riker's Political Theory of Federal Formations

The most notable work on the political theory of origin of federations is that of Riker, who made no pretence about his attempt to build a theory particularly on the origin of federations, and the operation and significance of federalism. Riker's intention was to develop a political science that would provide "testable and tested generalisations", and he rationalised his decision to do this by lamenting that, Given this assertion, it becomes pertinent to begin with Riker's notion of federalism, as this may offer an insight into his theory. Riker defined federalism as

> "a bargain between prospective national leaders and officials of constituent governments for the purpose of aggregating territory, the better to lay taxes and raise armies" (Rikker: 1964).

Implicit in this definition is that the bargain is like a contract involving some offer and acceptance. It also implies that the 'rational' politicians making the offer must be convinced of the benefits derivable from the proposed union, while their counterparts accepting the offer would also have to be convinced that the advantages of belonging to the union outweigh the disadvantages. According to Riker,

> The politicians who offer the bargain desire to expand their territorial control, usually either to meet an external military or diplomatic threat or to prepare for military or diplomatic aggression and aggrandisement.

Riker's theory is therefore predicated on the assumption that federalism is an outcome of political bargaining among rational politicians, built upon a two-fold hypothesis: the expansion condition, and the military condition, which according to Riker, are necessary for the formation of a federation. Riker began the formulation of his theory by bluntly dismissing earlier ideas on the formation of federations as "ideological" and "reductionist" fallacies, and particularly branded Deutsch's explanation of social and economic conditions as a "reductionist fallacy" (Rikker: 1964). The main weakness of Deutsch's nine "essential conditions", he argued, is that it precludes the political aspect of federal formation – a political bargain between two sets of politicians. The following more aptly presents the argument against the Deutsch conditions: "in bypassing the political, in bypassing the act of bargaining itself, it leaves out the crucial condition of the predisposition to make the bargain" (Rikker: 1964). Riker contended further that the list only provides a set of frequently observed conditions that propel politicians towards a predisposition to unite in some way or another. For Riker, therefore, earlier ideas on the formation of federations are ideological rather than scientific.

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In an attempt to justify the validity of his data and also to demonstrate that his theory was scientific, Riker claimed to have examined

> "all the instances of the creation of a federalism since 1786, given most detailed attention to the invention of centralised federalism in the United States",

Let us begin with Australia, where Riker conceded that economic factors cannot be completely ignored in the formation of the federation, and also that there was no immediate threat when the federation was formed. However, he pointed out that the presence of some "military-diplomatic concerns" informed the decision taken by the founding fathers of the country (Rikker: 1964). The two main claims made by Riker regarding Australia can be summarised thus: that the formation of the Australian Federation was precipitated by the fear of Japanese imperialism in East Asia, and that because these threats were relatively weak, it was necessary only to create a relatively peripheralised federation that reflected the strength of provincial as opposed to national loyalties. In the case of India, Riker posited that the formation of the federation was occasioned by external threats from Pakistan, which was "more warlike, better armed, and more resentful", and internal threats from the princely states, which were "a collection of partially self-governing colonies in 1947" (Rikker: 1964). Riker, however, recognised the influence of the constitutional engineering that culminated in the formation of the Indian Federation, particularly the influence of The Government of India Act of 1935, yet preferred to argue that the two forms of threat mentioned earlier combined to give birth to the Federation. For Malaysia, Riker asserted authoritatively that the formation of the Malaysian Federation fulfils his hypothesis. Specifically, he claimed that the military condition was present and was evidenced in "the existence of communist guerrillas, supported from China", whilst the expansion condition was also present due to the need to reconcile the previously federated states (Rikker: 1964). He declared with certainty that,

> "the clearly discernible motive for this federalism was, therefore, a fear of Indonesian imperialism and a reluctance, on the part of Singapore, Borneo, and others to accept Malayan domination" (Rikker: 1964).

In a stunning criticism of Riker's theory of origin, Dikshit (1971; 1975) asserted that Riker was neither the first nor the only scholar to point out the importance of a military condition or external threat, or the expansion condition, as this had been articulated by scholars before Riker, including William Maddox, H. R. G. Greaves and Kenneth Wheare. For example, Maddox (1941: 11-22) had observed that some of the motivations behind the formation of federations are: fear, a calculated expectation of advantage, and a response to some unifying ideal or myth; but fear which may develop from direct attempts at intimidation, or from a sustained and profound feeling of insecurity, is the most important of

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these political or psychological forces. Dikshit (1975: 223) particularly dismissed Riker's theory as untenable on the ground that his own study of the federations of West Germany and Austria had demonstrated that Riker's so-called necessary conditions were absent.

It must be stated at this juncture that some scholars are sympathetic to the Rikerian theory. Notable among them is McKay (2004), who observes that the main critique of the Rikerian theory revolves around Riker's insistence that the threats to external or internal security must always be present for a federation to be formed and must always be military/diplomatic in nature. McKay contends that Riker's theory cannot simply be flawed on the ground that all countries actually or potentially face threats, as claimed by other critics such as King. Pitching tent with Riker, McKay also argued that external threats may lead to annexation, treaty or war, and/or federation, especially when certain special conditions are met, and the level of threat will determine the particular arrangements arrived at. Nevertheless, McKay concedes that Riker's exclusion of the social and economic conditions is too restrictive because these factors were equally important to federal formation, but has praised Riker's theory for providing "us with the most effective heuristic tools at our disposal in this subject area" McKay (2004).

4.0 The Concept of Federalism

The concept federalism is etymologically derived from the Latin word foetus. The Latin word foetus means treaty or agreement. Hence federation means a union of states based upon treaty or agreement. Federalism did not begin as a concept that has to do with social or political organization. According to Awa earlier writers on federalism interchangeably used such terms as federal, confederacy, federation and confederation but that these terms are not the same in their modern usages (Awa 1976; Ugwu 1998:1). To this end, it must be noted that there is no universally accepted definition of the word federalism; the concept of federalism has received broad scholarly attention. Early writers on the concept of federalism such as Jean Bodin, Olto, Cosmanus among others, viewed federalism as a voluntary form of political union of independent authorities. The union either temporary or permanent, was based on the need for special common purposes like defense, trade, communications and other reasons that would benefit the parties involved. Contemporary writers on the concept of federalism such as Livingstone, Macmahon, and Riker among others viewed federalism as a mutual interactions between and direct contact with, at least two levels of government, McKay (2004).

It has been discussed and agreed at many fora that the discussion of contemporary federalism seems to have started with Kenneth C. Wheare who saw federalism as a constitutional arrangement which divides the law making powers and functions between two

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levels of government in such a way that each within its respective spheres of jurisdiction and competence, is independent and coordinate (Wheare, 1953). According to Wheare, this constitutional form is brought about by circumstances where people are prepared to give up only certain limited powers and wish to retain other limited powers to be exercised by coordinated authorities. He adds that coordinate supremacy of all the levels of government with regard to their respective functions remains a cardinal principle of federalism. This means that federalism has emerged as a particular kind of functional arrangement between states for living and working together nationally while presenting a measure of separate identity. Corroborating Wheare's definition and description of federalism, Kapur (1986) defined federalism as

> "a dual government where powers are divided and distributed by the constitution between a central government and regional or state governments". Such powers are original and deprived. The component units are "coordinate independent authorities within their allotted sphere of jurisdiction".

Kapur went further to assert that the component units must also be left with adequate economic resources to run their administrations and perform the functions assigned to them satisfactorily without being dependent of the doles of the national government. According to Babalawe.

> 'a federal state is one in which there is an explicit and constitutional demarcation of powers and functions among national and sub-national units.

Moreover, the powers and responsibilities are distributed in such a manner as to protect the existence of authority of both levels of polity each of which is independent within its own sphere… Federalism refers to the doctrine which advocates and promotes the form of organization of a state in which power is dispersed or decentralized by contract as a means of safeguarding local identities and individual liberties (Babalawe, 1998: 92). Babalawe (1998) went further to posit that

> federalism describes not only the structure of a state; it also designates its political process and political culture. An important characteristics which distinguishes federal system from non-federal systems, is non-centralization of power. In a federal polity, there is an irrevocable division of power between the central and component units.

It is pertinent to note that in Nigeria's federal experience, the above noted principle of Wheare's and Babalawe's federalism as well as Kapur's definition and description can no longer hold. This is because the central government has usurped the powers, which were

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formally exercised by the regional governments. While Rodee et al (1983: 52) defined federalism as "a constitutional definition of governmental power between the national and constituent units", Friedrich (1963: 585) sees federalism as "a union of group united by one or more common objectives but retaining their distinctive group being for other purposes… it unites without destroying themselves that are uniting and it is meant to strengthen them in their group relations" Along this same analytical line, Akindele (1995: 138) defines a federal state as

> "a political entity or country where powers and indispensable decisions are exercised and made at two or multilateral levels of government in accordance with the strict mutually agreed constitutional provisions of the country concerned."

It could be argued that these positions formed the basis of Kolawole's (1986: 1) claim that "federalism is anchored on consentient relationship" and that of Eleazar (1968: 360) that

> "federalism can exist only where there is considerably tolerance of diversity and willingness to take political action through conciliation even when the power to act unilaterally is available".

Federalism therefore, is a system in which two levels of government, federal and regional (state) exist side by side with each possessing certain assigned powers and function (Okolo 2011:2). Federalism has also been seen as a situation whereby geographical distribution of power to govern is desired or has been achieved in a way of giving several governmental units of the system, some degree of security- some guarantee of continue existence as organization and shareholders of power (Sawer 1968). For Karl (1968)

> Federalism is a situation whereby the federal and regional (state) governments are limited to their spheres and within those spheres should be independent of the other. Dicey on the other hand sees federalism as a political arrangement meant to reconcile national unity and diversity with the maintenance of the rights of the state.

Federalism as seen by Okolo (2011:4) is a type of society operating a constitution, which works at two levels of government as a national and as a collection of related but self-standing units. Federalism is that form of government where component units of a political organization participate in sharing powers and functions in a cooperative manner though the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity among others tend to pull the people apart.

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From the foregoing therefore, it is then understood that federalism must combine both structure and process. Indeed, only where the process of governance as well as the political culture reflects federal principles is the structure meaningful. There is the freedom of people in each basic component of the federal polity to determine how they are governed. The constituent states/regions have considerable coverage in organizing the forms of government and procedures of governance and must not rely on financial support from the central government, thus negating the principle of financial independence of the state governments as identified by Wheare. In this respect, Wheare (1963) stated thus:

> … finally, if government authorities in a federation are to be really coordinate with each other in actual practice as well as in law it is essential that there should be available to each of them under its own unfettered control financial resources sufficient for the performance of the functions assigned to it under the constitution…

Furthermore, Wheare notes that,

> ..it follows therefore that both state and federal authorities in a federation must be given the power in the constitution to have access and control its sufficient resources (Wheare 1953: 106).

For some scholars however the distribution of responsibilities and obligations can also be done by the parliament. Garner (1952:348) cited in Johari (1982:281) contend that

> federalism presupposes that the totality of governmental power is divided and distributed by the national constitution or the organic act of parliament creating it, between a central government and the government of the individual states or other territorial subdivisions of which the federation is composed.

Thus the under listed attributes can be ascribed to federalism; the existence of two tiers of government; the existence of a central political authority alongside the presence of political authority at regional or state level; the presence of a written and rigid constitution that lays out the grand rules for engagement; and the division of governmental authority and public resources between the central and territorial political authorities.

5.0 On Restructuring of Nigeria's Federalism

The word "restructuring" has acquired widespread usage, with sonorous reverberations, particularly in Nigeria's public space within the last 18 months of the coming to office of the Buhari Administration, Unongo, (2017). In historical terms, it must be emphasized that this is not the first time that words with prefixes such as "Re" have found their ways into national consciousness and reckoning. As a matter of fact, after the bitterly

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fought civil war between 1967 and 1970 in the country, the Yakubu Gowon Administration coined the three "Re's," namely, "Re-conciliation:" "Reconstruction;" and "Rehabilitation;" to depict the determination of the regime then to come up with programmes that would, at least, be used to blunt the rough edges of the traumatic years of the civil war on the war-torn erstwhile Eastern Region Unongo, (2017).

It should be quickly stressed that the three "Re's" were not even evocative then as compared to the current "restructuring" crusade that some of its protagonists would be prepared to even pay the supreme sacrifice in order to realize it.

> If what should have been the more evocative "Re's" did not bring out the worst in us (considering the fact that during and, particularly, shortly after the war emotions were still high given that lives were lost on both sides and properties were similarly destroyed), then the tenor of the call for restructuring, even when it is not conceptually so crystal clear at this point in time, should make resolve of government to embark on re-conciliation, re-construction, and rehabilitation should have been resisted (Seyi, 2011).

But the feeling then was that the war was a misadventure by the rebels who took up arms against their fatherland; they were misguided and therefore should be forgiven. Between then and now, so much water has passed under the bridge as far as nation building process is concerned. This is to the extent that some people openly canvass the dismemberment of the country, as its peoples cannot stay together Oyeneye, (2001). It must also be stated that "restructuring" is also not new in another sense: "resource control" was at a point in time the rallying phraseology aimed at precisely achieving the same objective as the current debate. Probably, the only difference this time around is as follows:

> while "resource control" largely captured the imagination and practical mobilization of largely the people of the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta, this time around "restructuring" is pitting the elite of the North and those of the South, as may be broadly segmented, to represent the South-East Geopolitical Zone; the South-South Geopolitical Zone; and the South- West Geopolitical Zone, on the firing line *Suberu, (2010).*

Etymologically speaking, the word "restructuring" is from its verb form "to restructure," which, in turn, could be traced to what could be referred to as the root word: "to structure," from which the prefix "re" was added to become "restructure." It is necessary to stress how the permutation of the word is arrived because there is no dictionary worthy of its name and in our possession that has the word "restructure" among the words it has had to define.

International Journal for Social Studies
Available at https://journals.pen2print.org/index.php/ijss
ISSN: 2455-3220
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> This finding compels us to embark on conceptual clarification very meticulously by leaving no stone unturned. On the basis of this clarification, we would like to proceed by defining structure first Olarewaju (2014).

To structure something, one of the dictionaries defines the process as follows: "To form into an organized structure; build. To conceive as a structure whole; ideate." As a noun form, the word "structure" is also defined as "That which is constructed; a combination of related parts, as a building or machine." Structure has its biological, geological, chemical, social (societal) connotations, according to the same dictionary. The word "restructure" is not independently defined in the dictionary, as already emphasized *Osaghae, (2002).*As a prefixed word, it would serve our purpose to define the concept as a process, in the case of a nation-state, that requires its citizens to take a closer look at the national edifice or, better still, the state of the nation with regard to how to address structural deformities, if any.

> Be that as it may, whatever may be the structural deformities of the Nigerian nation-state would have to be put in their proper historical perspectives by looking, first, at the structure used for governance in a multinational society; and, secondly, the constitutional provisions undergirding that structure *Osaghae, (2002).*

As already mentioned, Nigeria is a multinational society coupled together by the British as part of the colonialist and imperialist rampart in the 19th century, which process history has dubbed as the "Scramble for Africa." The various communities thus coupled together in Nigeria were at various levels of societal development. Some of them were entrenched empires such as the Kanem-Borno; Oyo (even though at that point it had passed its zenith); the Sokoto Jihad; Kwararafa (Jukun) Empire; Benin Empire (that was reputed to have had diplomatic relationships with the Portuguese monarchy); etcOmo-Seyi (1995).

Most of the other Nigerian pre-colonial societies, on the other hand, were, in historical studies, dubbed as acephalous entities, which were non-centralized and lacking in any serious statecraft appurtenances. Among these, one would like to mention the Igbo segmental society; the Tiv; the Ebira, and the other less centrally organized and smaller communities, where kinship relations largely formed the basis of authority. In demographic terms, also, the communities that came to comprise what is now known as Nigeria varied and are still varied in size*Osaghae, (2002).*The call for restructuring is not altogether a recent development as there have been demands for it even before 1999. The late Elder statesman, Chief Anthony Enahoro of the now rested NADECO, former Petroleum Minister, Professor Tam David West, former President OlusegunObasanjo, second Republic Vice President, Dr. Alex Ekwueme, Yoruba Leader, Ayo Adebanjo, Former Common Wealth Secretary General, Chief EmekaAnyaoku, former President Goodluck Jonathan, former CAN Vice Presidential

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Candidate and Convener of Save Nigeria Group Pastor TundeBakare, Catholic Bishop of the Sokoto Diocese, Bishop Mathew Hassan Kukah, Senator MojisolaAkinfewa leader of Afenifere, a pan-Yoruba Group, prominent Northern Leader and only recently fourth Republic Vice President, AtikuAbubakar have drummed the need for restructuring and dialogue to solve Nigeria's teething problems.

These leaders of note have also asked Nigeria's President, MuhammaduBuhari to commence implementation of the 2014 National Conference report as part of strategy to install true federalism. They argued analogously that the implementation will address myriads of problems confronting the nation while also noting that current protests and demands for separation by various ethnic groups and other soico-economic crises could be reduced if the report is considered and implemented. On his part, the late Alex Ekwueme, Nigeria's former Vice President said the 6 zone structure he recommended was the result of a deep reflection on how to solve Nigeria's problems and that the zones had taken care of minorities in the south and north. Ekwueme's stance was re-echoed at the 17th Annual Convention of Igbo Youths movement at Nike Lake Hotel Enugu on the topic, "Still in Search of True Federalism". Ekwueme said what Nigeria negotiated for and agreed with the colonial masters before independence was a regional government where each federating unit had its own constitution annexed to the 1963 Republican constitution. According to him,

> the republican constitution reflected true federalism where each component unit was coordinate and independent of the central; it provided fiscal federalism where 50% revenue went to the regions, 30% to a distributable pool and 20% to the central government.…There is therefore need for us to return to the basics from what we inherited from our founding fathers. For me the answer is return to zonal arrangement. The Nation Newspaper 2016:45.

On his part, Adebajo traced the origin of true federalism in Nigeria to the pre and post-colonial constitutional conferences while insisting that Nigeria must be restricted to correcting the humongous damage done to the nation's constitution by the military. Adebanjo said the various acts of uprising like the Niger Delta Avengers, MASSOB and IPOB would cease if that is done. He said that the founding fathers were right by agreeing to a federal structure to guarantee peace, equity and justice. Adebayo stated that the current posture of the Nigerian federation does not address the fears of ethnic nationalities, Vanguard Newspaper, 2016:32.

Bakare (2011), a former Vice Presidential Candidate in 2011 and convener, Save Nigeria Group (SNG) says restructuring is long overdue stating that it will help in correcting the flaws of the nation's flawed federal administration. To Bakare (2016),

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> Nigeria needs restructuring into 6 geo-political zones while the 36 states should be districts headed by Mayors. This has become necessary as close to 70% of these states cannot guarantee functional infrastructure, and internally generated revenue. New Telegraph Newspaper 2016:22

Bakare's assertion is important given the fact that as geo-political entities, the regions can pool resources together to tackle development, coordinate socio-economic policies and also empower local governments to bring effective governance directly to the people.at independence for example, the entire northern region comprising the present 19 states had on Ministry of education and a Minister in charge; the East and West comprising 11 states had one Education Ministry each. With only 3 education Ministries in the entire country, there was rapid educational advancement. Today, with 36 states Education Ministry and a Federal Education Minister alongside huge budgetary provision, education remains at its lowest ebb in terms of development.

Contributing, Akinfewa (2011), leader of Afenifere, a pan-Yoruba Group, believes restructuring will guarantee even development as was experienced in the 1960s because the constitution allowed them develop at their pace and within the limit of their resources. According to him,

> If we all remember, during the tenure of the late ObafemiAwolowo as Premier of the Western Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of Northern Region and Dr.NnamdiAzikiwe, Premier of the Eastern Region, these regions progressed according to its own pace and resources.

In his contribution, Dode (2015:73) in line with Wheare's work on federalism stated that there are vital conditions under which federalism can succeed when adopted by countries. Dode maintained that one of such conditions has to do with its composition which is that no one federating unit should be large in relation to the others in terms of geographical area and population, as to be in a position to hold others to ransom. Dode's allusion played out during the colonial era and into the first Republic where the observable trend about the Nigerian federation was a country which showcased the Northern region bigger than the West and East put together (landmass and population wise). Consequently, in the constituency delineation preceding the 1959 general elections, 174 (55%) of the 312 federal constituency seats were allocated to the North alone while the East got 73 seats (23%), the West got 62 seats (19%) and Lagos 3 seats (0.96%) (Okolo, 1973:45). This lopsided formation, it has been severely argued, contributed to the crises that led to the fall of the First Republic, the subsequent civil war in 1967 and other crises that has rocked the Nigerian state.

In a similar vein, Ajayi and Olarewaju (2014) in Rotimi and Joseph believes that federalism operates more effectively in a political and administrative system where the

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component units are structurally balanced. They aver that in Nigeria, the federation was built on three administrative regions of the North, West and the East whose lopsided nature was a consequence of the amalgamation of 1914 by the British colonial administration. One of the regions according to Ajayi and Olarewaju, was bigger than the other two regions put together having a land area of about three-fourths of the country and a population that was about 54 percent thus being heavily skewed. This imbalance which has continued since creation negates federal principle that no one unit should be so large as to dwarf the rest of the nation for as Mills (1946:367) noted,

> There should not be any one state so much more powerful than the rest as to be capable of vying in strength with many of them combined.

To Wheare (1964:10) therefore, the danger inherent in the structural imbalance of the federation will be the ability of the relatively bigger unit to over-rule the others and bend the will of the federal government to itself. This to him will lead to the monopolization of political and administrative power, usurpation of privileges and subordination of one group to the other. Wheare (1964) further argued that,

> It cannot be denied that population and size are sources of power in economic and political terms especially when dealing with matters concerning franchise (representation) and allocation of revenue to the component parts of the country.

The remarks by Ayoade (1988:6) on the imbalance of Nigeria's federal structure encapsulated the whole issue under discourse. To him,

> Unfortunately, the division of Nigeria into three and the granting of the North 50 percent of the total seats in the central legislature at the Ibadan constitutional conference in 1950 made the north a near absolute decider of joint deliberations.

In a speech delivered at the Annual AdemolaPopoola Public Lecture, Faculty of Law, ObafemiAwolowo University, Ile-Ife, Abubakar dispelled some myths surrounding calls for the restructuring of the Nigerian federation. He said it is a myth to say that we do not need restructuring, that all we need is good leadership that while leadership is critical, leaders also operates within structural and institutional constraints, which may impede or enhance their performance. He maintained that a federal structure that encourages dependency while discouraging hard work, innovation, productivity and competition, your development as a nation will be less than optimal. He also said it is a myth to suggest or imply that changes in the structure of our federation are a silver bullet or magic wand that would solve all our problems. Our challenges are multi-faceted and the structure of the federation is only one of them, albeit a critical one. Restructuring itself will not automatically guarantee good

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governance. As a people we still have to demand good governance and accountability from our leaders. The third myth he mentioned was that of true federalism stressing that federal systems are works-in-progress, and vary from one another according to their specific historical, socio-economic and political conditions. Ultimately people agree on the kind of federal system they will have, and be prepared to make necessary changes if it does not serve them well. (This Day Newspaper 2016:34).

According the Atiku,

> There's nothing wrong in people agitating for what they see as a better federal system. In fact the perennial debates and agitations by federating units for improved position within a federal structure is the hallmark of a living, breathing federal system. (This Day Newspaper 2016:34)

Atiku concluded by maintaining that his reasons for supporting restructuring are simply that the current structure, which concentrates too much power and resources in the centre, makes the nation economically unproductive, uncompetitive, indolent, and politically weak, disunited and unstable; made our component units too suspicious of one another, a suspicion that makes any rational discussion very difficult. On his path Chief EmekaAnyaoku, former Common Wealth Secretary General traced the genealogy of how the nation got to its current inhibiting structure laying the blame at the door-step if the Military and oil money; maintaining that only dialogue and restructuring will solve the problem. In his words,

> In the First Republic the constituent regions in our federation raised and retained the bulk of their revenues, mostly from agriculture and with those tried to meet their obligations.

Anyaoku is also of the view that federalism as is presently practiced in Nigeria has fostered dependence on revenues derived mainly from three states and is characterized by excessive centralization and concentration of power and resources, and intense political competition, and political instability.

> Today regional gatherings are usually about grievances and how to get more from the central pool of resources but hardly about how to produce and contribute to increasing those resources. Nations Newspaper 2017:23

It is the view of Anyaoku and proponents of federalism that it is the states that came together to delegate some powers to the central government (on matters that they deem best served by a central government). In contrast, our 1999 Constitution, specifically Section 7, has 83 federal legislative items as against 15 for the states (which the Federal Government

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can also override). I do not know of any well-functioning federal system in the world that has that kind of lopsided central dominance. Only our First Republic Constitution came close to the US's Constitution in terms of the process of federal constitution-making and allocation of powers between the federating units and the federal government.

From Anyaoku's observation, it must be noted that our federalism stands on a faulty footing despite all efforts to fix the anomalies. With eyes firmly set on oil revenues rather than diverse economic activities, and a mindset that saw any push for greater autonomy for regions as a threat to national unity, the efforts so far put in place resulted in excessive centralization of power and concentration of economic resources at the federal level. For as long as oil flowed and revenues remained high, few people seemed to mind. Thus, the Nigerian governments walked away from preceding sources of government revenues. Rather than clamour for more productivity and improvements in human resource development, there is clamour for more states and local governments. The federal government also created local governments and continues to allocate resources directly to them through so-called joint accounts with state governments. The result has been that local governments have ceased to be local, and they are also not national or effective. Rather the state governments essentially confiscate the funds and expend them as they wish. Thus the division of responsibilities for local government administration has killed the responsibilities.

6.0 Federalism and Restructuring in Nigeria

Nigeria has undergone a long process of restructuring in terms of the number of geo-political administrative units constituting the polity. This process is popularly referred to as "state creation" and/or "reorganization" the process whereby new geo-political units/constituents known as "states" in most federations are created out of existing or old ones. The outcome of this process is usually an increase in the number of states constituting the Nigerian federation Abubakar, (2016). Historically speaking and as emphasized by Adejumobi, (2000), the issue of state creation in Nigeria started as far back as 1963, when the Midwest was carved out of the former Western Region by the AbubakarTafawaBalewa administration. In 1967 the country was further divided into 12 states by the administration of General Yakubu Gowon, *Agbaje, (2010)*. This progressive increase in the number of territorial units continued in 1976 when the Murtala Administration created an additional 7 states, making the total of states 19. Between 1987 and 1991, General Babangida in two separate exercises, created 11 additional states, bringing the total up to 30. And in 1996, the Abacha administration created 6 more states to make the territorial units of the country 36.
In attempting to trace the history and politics of state creation in Nigeria, scholarly opinions vary widely, almost occasioning confusion, with particular reference to the timing of the first exercise. There is the convenient temptation as noted by Akinfewa, (2016), for example, to take the creation of the defunct Mid-Western Region in 1963 under the government of

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AlhajiTafawaBalewa, as the first exercise. There has also been the attempt to tie the inception of state creation in Nigeria's political history to the country's constitutional development Akinfewa, (2016).

For Akpotor (1995), Agitations for creation of additional states as well as the debate on the desirability of the exercise are as old as the country. The debate dated back as far as 1942-1943 when NnamdiAzikiwe published a series of articles in *West African Pilot* which were subsequently revised and published as a booklet. In the articles, Azikiwe (1980) suggested that the country's twenty five provinces be regrouped into eight states. Similarly, Chief ObafemiAwolowo (1947) argued for a federal constitution based on the ethnic factor, in which each ethnic group, irrespective of size, is autonomous in regard to its internal affairs (Awolowo, 1947). The Nigerian federation which emerged with a 3 region structure at independence in 1960 has assumed a 36-state structure within 36 years, that is, 1996 when the last exercise was carried out. In spite of this, separatist agitation and the attendant request for creation of more states in the country has not abated.

> As a matter of fact, the development appears to have vindicated Awolowo's position on the issue of state creation on the one hand and failure of the country's quest for integration on the other Akinyele, (1996).

According to Nnoli (1978: 256),

> the central motivating force of those who support the creation of states is the desire to ameliorate, if not eliminate, inter-ethnic tension which undermines national unity. But with the creation of several states, requests for further reorganization of the entity have not ebbed as sections of the country that have not benefited from the largesse continue to agitate.

Suberu (1994), in his own contribution to the debate submitted that,

> the distributive imperatives and advantages of new states, and the sheer multiplicity and inexhaustibility of ethnic and sub-ethnic grounds for legitimizing statehood aspirations or claims, have combined to make the establishment of new states a persistent, strident and pervasive theme of Nigeria's national politics.

To this extent, state creation in the country's political process has become vulnerable to the manipulation of elite both at national (those who benefit by organizing) and state/local (those who benefit by being reorganized) levels. Evidences from the Nigerian case have shown that national elites, both military and civilian use state creation as a strategy for regime legitimacy, shore up and realign regional and local support, punish, decimate or weaken

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oppositions, patronize and reward allies and clients Suberu (1994). The exercise is also employed in weakening the existing political units at the periphery by balkanizing them along sub-ethnic lines, thereby reducing their revenue and rendering them impotent. Also, state restructuring has also been used to perpetuate regime, achieve balancing and regime stability through engineering competition, rivalry and mutual distrust and suspicion among groups in the country.

Suberu's thesis is also useful in state or regional level analysis. At the state level, state creation presents an opportunity for the elite who may have been excluded from primitive accumulation traditionally associated with the state institutions in Nigeria to carve out spheres of accumulation for themselves (Suberu, 1994). State creation has, therefore, become an avenue for personal enrichment to functionaries at that level. It increases the chances of members of the elite who could not compete favourably for political offices and appointments with others in the old state. The list of available positions is long. They are Governorship, Deputy Governorship, House of Assembly, House of Representative, Senate, Board membership, Permanent Secretaryship, Judges, First class traditional status, Vice Chancellorship, Professorial chairs, contractors and businessmen. Meanwhile, the masses whose supports were mobilized during the struggle for the state, who had been assured of socio-economic transformation and development, are left in the lush.

Ugoh (2005, 49-65), contributing to the debate on the nexus between state creation and national integration in his article titled, "State Creation in Nigeria: Failed Approaches to National Integration and Local Autonomy" demonstrates how the fissiparous tendencies bearing on the Nigerian national polity make the policy of using state creation to achieve national integration a failed strategy. The paper shows how the outcomes of state creation exercises in Nigeria have failed to assuage the very forces that instigate new state demands. It contends that the prospects for national integration and local autonomy depend on the emergence of a purposeful national leadership and proper political restructuring of the federation designed to generate a national image that has more appeal than the regional ones Ugoh, (2005).

Explaining why groups in Nigeria prefer the territorial approach, Lincoln posits that the territorial approach is preferred over constitutional safeguard by the ethnic groups in the country as a solution to exploitation, uneven development, subjugation and deprivation among geographically mixed groups. It is believed that possession or control of territory at a regional or local level is more palpable and less fickle a benefit than abstract(in their perception and opinion) legal or constitutional provision made by the central government constituted by groups and institution that could presumably reverse, ignore or operate them at convenience(Lincoln, 2000). This may have informed Adesina's (2004:4) observation that;

> The Nigerian peoples may have shared the fundamental ideals that make their notions of their federal identity largely confined to mere constitutional provisions.

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Emphasizing the importance and analytical value of intra-ethnic conflict to development and national cohesion, Adesina (2004: 1) argues that intra-ethnic rivalry repudiates the legitimacy of larger group interest or vision. He posits that a larger group would maintain its cohesiveness to the extent that sub-ethnic groups within the larger one do not feel excluded or disadvantaged. He further asserts that in a situation where they feel marginalized, especially in the distribution of resources, sub-ethnic groups are likely to disregard identification with a larger interest they perceive as unfair and unjust. Consequently, renewed loyalty and allegiance to "home town/village" and withdrawal from the larger group becomes inevitable. The implication of this development is that unity and integration among the disparate groups that make up the Nigerian nation becomes problematic. To this extent, the argument is valid that intra-ethnic conflicts, more than cross-ethnic hostility, are more likely to impact negatively on national cohesion. This is evident in such cases as Ife/Modakeke of the Yoruba stock, Tiv-Idoma in Benue, Urhobo-Itsekiri in Delta, Kutebs versus Jukun in Taraba, Kanuri-Shuwa, Hausa/Kataf in Kaduna and recently the bloody conflict between settlers and indigenes in Plateau state.

While new states in most of the classical federations have emerged largely from the incorporation of external units to an initial core (Ofoeze, 1989), the Nigerian states evolved through a strategy of internal fragmentation or deflation, rather than through a process of outward expansion or aggregation (Suberu, 1999: 57-58). Regrettably, however, the Nigeria situation is such a system without in-built mechanisms for redressing historic wrongs and ensuring fairness without recourse to organized divisions and deliberate bouts of pulling apart. Undoubtedly, it was elite selfishness, and not national interest, which has propelled the state creation movement till this decade (Suberu, 1999: 58). Nevertheless, as earlier enunciated, the initial historical rationale for the movement for new states in Nigeria involved the quest by ethnic minority groups for autonomy from the regional stranglehold of the majority ethnic formations. The minorities' quest for "statehood" status did not, however, receive a sympathetic consideration or endorsement from the Sir Henry Willink Commission established in 1957 to inquire into the alleged fears of minorities and the means of allaying them.

> Rather, the commission argued that the grievances of the minorities could be redressed through administrative changes, greater federal and regional attention to the needs of depressed areas and entrenched guarantees of fundamental human rights (Willink, 1957).

7.0 Efforts at ensuring true federal practice in Nigeria

Federal power and intergovernmental relations in Nigeria clearly tilts in favour of the federal government at the expense of the states. There have been attempts to deal with agitations that tended to rock prospects of lasting federalism in an intense environment of serious doubts and fear concerning common political identity occasioned by structural and

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systematic imbalance in the body polity. The weight of agitations of recent led to the increasing calls for a National Sovereign Conference to redress perceived wrongs and imbalance. Certain strategies have been institutionalized to bring about federal balance. Such strategies include: state creation, adjusting the exclusive and concurrent legislative lists of functions, rotational presidency, federal character and establishment of geopolitical zones.

According to Rotimi& Joseph (2014) the first attempt of state creation came with,

> the creation of Mid-western Region in 1963 followed by the change from regions to states with the creation of twelve states federal structure in 1967 and 19 in 1976 by the Murtala-Obasanjo military regime.

They also noted that in 1987, the states were increased to twenty one and thirty six in1999 the purpose of which was to solve the primary problem of ethno-structural imbalance engendered by the disproportional size of the North. Dode (2015) further maintained that

> state creation was also to create federal structure (in terms of sub-national units) in which the interest of minority ethnic groups were protected.

States and local government areas were also created to reduce the obviously insatiable distributive pressure in revenue allocation, as well as, bring government and development closer to the people. State creation as a strategy for national integration and federal balance has left more to be desired.

Suberu (2008: 54) argued strongly that instead of state creation solving the minority questions and fear of domination; it has increased it as new minority and majority arise with creation of new states resulting in a vicious cycle. The issue of some states being economically viable and others not poses new problems of fiscal relations on the federation. Bassey (2013) noted that,

> demand for states proved dissatisfaction by ethnic nationalities, and lamented on the actual number of states that will be satisfactory to all concerned. In reality, state creation cannot solve the problem of federal imbalance, rather it creates ethnic imbalance which aggravates the problem of federal imbalance.

In an attempt to solve the problem of imbalance occasioned by state creation, the federal military government in 1996 created 6 geo-political zones. Three geopolitical zones were created each for Northern and Southern Nigeria. These zones according to Ajayi and Olarewaju (2014) are South East, South West and South-South in Southern Nigeria and North West, North East and North Central in Northern Nigeria. The creation of the geo-political

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zones did not also result in structural balancing of the federation as some zones have more states than others. Aderonmu (2012:13) aver that out of thirty six (36) states and Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), the North as a whole divided into 3 geo-political zones has 20 states while South with three geopolitical zones, has 17 states. The North Central and North West zone each has 7 states; the North East, South – South and South-West has 6 states each while the South East has 6 being the least zone. This shows structural imbalance between North and South in terms of number of states per geo-political zone. In this regard, Aderonmu (2010) contends that neither state creation nor creation of geopolitical zones as governmental policy and strategy could solve the problem of imbalance in Nigeria's federalism.

Another method used in ensuring federal balance, political stability and equity has been that of zoning the presidency on a rotational basis and principle of federal character. The socio-political uproar generated by the June 12, 1993 election, in addition to the Nigeria civil war of 1967 to 1970, represents most frontal challenges to the existence of Nigerian state. The massive movement of people from their place of residence to their places of origin in the wake of the uproar in the mid-1960 shows the absence of National Essence and imbalance. The Constitutional Conference of 1990's where all segments of Nigeria's society and groups were represented refashioned a sustaining basis for the existence of the Nigerian state. The basis so fashioned was a symbolic proposed term for the rotation of key executive and legislative offices among the political zones in Nigeria in order to ensure the emergence of Nigerian state that is institutionally coherent, workable and stable. Though this was not inserted in the 1999 constitution, the political parties used it in their party process for chosen party candidates in primaries. This principle of zoning was utilized by People's Democratic Party (PDP) at all levels of election from federal to local.

In addition, attempts have been made by various regimes to ensure restructuring of Nigeria's federalism through organizing of national dialogue. Following the return to civil rule, the government of former President OlusegunObasanjo in 2005 held a dialogue christened National Political Reform Conference. According to former President Obasanjo (2005: 12):

> We are once again at the threshold of history. History has presented us with the opportunity to reassess, refocus, redefine and redesign our political landscape in a direction that would strengthen the bonds of unity, enhance the process of democratic consolidation, strengthen the structures so as to solidify those values that promote democracy, good governance and good neighbourliness; and open boundless opportunities for all Nigerians to be and to feel that they are part of the evolving political process and socio-economic advancement.

The conference had specific purpose to discuss and agree on the terms and conditions to be embodied in a new constitution as the basis on which diverse nationalities and people

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comprised in Nigeria can live together in peace, security, progress and unity as one country under a common central government. After months of deliberations, the Conference failed to achieve its purpose as it was abandoned owing to irreconcilable differences and the suspicious adoption of a draft constitution purportedly granting third term to the former president. It failed to help solve the problems facing the Nigerian state.

On March 17, 2014, former President Goodluck Jonathan inaugurated another National Conference Committee made up of 492 delegates representing a cross-section of Nigerians. After months of breadth-taking deliberations, the conference submitted its draft report to the President who promised implementation of its recommendations. The Conference among other things recommended the retention of the federal system of government. The conference agreed that federalism denotes a political arrangement in which a country is made up of component parts otherwise called federating units and that political powers are constitutionally shared between the central government and the component states. It also looked at the merits inherent in federalism in a heterogonous society as Nigeria and identified the sustenance of unity in diversity, expanded opportunities for various people including minority groups to participate in governance of Nigeria, etc. The conference also recommended the setting up of self-funding zonal commissions to promote economic development, good governance, equity and security; it also recommended the adoption of a home-made model of government to be called modified presidential system with attributes of both parliamentary and presidential systems of government. Other recommendations were setting up of Nigerian Charter for National Reconciliation and Integration to encourage inclusiveness and integration. While the conference resolved in its recommendation that Nigeria will live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state under God, it also suggested as worthy of being accepted the right to self-determination by states as federating units with each state having its own constitution, etc. The report was forwarded to the National Assembly for legislative action to be taken. Incidentally, the former President lost the 2015 election to the then opposition and had no opportunity of implementing recommendations of the conference.

8.0 Conclusion

This study has discovered that the Federal Character Principle is a government policy aimed at creating equity in appointment, representative positions, allocation of resources and location of social infrastructure among component units. The policy if well implemented would have corrected imbalances in the body polity. This enabling law of this policy establishes the federal character commission in Nigeria, being a government agency and regulator of equity in allocation, distribution and redistribution in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, most Nigerians do not believe in the ability of the commission to correct the imbalance and preponderance of some units over others. The principle is

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considered to breed mediocrity, and acts as a disincentive to merit. The policy is seriously subverted by Nigerians as people simply claimed places other than their real place of origin in order to utilize the disadvantage position of the place and perpetuate such locality in the position of disadvantage. The policy rather than promoting federal balance aggravates federal disequilibrium.

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