

**THE ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA:  
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

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**Abstract**

*Introduction: The multi- dimensional challenges facing contemporary Nigerian nation has provoked the conjuring of vast array of ideas as the way forward. One of the recurring idea in the national discourse is restructuring. This word restructuring while remaining on the front burner in the milieu of per mutative variables for our national survival has however remained grossly misunderstood in terms of it's core message. It is against the controversial or overwhelmingly divergent perspectives that is being attached to the above word that some people see it as lacking any relevance in providing critical contribution in advancing the Nigeria forward. However this work is an attempt at examining the ethical perspectives of restructuring in Nigeria.*

**Introduction**

Despite the present of abundant human and non-human resources in Nigeria which no doubt have constituted the platform for greatness among developed nations, the country had been facing different challenges that are hindering social economic and political development. According to National Confab final conference report – A nation, *simplicita* is a community of people sharing a common heritage, language, culture, religion etc. What this means is that for an entity to be accepted as a nation it must consist of a people sharing a significant measure of commonality, inter-subjective allegiance within the context of historical nexus.

Unfortunately, while modern nation states tend to be pluralistic driven, a feature which has been known as serving both as a source of strength and also as a fuel for mutual suspicion, the pluralistic nature of Nigerian nation has continued to be exploited towards achieving negative ends by the political class. The result is that the country has maintained a direction of promoting clannish political and religious interest instead of the collective good necessary for the sustainable development.

Olawale (2016) in commenting on the need for paradigm shift on the governance of Nigeria states that the problems of the nation are multi-faceted, covering economic, political and social and consequently demands a multi-dimensional solution. According to him the time for a comprehensive restructuring of Nigeria in order to give birth to a productive and egalitarian economy as well as stable and a fairer society is now.

The above view he notes is predicated on the following factors:

- Nigeria is at the brink of plunging into full scale depression
- Oil prices all time fall, pipeline vandalization by Niger Delta Avengers, massive devaluation of naira.
- Growing restiveness and ethnic agitations from such groups as Boko Haram, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Odua People Congress (OPC) and the Arewa youths.
- Fulani Herdsmen and farmers clashes in various parts of the country with the attendant food security challenges.

All these threats aggregate to place the nation on the keg of gun powder. Furthermore, he notes that an over-bloated 80% recurrent expenditure by the federal government on year-to-year basis leaves the nation on a perpetuating vicious cycle of stagnancy and underdevelopment.

According to Obioha (2017:7) no one or two persons can pontificate to all of us on the concept of national unity. Unity to have its force he opined must be open to negotiation until it assumes a state of perfection that is characterized by equity, fairness and justice. However reacting to the assertion by President Muhammadu Buhari to the nation shortly after his return from medical vacation in London that Nigeria's unity is settled and therefore not negotiable, Obioha submits that no nation's unity is a settled issue that cannot be questioned or negotiated if it is not working well as is the case of Nigeria. In a situation where the roof of the nation's edifice is leaking and the walls are collapsing while the paints are peeling off common sense dictates that there is the need for some structural renovation, reconstruction or restructuring.

The agitations by MASSOB, IPOB and others which arose as a result of the glaring injustice, inequalities and unfairness in the nation underscores the fundamental reason why dialogue rather than force should be adopted in bringing about peace and collective development. These vulnerable zones in our national project he observes are visible in the states and local government structure as they determines allocation and federal appointment. A development which he notes invariably legitimizes the above concern for rebranding, repacking or redefinition of the context of our one nationhood.

The above view was corroborated by Eya and Kalu (2017:9) when they quoted Prof Ben Nwabueze, the leader of Southern Leaders of Thought as upholding the view that only the restructuring of the Nigeria nation will end the increasing spate of agitation in nation. According to him the president of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari will be courting trouble if he tries to usurp the constitutional powers of the Nigerian people to demand a better Nigeria through a change in structure. Furthermore, he avers that restructuring within the Nigeria context is not a matter of amendment of the 1999 constitution which he notes denies the various ethnic nationalities that make-up Nigeria the power to govern themselves within Nigeria. Rather it is an arrangement that requires a new constitution adopted by the people at a referendum. It is the best option for the realization of the truly one Nigeria nation. Restructuring at this time he observes fundamentally relates to the modification as deemed necessary, the restoration or the re-establishment of the kind of federalism that existed under 1960/1963 constitutions. The above view he notes is of predicated on the reasoning that given our circumstances as a country, with a vast expanse of territory, comprising of a great diversity of ethnic nationalities, with divergent cultures,

religion, history and interest and outlooks adopting a truly federal system of governance seems generally the agreed viable option for the way forward.

### **Conceptual Definition**

Restructuring according to Wikipedia is a business term relating to the act of reorganizing the legal, ownership or structure of a corporate entity for the purpose of making it more profitable. In his own contribution restructuring according to *beralinling.net* is defined ordinarily by the dictionary as the reforming, rearranging, altering or changing a current structure with a view to enhancing its overall performance and efficiency. Thus it notes that restructuring involves a reconstitution, or reformation that creates a new entity while retaining the fundamental or significant core of the original. However it goes on to posit that while the above dictionary definition of restructuring can be referred to as cosmetic based or old-type restructuring the modern perspectives on restructuring involves a complete and fundamental reconfiguration of the state and national architecture. Thus it submitted that what led to the emergence of thriving federation, rich and resourceful post-modernist nations such as Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirate and Australia was not the old paradigm unitary command structure governance but total restructuring that embraced full federalism.

From the foregoing restructuring as used in this context refers to the act of re-engineering, re-invention and reconfiguration of the body polity on the path of true federalism. Federalism is defined as modern nation formation strategy that promotes decentralized governance with a view to empowering her constituent units to develop according to their inherent resources and cultural distortions while at the same time contributing their quota to the federal coffers. *Premuntrimaging.com/news/headlines* editorial captures the above view succinctly when it states that deriving from the milieu of wide spread disenchantment with governance and the national economy, grounded on the prevailing hostile class structure it posits inter alia:

This is the time for a genuine constitutional reform process to reset the *grundnorm* of Nigeria's social compact, in a way that fundamentally renegotiates the relationship between the different nationals and groups and determines their preferred structures of coexistence and governance.

### **Ethical Issues on Restructuring in Nigeria**

**Ethnicity:** According to Odum (2016:110) one of the major ethical challenges confronting the enthronement of sustainable national harmony and development is the unending emphasis that highlights the system of our inherent diversity or simply put the problem of ethnicity. Furthermore he notes that while it is the duty of the ruling class to engender cooperation and pull the diverse groups and interests together with a view to building a united polity, Nigeria has continued to witness a situation where sub-national consciousness has maintained a strong centripetal pull that keeps stifling the quest for national building. The result is that there is a sustainability of the separation of citizen from citizen. This prevailing sad development derives from faulty fusion of the various nationalities that make up Nigeria by her past colonial masters.

Odum puts the above view pointedly when he states that our former colonizers driven by exigency of entrenching economic convenience rather than the need to build a

nation that shares the potential for living together succeeded in laying the foundation for a faulty or forced nation called Nigeria. Besides he posited that from Rwanda to Sudan, Congo to Burundi, and indeed several other African countries that share the same faulty foundation experience the challenge to build a united nation continues to be made more complicated. Commenting on the deadly wound inflicted by ethnicity consciousness in Nigeria, Mbadiwe (1991:159) avers that it “divided the federation, balkanized it and made nonsense of the gradual growth”. The result is that the country has continued to toe the path of a journey without a radar and a compass as the Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria continue to remain on the cold-war for economic and political domination.

As long as ethnicity problem remains a powerful force in our body polity the quest for national integration will perpetually remain a mirage. The Bible maxim that no house that is divided against itself can stand becomes highly relevant in our search for a viable Nigeria nation. (Mathew 12:25-26) In other words for the nation to move forward it must create an atmosphere where the divergent issues that divide citizen from citizen are addressed and minimized. It is against this backdrop that the call for restructuring Nigeria as a tool for breaking down different unethical walls of marginalization, superiority complex and inferiority complex, economic, political and socio-cultural and religious subjugation becomes an urgent necessity.

**Corruption:** The unending emphasis on fight against corruption by each succeeding administration in Nigeria underscores the deep-rooted culture of the evil in Nigeria. Besides the establishment of several institutional framework to deal with the scourge of corruption such as Code of Conduct Tribunal, Public complaints commission, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices, and other related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Nigerian Extracting Intractives Transparency Initiatives (NEITI) no doubt shows the profound and chronic nature of corruption in Nigeria.

Chuta (2002:7) corroborates the above view when he states that corruption has assumed an extreme and bizzare state of hopelessness and pessimism as keeping an average Nigeria from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam. What this means is that corruption in Nigeria has assumed a dimension of defiance of mono-solution deriving from the divergent approach that have been employed to curb the menace.

Corruption in Nigeria according to Ribadu (2006:1) is an ethical challenge rooted in over 29years of military rule out of the 46 years in our nationhood. It is a culture that derives from the faulty foundation laid by the protracted military domination of our political power over the years deriving fundamentally from the faulty and forceful constitution they imposed on the nation. Corruption has been defined by Lipset and Lenze (2000) as the violation of established rules and regulation for self-gratification, personal gain or profit. It is the instrument which people employ to access undeserved advantages, wealth or power through illegal means at public expense. Nye (1967) and Chaturvedi (2006) was in agreement to above view when they define the above word as the deviance behaviour of occupiers of public offices from formal duties with a view to procuring gains which maybe in monetary term or in kind for oneself, close family or private clique. It is therefore a non-violent weapon of manipulation and distortion of public position, rules and regulations and privileges with a view to expanding ones coast of advantages illegally. The need for restructuring that effectively defines, unites and provides quality checks and balances in our institutional framework becomes most imperative. No nation can rise

above her internal structural mechanism that sustain national order, peace and cohesion. In a nation like Nigeria where laws and structures of nationhood were tilted to favour the Northern region and the minority political class, such entrenched structure of misnomer will definitely filter from the top to the bottom. That is the bane of generalized corruption in Nigeria where the axiom like the father like the son holds true.

**Injustice:** Constitution the world over have been known as the supreme document that regulates political activities and process of governance. It defines process which determines who exercises executive power, who makes laws, and how the other players get their voices heard as well as what constitutes accountability on the political and public office holders. It is therefore the critical document that regulates the affairs and interaction of people without fear or favour. It is the instrument of justice and equity through which advanced societies regulate themselves and their affairs. Constitution therefore derive their legitimacy when they are internally developed instead of otherwise. The problem of imposition of unitary military constitution since 1966 by the military class has continued to place the political governance of the Nigerian nation under the tripod stand of illegality as the ingredient of equity and justice which are essential features of a people driven constitution remains lacking in the Nigerian constitution. Against this backdrop the country has remained a nation driven on the wheels of injustice because the above constitution was developed to favour Northern Nigeria significantly against the Southern Nigeria.

The situation in which some citizens of Nigeria are treated as slave and aliens while others as superior ethnic group has continued to fan the ember of agitations for restructuring of the nation. Okechukwu (2017) in his submission posits that structural injustice that is prevailing in Nigerian state cannot be eliminated by the recurring cosmetic approach of successive governments that resort merely to appoint representatives from different parts of the country into positions and in addition to implementing some projects and programmes during their tenure while showing a blind eye to development of a sound social, political and economic environment that empowers the majority of the citizenry through structural justice. According to him the way forward to addressing gross injustices that permeate the nation is a restructuring roadmap that should be hinged on the recommendation of 2014 national conference convened by former president Goodluck Jonathan.

Commenting on the gross structural injustices that have continued to derail the building of a strong Nigeria nation, Adebajo (2017) puts it pointedly when he said that the much acclaimed Nigeria constitution of 1999 by the Northern elites is not our constitution after all as it was an imposition on the nation by the military. Thus he submits that even though they had handed over power to the civil politician they remained indirectly in power through their militarized structured constitution. For instance he notes that 1999 constitution contained several structural aberration with regard to creation of states and creation of local governments that put the northern Nigeria at a great advantage over the southern Nigeria. Furthermore, Adegunrin (2017) on behalf of Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria held on August 2017 called on “Nigerian leaders to rise above politicking and selfish interests and restructure the country to engender equity and justice”. Against this gross ethical challenge of structural injustice bedeviling our nation it would amount to intellectual sabotage, and political treachery and grandstanding selfishness for the nation’s leadership to continue to look the other side amidst the growing public call for

restructuring. What this means is that there can be no better time for addressing these injustices as the constitutional framework of the nation currently is not providing the fundamental direction for development and self-realization of most of its citizens.

The above view was equally reinforced by the Southern Leaders Forum at the conference held on August 23, 2017 at Lagos when they stated that Nigeria ceased from being a federation since 1966 following the turning of the constitution inherited from her founding fathers into a militarized unitary constitution. A development which they noted is at the peak of all structural injustices in the nation. What this means is that as long as the nation's political leadership continues to deny the fundamental ethical challenge of injustices being perpetrated against certain sections of the country they keep breeding the seed of discord that would eventually overwhelm the land in catastrophe.

The ethical challenge of favoritism is so undermining in Nigeria that many have continued to cry out against it. This scourge in our national character has been worsened by the Buhari administration through his insensitive and lopsided recruitments/appointments into all federal institutions to favour the North against the south. The flagrant breach of the constitutionally enshrined federal character principle by the President Buhari in appointments as well as his official indifference to the murderous activities of his kinsmen, the Fulani herdsmen against the innocent Nigerian citizen on the farmers have compounded to elicit increasing cry against entrenched injustices and the need for restructuring.

### **Unaccountability**

The various degrees of illogicality that are inherent in the military imposed constitution does not make room for accountability and transparency in the national discourse. For instance, the creation of states and local governments by the various military administrations over the years have tilted towards creating a Northern Nigerian that wields great political and economic advantage over the Southern region.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Nationhood rises or falls depending on the configuration of her foundation. Those founded on fostering soil of deceit and injustice over time goes into self-extinction. This is inherent on the axiom that states that no one can eat his cake and have it or the biblical truth which states that he that eats of cockatrice dies while those who crush their eggs would be invaded by vipers. (Isaiah 11:8, 14:29, 59:4) From the foregoing the Pauline teaching becomes imperative that whatever a man sows he shall reap. Nigerian leaders must be told in blank terms that true nationhood that would last must be anchored on the rocky foundation of truth and justice. It has been submitted that the people that laid foundation for a faulty structural framework of the Nigerian nation is the military. Since several past democratic governments have not marshaled the political will to redress this anomaly the country has continued more than ever in recent times to witness increasing agitations from both the southern and northern part of the nation for a truly restructured Nigeria. The implication from the foregoing is that the time is ripe for the political class to call a spade a spade by giving birth to a restructured nation that would secure equality, freedom and justice for all irrespective of religion, ethnicity, religion or political status. Below therefore, are some of the recommendations for moving the nation forward from the above ethical challenges.

1. Now that we worked ourselves into blind structurally it is most reasonable and useful to unbundle our nation structurally by centralizing and devolving power from the central government to the states in order to unleash local genius needed for mobilizing creative and enterprising capacity that should move our nation forward.
2. To reset the *grundnorm* of Nigeria social compact in a way that aligns with international standard, the vast nationalities that make up the country must be given a say to chart their preferred structure of corporate existence and governance through referendum.
3. Nature flourishes in the atmosphere of order and so Nigerian nation must build an internal order before it could reproduce order in the externality of her citizenry behaviour. In other words, ethical supra-structure must be grounded from ethical infrastructure inherent in the constitutional configuration of the nation. Building the positively well behaved Nigerian people must be anchored on a legal or constitutional foundation that protects and promotes equity and justice for all.
4. To reduce poverty and unemployment in Nigeria, which has remained at the core of social conflict and restiveness, the nation must culture productivity consciousness through creating federating units that are given full capacities to be self sustaining economically and politically.
5. Building a critical mass of nationally vision driven citizenry is an important ambience towards evolving a national cohesion and integration that should serve as the launching pad for sustainable nation and development. This was the view of King Solomon when he states that without a vision the people perish (Prov. 29:18). In other words to evolve a great Nigerian nation her people must be made to see things from one eye glass of true nationhood. Total restructuring therefore becomes a platform for creating a truly united and indivisible country that can be propelled forward by a common destiny.

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