

Federal Character Principle: A Road Block to National Integration and the Bane of Nation Building

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Abstract

This work examines politics behind the implementation of the Federal Character Principle with a view to discussing the impacts on National Integration otherwise known as National Unity of Nigeria. Every policy of government is expected to display high sense of indices of acceptable governance such as: transparency, accountability, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, popular participation, service delivery and so on. Paradoxically, the reverse has always been the case with Federal Character Principle. The impacts of this have indeed pervaded the political landscape of Nigeria as majority of school leavers are found roaming the streets in search of employment. Verily, every Nigerian is adversely affected by Nigerian factors which are predicated on corruption, greed, selfishness among others. As a corollary, the much expected dividends of democracy is nothing but a ruse. The work relies on both primary and secondary sources of information. The data sources were complemented with the administration of questionnaires and oral interview with relevant stakeholders and members of the public to elicit more information about the performance of both the Federal Character Principle. Data were also sourced from the internet, governmental organizations and other related agencies with the objective of assessment and comparison. The study raises critical question about the desirability of Federal Character Principle so as to ensure corruption free society via its job creation as far as Nigerian political system is concerned. It noted that the aims of establishing the Federal Character Principle have not been fully realized rather it has disintegrated nation building. The study therefore concludes that for the attainment of good governance, Nation building, societal development, corruption free society and putting in the round peg in round hole, emphasis should be placed on how both the Commissions operate and to actualize these, there must be conscious efforts on the part of the government to ensure that credible people are employed to work in the Commissions in order to engender promotion of accountability, transparency and probity. This will serve as model for others to be on their toes so as to institute good governance in the land.

Keywords: Federal Character Principle, Politics, Good Governance and National Integration

INTRODUCTION

Federal Character Principle in Nigeria can be referred to as a system introduced with the motive of unifying the entire workforce within the country irrespective of the ethnic coloration. The federal character was stated in Nigeria's 1999 Constitution. This statement is to ensure the principle that all public service institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, religious, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the country <https://www.legit.ng/1174879-what-federal-character-principle-nigeria.html>.

According to the constitution: ...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 and the need to promote national unity and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government

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The phrase Federal Character was first used by the late General Murtala Ramat Muhammed in his address to the opening session of the Constitution Drafting Committee on Saturday the 18th of October 1975. Federal character of Nigeria, according to the CDC's report of 1977, refers to the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

From the foregoing, this study examines the fundamental course of why the Federal Character

Principle has failed to unite Nigerians contrary to the purpose for which it has been created. Equally, the study provides panaceas that there must be conscious efforts on the part of the government to ensure that credible people are employed to work in the Federal Character Commissions in order to engender promotion of accountability, transparency and probity that will serve as model for the public to be on its toes so as to institute good governance in the land.

Statement of the Problem

The main idea is to create conditions where no tribe is favored above another. But this principle has also received negative feedbacks, Nigeria's Deputy Senate President claimed that: ...regrettably, the federal character has become a euphemism for recruiting unqualified people into the public service.... What is federal character principle in Nigeria? Ike Ekweremadu emerges Deputy Senate President Photo: todaysimpact.org READ ALSO: I wasn't elected to break up Nigeria - Senator Omo-Agege .There is still no equality in this question, according to Federal Character Principle In Nigeria, majority of federal government appointments and jobs are given to a particular ethnic group in the country. What is federal character principle in Nigeria? Read more: <https://www.legit.ng/1174879-what-federal-character-principle-nigeria.html>

Bello Tukur, CEO of the Federal Character Commission Visits NCC Photo: ncc.gov.ng The Federal Character Commission is one of the executive bodies, the commission was established by the Section 153(1) of the 1999 Constitution. The principle of the commission is set in Constitution. The commission should monitor the implementation of rules and principles proclaimed in federal character. Federal character Nigeria is an important statement that aims to uproot social inequality, but the real data shows that there is still a lot of work to be done on this issue. A number of research priorities linking inequalities between federating units are identified for the immediate attention of researchers whose research interest areas may include practice and the future of Nigeria bureaucracy.

Besides, this study highlights the components of sound governance model to include citizen active participation, collaboration, network, equity, stronger regulations, and its implications for public trust, equity and public-service diversity management and national unity in Nigeria's democratic governance. Read more: <https://www.legit.ng/1174879-what-federal-character-principle-nigeria.html> .

At this juncture, the study will attempt to answer the following research questions

(i) What is federal character principle?

(ii) How has the principle of federal character unified the entire citizenry of Nigeria?

(iii) To what extent has the federal character principle been a road block to national integration and nation building in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the words of Aliyu (2008) : *'The federal character principle is a necessary evil that we, Nigerians, have to endure for now; it's a sacrifice we all have to make for the emergence of the just and egalitarian society we all aspire to have. Hopefully, decades from now when our body politic had developed sufficient immunity to the virus of prejudice and discrimination, the federal character principle will go the way of the dinosaur.'*

Aliyu went further to his experience as to the mindsets of many Nigerians in respect of what federal character principle connotes. Find below according to him:

"I first came into contact with a distorted perception of the federal character principle years ago while serving the nation as an NYSC corps member. That distorted perception was projected by a fellow corps member, an Ibo lady, and graduate of the University of Nigeria Nsuka. She said they were told by their lecturers at the UNN that federal character is employed even in the grading process of WAEC examinations to the effect that a distinction pass in the North was equivalent to a credit pass in the south; a credit pass in the North is equivalent to an ordinary pass in the South; while an ordinary pass in the North is equal to an F9 in the South. When I posed to her the question: What then is the equivalent of a northern F9 in the south, she was lost for words. The sad fact of this misrepresentation of reality was that the young university graduate believed what she was saying then as some southerners today. Another instance, some years ago when the former Inspector General of Police, the now embattled Tafa Balogun effected the mass promotion of officers and men of the Nigeria Police, whose promotions were long overdue, I had an encounter with a newly promoted corporal who then resides in my neighborhood. I congratulated him on his belated promotion and he answered "thank you, but if I have been a 'notana', I would have been an Inspector by now or even an ASP, you know promotions are faster and smoother for 'notanas' because of federal character". I can go on and on telling stories of how the high achievements of many a northerner, accomplished through hard work and perseverance, on the basis of merit, are devalued at the currency of federal character. This is the price that we, northerners, have to pay, though we are not the sole beneficiaries of the federal character principle in the country. Apart from the disadvantaged southern minorities, many a southerner poses as a disadvantaged northerner to gain admission or secure employment".

From the above, Aliyu is from the North and he is a bit bias in the story should we to put in perspectives the position of the 1999 Constitution thus:

“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 and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or any of its agencies.”“Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: section 14 subsection (3)

The above provision of the Constitution enshrined the federal character principle: arguably one of the most controversial provisions of our Constitution. The Radio Nigeria phone in programme, Radio-Link, of Saturday the 25th of April brought this issue, once again, on the front burner. Its repercussions reverberated in the last Saturday’s edition of the programme. Conscious of the fact that mass enlightenment is an inevitable weapon for the destruction of old and new myth, I decided to commit pen to paper with a view to partaking, modestly, in this worthwhile debate.”(Ononogbu,2018)

Be that as it may, the federal character principle has indeed failed in its bit to ensure that the Civil Service is free of corruption, favoritism, nepotism, ethnicity and tribalism. Honestly, majority of the appointments of the Ministers and the Service chiefs of the security apparatus under Buhari’s administration has always taken a lopsided dimension. For instance,

Below is the list of the Ministers and the Service chiefs with their states of origin to indicate the challenges of the federal character principle:

Names of Ministers under Buhari and their State of Origin

There are 44 ministers under Buhari's administration and therestate of origin is :

1. President Muhammadu Buhari - Adamawa State - Minister of petroleum.
2. Muhammadu Musa Bello - Adamawa State - Minister of Federal Capital Territory, (FCT).
3. Godswill Akpablo - Akwa Ibom state - Minister of Niger Delta.
4. Chris Bighorn - Anambra State - Minister of Labour and Employment.
5. Sharon Ikeazor - Anambra State - Minister of State Environment.
6. Adamu Adamu - Bauchi State - Minister of Education.
7. Ambassador Maryam Katagum - Bauchi State - Minister of State Industry.
8. Timipre Sylva - Bayelsa State - Minister of State for Petroleum.

9. Gevrg Akume - Benue State - Minister of special Dutie.
10. Mustapha Baba Shehurl - Bornu State - Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.
11. Goddy Jedy Agba - Delta State - Minister of State Power.
12. Festus Keyamor - Delta State - Minister of State, for Niger Delta.
13. Ogbonnaya Onu - Ebonyi State - Minister of Science and Technology.
14. Osagel Ehanire - Edo State - Minister of Health.
15. Clement Ike - Edo State - Minister of State for Budget
16. Richard Adeniyi Adebayo - Ekiti State - Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment.
17. Geoffrey Onyeama - Enugun State - Minister of Foreign Affairs.
18. Ali Isa Pantami - Gombe Sate - Minister of Communications.
19. Emeka Nwajiuba - Imo State - Minister of State for Education.
20. Suleman Adamu - Jigawa state - Minister of Water Resources.
21. Zainab Ahmed - Kaduna State - MInkster of Finance.
22. Muhammad Mahood - Kaduna State - Minister for Environment.
23. Sabo Nanono - Kano State - Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.
24. Bashir Salihi Magashi - Kano State - Minister Of Defence.
25. Hadi Sirika - Kastina State - Minister of Adulation.
26. Abubakar Malami - Kebbi State - Minister of Justice/ Attorney General of the Federation.
27. Ramani Tijjani - Kogi State - Minister of State, Federal Capital Territory (FCT).
28. Lai Mohammed - Kwara State - Minister of Information and Culture.
29. Gbemisola Saraki - Kwara State - Minister of Transportation.
30. Babatunde Fashola - Lagos State - Minister of work and Hosing.
31. Adeleke Mamora - Lagos State - Minister of State of Health.
32. Mohammed H. Abdullah I - Nasarawa State - Minister of State, Science and Technology.
33. Zubali Dada - Niger State - Minister of State Foreign Affairs.
34. Olamilekan Adegbile - Ogun State - Minister of Mines and Steel Development.
35. Tayo Alasoadura - Ondo State - Minister of State, Labor and Employment.
36. Rauf Aregbesola - Osun State - Minister of Interior.

37. Sunday Dare - Oyo State - Minister of Youth and Sports.
38. Pulen Tallen - Plateau State - Minister of women Affairs.
39. Rotimi Amaechi - Rivers State - Minister of Transportation.
40. Maigri Dingyadi - Sokoto State - Minister of Police Affairs.
41. Sale Mamman - Taraba State - Minister of Power.
42. Abubakar D. Allyu - Yobe State - Minister for works and Housing.
43. Sadiya Umar Faruk - Zamfara state - Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management.
44. Dr Ikechukwu Ogah - Abia State - Minister of State mines and steel.

Names of Service Chiefs in Nigeria

1. Maj. Gen. Abayomi Gabriel Olanisakalin - Chief of Defense staff - Ekiti State.
2. Maj. Gen. Tukur Buratai - chief of Army Staff - Buratai town, Biu local government, Born State.
3. Rear Admiral Ibok - Ete Else Bias - Chief of Naval Staff - Nko town, cross Rivers State.
4. Air Vice Marshall Sadique Abubaka - Chief of Ari Staff - Bauchi State.
5. Ari Vice Marshall Monday Rick Morgan - Chief of Defence Intelligence - Benue State.
6. Major Gen. Babagana Monguno (rtd.) - National Security Adviser - Borno State, (North East).

Looking at the appointment, it can be argued that majority of the appointments are to the favor of the North as against South and possibly West of Nigeria. Besides, **the** perplexing application of **the federal character** principle seems to pose **challenges** to administrative effectiveness in **the** Buhari's regime through **the** restriction.

It should be noted however that the federal character principle enshrined in the Nigerian constitution is arguably one of the most controversial provisions of the constitution. The phrase Federal Character was first used by the late General Murtala Ramat Muhammed in his address to the opening session of the Constitution Drafting Committee on Saturday the 18th of October 1975. Federal character of Nigeria, according to the CDC's report of 1977, refers to the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of

Nigeria. This is an effort to re-address the unbalanced structure and ethnic domination in government in order to achieve national integration (Osman in Kayode, 2015). Federal character was supposed to protect the right of the minority, accommodate the disadvantaged and ensure even development in Nigeria.

FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE AND THE NIGERIAN CASE

The workings of government structures and processes are dictated by the system of government in place. The system of government in turn finds expression in the contents of the constitution, or decrees, depending on whether the government is - a dictatorial or democratic regime. The processes and structures are however constrained within the institutional maps and constructions in place (Odubajo, et al, 2013).

Federalism in Nigeria, dates back to the Richards constitution of 1946 which divided the country into three regions of: North, East and West. Bernard Bourdillon the then governor general initiated and laid the foundation of federalism in Nigeria in 1939 by creating three provinces. He later handed over the constitution to his successor Arthur Richards and it became the Richards constitution of 1946. While the Oliver Lyttleton's constitution of 1954 was the first constitution to implement federal principle in Nigeria by granting autonomy to the regions.

Federalism is basically not a descriptive but a normative term and refers to the advocacy of multi-tiered government combining elements of shared-rule and regional self-rule. It is based on the presumed value and validity of combining unity and diversity and of accommodating, preserving and promoting distinct identities within a larger political union. The essence of federalism as a normative principle is the perpetuation of both union and non-centralisation at the same time (Odubajo, et al, 2013). The federal character principle arose out of the need to reduce ethnic conflict arising out of competition for political power, government appointments, citing of public industries and institutions, employment into public organizations among others. Since its adoption in the 1979 constitution, successive constitutions (1989 and 1999) have retained the federal character principle as part of their provisions. Recognizing its 'necessity', General Sani Abacha established the Federal Character Commission for the implementation of the policy in Nigeria

CONCLUSION

Since the introduction of the federal character principle in the Nigerian constitution, there are two schools of thought regarding the usefulness of the principle. The optimist and pessimist with the former believing that the principle is a child of necessity to foster and

strengthen Nigeria's unity while the latter believes that the principle sacrifices meritocracy on the altar of mediocrity. As Amman (in Chukwuma, 2014 cited in Kayode, 2015 p.37) aptly captures the merit of federal character principle as follows: that, *the principle provides an equitable formula for the distribution of socio-economic service and infrastructural facilities; provides modalities for redressing imbalances; ensures equitable admission into federal universities; ensures that no one section of the society unduly dominates the elective or appointive positions; provides equal access into Armed Force, the police, etc.* protect the interest of minority ethnic groups, ensures even spread in the recruitment into federal civil service among civil servants, ensures the corporate existence of Nigeria and promises to douse the centripetal agitations (civil wars). On the other hand, the opponents of the federal character principle argue that the principle undermines merit and promotes mediocrity in the public domain. They further argued that the principle has been used to accelerate the promotion of mediocre and incompetent civil servants, military and paramilitary officers into top positions, because advance in the service is based on criteria derived from the federal character representation

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