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The Role of Academics in the Attainment of National Intergration in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and The Wayforwad

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Abstract: *This presentation is a review of the roles of Nigerian academics in relation to national integration. At the background is the perception of the troubling times in Nigeria occasioned by socio-economic and political turmoil. It is thus premise that, academics in higher institutions of learning have been an integral part of nation integration drives and attempts in Africa and Nigeria in particular. However, it is noted with greater concern such the momentous of the academics to critically participate in the drive for national integration especially in this crucial time of Nigeria's national development have been subdued by serious political and administrative mismanagements in the nations and the contagious effectives such have on the ivory towers. This ugly development has depleted the quality and quantity of the academics, often reducing its impact to campuses. Secondary data were used to described and justify this revelations. The presentation holds that the academics world over and in Nigeria with significance motivation and improved and robust working environment remains the government best bet to institutionalizing and sustaining national integration.*

Keywords: Academics, National integrations, Challenges, Way-forward, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that Nigeria is experiencing several developmental challenges never witnessed in its almost 60 years of existence as a republic. In its politics, economic, education, religion, health, and other spheres/structural designs to aid living, a closer examination of such will indicate or suggest existence or manifestation of signs of problem(s). A catalogue of the development challenges in Nigeria could be summarized as in the nefarious activities of Boko Haram (BH) in the north-east affecting critically four states: Adamawa, Borno, Gombe and Yobe state. Another brand of militancy existed in the Niger-delta creeks of Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa states (as the most prone enclave of the warlords of the militants). Admittedly, the militancy in the Niger-delta was mildly curtailed with the federal government introduction of amnesty programme in 2009. The reality is that the potency of the crisis and factors (such as oil spillage, gas flaring, youth unemployment and restiveness in the region, loss of valuable ecological factors, elitist politics of personal aggrandizements etc.) continue unabated. Meanwhile, government in both federal and states affected remain largely complacent in serious economic mismanagement to bring a lasting end to the crisis in the region. The Niger-delta comprises of six states: Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Rivers and Cross-rivers state. Oil explorations and exportation from this region constitute 80% of the nation's revenues and support almost 90% of the nation's yearly budget.

Observably, apart from the political/economic crisis in the (BH) and militancy in the Niger-delta, other states in the nation experienced other form of serious economic and political challenges which invariable forced citizens to questions their status in relations to those of other citizens and the privileges such herald (Alubo; 2006, Best;2007). Most times this ugly development came with destructive capacity of equalizing or attempting to surpass the militancy in the Niger-delta or (BH) militancy. Whereas, mayhem and attempts at ethnic or religion group

extermination as attempted, in Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, Delta, Osun, etc. ethno-religious conflict remains a turn- in- the flesh of Nigeria, as the six largest oil producer and exporter in the world. The country harbours over 70% of its population as poor (Aigbokhan, 2008, Oshewolo, 2010), this manifest in some implications low national literacy rate, high youth unemployment, in adequate access to health facilities, epileptics electricity supply, high rate of maternal mortality, and squalors.

Even where for instance there is glaring economic boom in revenue generation such as from 1999-date, the political and economic prosperity remains illusion to many, while a few enjoy unprecedented riches and privileges. Such development further polarized the nation, and in a country with long history of ethnic/tribal and religious differences, the issues of national integration with this background no-doubt will remain shaky, though crucial for progress and development of the individuals and the state.

The roles of government in regards to national integrations and development have been highlighted which are variously and mostly short of the ideal expectations, occasioned by poor leadership, corruptions (of recent: Alkali's 2015, When Stealing is Not Corruption), mismanagement, and politics of ethnic and regions priority and religion affinity etc. Hence, what is the faith of national integration in Nigeria, what are the implications and significance of critical stakeholders such as the nation's academics to national integration, what role do such category plays in attainment of nation's integrations? How effective and what challenges could the academics face or overcome towards these goals? And what are the precursors and perceived way forwards in this drive? These are the main trust of this presentation which is made up of this introduction, conceptual elucidation, national integration in Nigeria, and the academics in Nigeria: issues and challenges associated and the ways forwards. Also some recommendations are made.

2. CONCEPTUAL ELUCIDATIONS

Academics: the word academic is derived from the word academia which according to the English dictionary translates to scientific and cultural community engaged in higher education and research. The term academic is an adjective which denotes belonging to an academy or other higher institution of learning; also a scholarly society or organization. Therefore, academics (plural of academic) refer to the members of an academy, college or university. Nigeria's 'western-education' system is tagged the 6-3-3-4. Implying sets of curriculum hurdles for pupil to progress through in primary, junior-senior secondary school and four year tertiary education sojourn. Post-graduate studies for interested candidates and for national development are encouraged institutions such as the university, polytechnics and our colleges of education. Also, reputable state institutions such as Petroleum Trust Fund (PTDF) and Tertiary Education Trust FUND (TETFUND) in technological and scientific filed as in management, humanities and the social sciences. Academics from the citadel of learning in Nigeria are represented in the bodies Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU), Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP), and College of education Academics Staff Union (COEASU). The role of the academics is teaching and examination of students for the award of various forms of certificate of learning and honours variously graded as B.sc, M.sc/M.A/M. Phil., Ph. D, N.C.E, ND, H.N.D, and P.GD.

Scholarship is the most important academic portfolio of the academics, often with an anticipated trajectory from local, national to international impacts. More so, all lecturers (academics) are expected to support administrative activities as a part of professional practice and a level of good citizenship required of the nation and membership of colleges. In addition, Keohane (1999) maintained that academics integrity is essential to the success of our mission as educators. Academics excellences and research also confer on individual professorial status.

- Hum S Nation: according to Anifowose (1999) the concept of nation denote two capacities, as either a political unit (a state) which, (citing earnest bakers definitions) implies a juristically organized nation or a for action under legal rules and which possess characteristics like territory, population, government, independence and a sense of nations identity. In this sense, Nigeria since 1960 has continuously attempted to be and remain a state. Anifowose (1999) also identified state as an ethnological unit (refers to as a race), which is described as a collection of people in a territory with strong cultural bond resulting from blood- ties, common language, traditions and history. These form of definition fits and has been used by various form of ethnic and tribal groups domicile in Nigeria and have largely informed, determined and shaped especially political affiliations and general development. This is with regards to Odua People Congress (O.P.C), The Ijaw Nation, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), The Ohaneze Idi Igbo etc. This socio-political formations owing to experiences such as the sad 30 months civil wars, the military incursion into politics, the resulting introduction of large-scale sentiment into governance, the antecedent institutionalizations of corruption and mismanagement of the nation's resources have all combined to exacerbated ethno-cultural and of recent religious inclined politics and government preferences. Such, have demonstrated capacity for disastrous end to the Nigeria nationhood in 2003, 2007, 2011 post- elections violence.

Contrarily, according to Simpson (2010) a nation is said to be born when a group of people living in a particular territory develop a political form with a sense of unity and determine their political future. It is perceived that the concept of nation arises when national consciousness emerges among individuals, resulting into peaceful and mutually productive political association. A nation exhibits such features as inclusive membership, operated with unbiased set of rules, and mutually benefiting citizenship (Simpson, 2010). In this line of thought, therefore, as an entity Nigeria and Nigerians need to revisit the meaning of nationhood as it apply to them, in other to collectively and adequately work for national integration and national development.

Nationalism: a summary of meaning and implications of the concept Nationalism implies the following. It is membership in a state and its identification, the unity of the people constituted by certain factors like class, language, religion and culture. It is also taken, as an ideological feeling among people based on certain common identities. In the years leading to Nigeria independence in 1960 the concept or notion of nationalist and nationalism reign supreme in the mind and actions of Nigeria. Evidently, it follows enlightened and gigantic strides by individuals and groups, especially those elite with 'western education' or political sagacity in the sensitization and mobilization for independence, from the shackle of the exploitative and dominative colonial rule. According to Mkandawire (1995) the notion of nationalism dominates not only in the political challenges to the imperial Britain, but was grounded in the intellectual and the academic chime prelude to independence. Of, significant was the nationalism dominative capacity in the intellectual dispositions of the first generation academic in Africa and Nigeria (mostly, European and American trained), whom 'sow the seed' of the intellectual capacity of the post-independence Africa.

But, close to a decade after independence of most African states, such as Nigeria, with 56 years of independence, observable from political and economic development, involving its ethnic/tribal (above 370) and religious groups (mostly African Traditional Religion [ATR], Islam and Christianity according to the order of arrival), suggest jettisoning the nationhood (nationalism) for religious and ethnic divides. In sequencing the intellectual progress in Africa, Mkandawire (1995) noted that after independence of most African state, the task of the academic is shifted to those of supporting national integration in the new Africa state. Some 56 years after where are Nigeria and the Nigerian academics?

National Integration: According to Simpson (2010) national integration suggest the filling in an entity with glaring diversities in ethnic, cultural or religion identities to feel unified by certain emotional forces. The main objective of national integration is to counter and surmount all fissiparous forces inhibiting the progress and development of a nation. No doubt National integration is a complex concept. It implies and is implicated by the social, political, religious, regional and economic dimensions in an entity. To this end, Simpson (2010) defined the concept as a state capacity to: create a mental outlook (in its population) which will prompt and inspire every person to place loyalty to the country above group loyalties and the welfare of the country above narrower sectarian interests. In an entity like Nigeria, this has remained the major bane to political and economic development. Onifade and Imhonopi (201) have reviewed several positions in critical confirmation of this assertion (for example: Bandyopadhyay & Green (2009), Miguel (2004), Collier (2009). The intensity, escalation and elevation of ethno-religious sentiment into national political and economic lime-light are unprecedented life in the current democratic dispensations and are a matter for serious urgent attention and redress.

3. THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION: NIGERIAN EXAMPLE.

The needs for national integration have been systematically categorized by Simpson (2010) as follows:

- a) To keep our freedom secure.
- b) To make the nation solid and united.
- c) To break the walls of provincialism.
- d) To avoid internal strife.
- e) To face foreign aggression.

In addition the scholar identified three basic factors as integral to enhancing national integration which are:

1. Structural equality: Equal opportunity must be provided for all especially those who are socially and economically backward.
2. Cultural unity: Caste discriminations like un-toucheability and inapproachability should be eradicated.
3. Ideological unity: Awareness about 'national objectives' should be created among the people who hold divergent views on political and religious and similar other fields.

Nigeria is a country with varied ethnic/cultural and religion differences among its people. Therefore, understanding the political process and governance of the country is very important. This is because for peace and

balanced development to be designed and achieved all components of ethnic groupings (amounting to 370) and religious groupings (the two dominate religious groups Islam [predominantly in the northern part] and Christianity [predominantly in the southern part]), must all be adequately represented in policies, programmes, governance and leadership of the nation. This is in line with creating a nationally integrated nation, which characteristics have been identified above.

These are the bases upon which Nigeria choose federalism as a system of its political administration. The differences in regional, ethnic, religious and other heritage among the various people and groups in Nigeria are effectively to be addressed by a federal design as variously defined by Watts (1994: 7) as “not an abstract ideological model to which political society is to be brought into conformity, but rather a way or process of bringing people together through practical arrangements intended to meet both common and diverse preferences of people.”

In relations, the governance (governing the nation) must be conducted with fairness, justice and equity among all the ethnic and tribal groups. In addition governance must be pursued with the hope and zeal of balancing development in each of the regions (six geo-political zones: North West; North East; North Central, South-South; South-East and South-West.) and states (36) of the federation. In other words the policies and programmes of government in Nigeria must be pursued with the intentions of using the nation’s resources for equal progress and development for all the people of Nigeria.

However, and contrary to this perceived objectives of the state and the clear background to fiscal responsibilities as demonstrated, national integration in Nigeria was described as for example by Onifade and Imhonopi (2013) aptly, thus: since the inception of the Nigerian nation, Nigerian governments, past and present, have made serious efforts to propagate policies and programmes that are geared towards national integration. The duo contended further that: despite such well-intended and unity-oriented programmes and policies, Nigeria’s unity has continued to be plagued and threatened by embedded socio-cultural, religious and political dichotomies. Where, they submit that: unless efforts are made to checkmate these divisive tendencies towards national integration, the long expected and loudly proclaimed oneness and indivisibility of Nigeria will remain an utopia.

4. THE ACADEMICS IN AFRICA: A BRIEF ON NIGERIA

It has been argued that, ‘the survival of our nation depends on teachers.’ Impacting knowledge, creating a disciplined, industrious, strong and vibrant entity remains the challenges of the academics in the 21 century. This is more apparent in third-world countries like Nigeria, with serious developmental challenges. In Europe, Education in the higher level sense has been described as flows:

Higher education is an important aspect of the ‘absorptive capacity’ of societies, the degree to which new knowledge is accessed, understood and used, and a crucial means of realizing the ambition of making Europe more innovative. As one of the main ‘outlets’ for research, not just for social science but for science in general, higher education is one of the most important routes along which research has an impact on society, knowledge flowing via the heads of people into applications in daily life. State-of-the-art insights on teaching scientists how to teach, thus leveraging the knowledge embedded in their research, can be expected to increase the return on investment in science (Floud, 2012).

Europe has many comparative developmental advantages and strides against the Africa. Such remarks by Floud, therefore is a precursor to Africa: Nigeria’s leader and citizenry towards understating and reassessing the implications of higher educations. Since independence there have been at least three generations of indigenous researchers in Africa. Each has witnessed changes in their countries’ economic fortunes and political trajectories, as well as cultural and societal transformation. All of these factors have impinged on the nature and meaning of their academic careers (Mkandawire, 1995). Nigeria academics in every season as identified by Mkandawire, have demonstrated soundly and vibrantly their worth either in the academia or within political and administrative capacity they are called to. Nonetheless, the state of academics in Nigeria remains particularly not encouraging. Erudite academics have described the situation in length as follows:

The teacher is human and is put under challenging tests. He is grossly underpaid (until recently) and still relatively poorly remunerated, he is seriously over-worked, he has been given a job without the requisite tools for successful execution, and then he is a tortured soul, psychologically, having lost respect and dignity in a society that measures worth only in pecuniary terms and having to teach largely uninspiring students. He is under immense pressure for improved performance from the administration which continually raves up performance baselines in the bid to redress standards decay. He must climb to the next rung of the professional ladder. Constrained

by infrastructural and other inadequacies, he succumbs to the temptation to take unethical shortcuts to achieve the goal. These include but are not limited to plagiarism, patronage of obscure phony journals to satisfy the ever increasing minimum number of publications for the next promotion. He concentrates on this publication activity at the expense of other essential duties, particularly his teaching assignment. No one takes any notice so long as the students get the grades they desire (Nwalor, Undated)

In Nigeria, such ugly development as captured by Nwalor above reinforced earlier Mkandawire (1995) claim that, in the current debates about the crisis of African universities and what to do about it considerable emphasis has been laid on the institutions and their physical dilapidation, much more than on the people animating these institutions. Yet one interesting feature of institutions of learning is that while they are sources of new knowledge and labour-saving technologies, they themselves are relatively 'labour intensive' or 'human capital intensive' operations. To justify the implication of Mkandawire a decade ago fear, Saliu (2007) have revealed that, there were over 27,000 academic staff members in Nigerian universities in 2006/2007, having to cope with a high student-staff ratio of 40:1. Tetey (2010) revelation in this regards is partly tempting as he submit:

While academic staff recruitment and retention remain a challenge across the globe, the situation in many African countries appears to be particularly urgent. Leaders of African universities acknowledge the devastating impact of staff shortages on the goals of institutions of higher education and warn that if something is not done very soon, the African academy will not only lose its ability to produce adequate personnel to support the countries' human resource needs but also to uphold and protect the quality of intellectual life in the Africa region.

5. ACADEMIC AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA: THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

In a detailed assessment and critique of the implications of national education drives and system in Nigeria, Nwalor (UD) aptly submits as flows:

Education was not seen as a means for the constructive development of society but rather as the means to a larger share of the wealth of the nation – the same sentiments that ruled in national politics then and particularly still rules today, giving birth and prominence to issues and measures associated with distrust and inequity – insecurity, quota, and the principle of rotation. We had a nation founded on the merits of synergy degenerate to one where everyone literally must fend for himself minding and protecting very narrow personal interest.

He contends further:

Thus, the educational system today has to contend with examination malpractices of various types, admissions racketeering, and records falsification and misrepresentation as well as other vices that threaten its survival. From all this, most sadly, has evolved a culture of aspiring to that which the individual is not qualified for.

Despite, the significance and the necessity to crave for national integration in Nigeria of which the academics occupy a crucial position to purse and direct outcomes, the academics are challenged by multiple cultural and structural factors, some of which are:

- a) The nations inadequate fiscal budgetary allocation to education sector: despite proven huge revenue accrument to the nations, the last 16 years of civilian administration, not one has the nations met the UN 26% mandatory state allocations to educational sector.
- b) Such, development translate to serious infrastructural deficit, in lecture halls/classrooms, laboratories, libraries, modern learning aids such as computers and the internet etc.
- c) Dearth of the academics: the number of qualified and determined academics in the nation continued to dwindle, due to poor motivation and structural deficit obtainable in the nation. More so, academics situations and socio-economic conditions abroad continued to be attractive and luring. Therefore, plummeting the Student-staff ratios as Tetey (2010) demonstrated with particular reference to Nigeria, continue to inhibit the capacity for development and monitoring of morality, discipline, national spirit, nationalism, etc. among young students.
- d) Outreach and capacity of the institutions to general population with knowledge and information from research spread. In developing countries such as Nigeria, wide gap existed between our 'citadel of learning' and society or communities acceptance and applications of modern knowledge and discoveries. The quantum of research and studies in every aspects of knowledge in the libraries and research center in the nation are marveling, however its connection to the nation's populations is largely unattainable. The

character Nwalor (UD) pointed of Education for individual or community advancement is largely dominating and overshadowing its holistic importance for national integration and development.

- e) National literacy level: The national literacy is a prime factor in initiating and sustain development initiative and programmes. The issues of national integration and its importance for development depends on considerable availability of learned, informed, or people with high level of awareness.
- f) Dearth of Technological use: Google, Google scholar, academia, flexible learning aid such as Skype, FACEBOOK, wikispaces etc, are still not in widespread use in the nations as both with academics and the general public. Therefore, serious intercourse between research and research usage remains a challenge in the nations.
- g) The paucity of academics collaboration especially in the inter or multi-disciplinary fashion remains a challenge. The knowledge spaces delineated as academics is obviously vast, a catalogue is provided by the European Science Foundation ESF (2012) as humanities, life, earth and environmental sciences, medical sciences, physical and energy sciences, social sciences, marines sciences, material sciences and engineering, nuclear sciences, polar sciences, radio sciences and space sciences. Each field in its sphere is vast and unique, however, recent applications have suggested that there are more benefits to be attained in collaboration by academics from varied field. The impact to national integrations and development is yet to be adequately pursued.
- h) Industrial collaboration and partnership: as in the above factors industries, organizations, companies whom are a prime target to the applications of research benefits or output in the Nigeria, are yet adequately reach out and accept research vigorously from our ivory towers.
- i) Lastly, id the issues of the internal factors are, in the ivory towers which are described as lack of objectivity and fairness in the internal administration of the institutions, academic offences exemplified by “plagiarism, harassment of female students, lowering of grades In vengeance or upgrading students for clearly illegitimate favours, fraud and peculation in the use of University funds, favouritism in admissions policy for friends of the university administrators, arbitrary appointments of incompetent heads of departments ” (Okigbo,1992 cited in Nwalor, UD).

6. THE WAYS FORWARDS

Higher education has an important role in shaping our future society. The engine rooms in all high institutions are the academics. There are calls for a greater emphasis on the holistic development of students, where all aspects of their growth as individuals in society are addressed (Quinlan, 2011 quoted in ESF,2012). It is observed that, not only is economic growth linked with the potential for universities to embed employability skills and a range of other generic competencies into the curriculum, but cultural change also relies upon higher education. Free, democratic societies require citizens and leaders who will think and contribute critically – intellectually, scientifically and morally – to their communities (ESF,2012). Therefore, Nigeria currently experiencing critical socio-economic, political and technological challenges, must consciously resort to it ivory towers with sincere and determination and commitments not in the fashion of ‘politics’ and political propaganda, but as a clearly agreed panacea to instituting and sustainable national development, a key factor which is national integration.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the implications of the expositions above the following recommendations are particularly apt with regards to the presentations:

- a) At the Federal Government level there is urgent need to increase yearly Educational sector budgetary allocation at least to meet the UNESCO 25% to that effect.
- b) Both the Federal and the State governments, most individual and collectively pursue aggressive provision/disbursement of modern teaching and learning aids to all institutions of learning in the nation.
- c) Government at the federal and state levels must collaborate in supporting wide societal dissemination and applications of research finding from our ivory towers.
- d) Academics research and conclusions from seminar, conferences, workshops must be made public by the academic professional bodies such as ASUU,ASUP, and COEASUU.

8. CONCLUSION

State and nationhood in Nigeria has not been as fragile as it is at present, despite robust national revenue and potential resources for income generation. The history of cultural and religious identity could not be removed or relegated to the background as crucial observed in nations perceived to developed or developing like USA, china, Germany, Japan, India, Singapore, Malaysia etc. What remains critical with all of these nations however is the crucial role high education, conveyed by reputable academics in such countries plays in building, managing and sustaining such nation's integration. Nigeria and Nigeria educational system over the years has built reputable citadels of learning and academics. Some these glaring achievements transcend and radiate in national development of the nation, while serious deficit in motivation and infrastructure combined with state/government mismanagements and corruption combined to denied the nations adequate use and benefits of the academics towards national integration.

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