



Ethnic Pluralism and Cohesion in Nigeria: The Trajectory of Local Government Legislation

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Abstract

There has been a common view that there are more than 350 ethnic groups in Nigeria and the level of ethnic pluralism in some states such as Plateau, Kogi, Cross River, Kaduna, Rivers, Niger and Nasarawa is mindboggling. In these states, each local government has more than 20 different ethnic and socio-cultural groups with specific languages which in most cases made legislation and governance difficult. This ethnic pluralism and multiculturalism in each local government often result in conflict, economic doldrums, and under-development. However, little or no concerted effort has been made by relevant authorities, especially at the local government level, to convert these diversities into national strength and communal cohesion. In fact, on a contrary, the perceived lopsidedness in government appointments and body language of some high-ranking government officials on elements of criminality perpetuated by some groups of people threatens national unity the more. Religious fanaticism, political exclusiveness, tribal allegiance and ethno-religious chauvinistic behaviours as we see today have reached a tipping point, and if not nipped in the bud, it is capable of balkanizing the entire country along these divisive traits. Therefore, the main thrust of this paper is to take a cursory look at how local government legislation can promote cohesion and unity among the multiethnic groups in Nigeria. This study explores the nexus between legislation and social cohesion in a heterogeneous local government system in Nigeria. It argues that promoting national unity and sustainable development in Nigeria is best achieved from the grassroots through conscientious local government legislation that de-emphasises (but not ignore) ethno-religious sentiments and cultural divisions on one hand, and promotes inclusive political participation and social empowerment on the other hand.

Keywords: Ethnic Pluralism, Social Cohesion, Local Government Legislation, Nigeria

Introduction

In pre-colonial era, the area that is known as Nigeria today existed as empires, kingdoms, emirates, caliphates, chiefdoms, villages, etc. Some of the empires and kingdoms included: Kanem-Borno Empire, Oyo Empire, Benin Kingdom, Hausa City States, Nupe, Igala, Jukun Kingdoms and Sokoto Caliphate. There was also House Organizations in coastal areas. The House System which gradually developed into the Canoe House System as a result of the early contact with Europeans existed mostly among the Ijaw, Efik, Ibibio, Itsekiri, and Anang in the Niger Delta region. It is also important to note that there were other diverse socio-cultural and ethnic groups which included the Yoruba, the Hausa, the Igbo, the Fulani, the Kanuri, the Idoma, the Edo, the Tiv, the Itshekiri, the Jukun, the Ijaw, the Ebira (Igbira), the Gbagyi, the Ogu, and a host of others in Nigeria area in pre-colonial era. All these groups were not living in the isolation of one another. There had been long



existing contacts among them through trade, migration, war and cultural exchange before the advent of the European imperialists.

Some of these groups were centralized and governed by a monarch and traditional institutions while others were de-centralized and governed by a council of chiefs, leaders, or title holders. In pre-colonial Nigeria, policies, laws, rules and regulations that facilitated peaceful co-existence amongst all the sub-ethnic groups in the locality or community were made by these traditional institutions. It was the responsibility of the traditional rulers with the advice of their chiefs and spiritual leaders to legislate for the society in a manner that promotes and maintains peace and progress. From the foregoing, it is therefore evident that Nigeria has always been a country of ethnic pluralism, working constantly to accept and accommodate this reality through mutual understanding and cooperation on both simplistic and complex levels. Given this corollary, it is safe to say that diversity is a fact of life in Nigeria, not only within the states but also within communities and local government areas.

Historical Antecedent of ethnic and cultural mix in Nigeria

The Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 which was initiated by the leading European Powers, notably Germany, France, Portugal and Great Britain, facilitated the partitioning of African nations among contending European countries. As the Africans were never consulted or involved in such a landmark decision that would forever shape their future destinies, the whole process was carried out haphazardly in a manner that resulted in the forceful merger of different ethno-religious communities together without consideration of their cultural and social backgrounds. What drove the European powers towards this path was nothing but the enormous economic and political convenience they expected in return. For instance, some Yoruba speaking people were merged with the present day the Republic of Benin, while the Ogu ethnic groups were merged with the Yoruba in the southwestern part of Nigeria.

With the official colonization of Nigeria by the British in 1900 and the subsequent amalgamation of the country in 1914, different people of diverse ethnic and historical backgrounds, were merged together in a particular local government area, and placed under self-appointed paramount rulers by colonial authority, as the British deem it fit for her economic and administrative convenience in the case of Nigeria. With this new arrangement, many kings and chiefs lost their authority and were forced to be totally submissive to the British appointed paramount leaders.

This, therefore, marked the beginning of ethnic and cultural pluralism in a particular local government area. It cannot be disputed that the policy of indirect rule introduced by the British administration changed the existing political arrangements in most parts of modern Nigeria, powers to make laws at the local level shifted to the British administrators, Residents or District Council.

The British colonial administration and their Native Authority (1900-1954) appear to have succeeded in preserving the purity of local ethnic groups. This is not to suggest that during this period there was any limitation or free movement of people and cultures from one locality to another. (Ola, 1984: 31). There was therefore some noticeable mix of ethnic differences in the native authority. Yet the colonial administration was able to contain it using the policy of localization and *myownisation*.

In dealing with ethnic pluralism and multiculturalism under the Native Authority in Nigeria, the monarch who was the sole authority, under the directive of the colonial masters, made appointments based on equal distribution of ethnic groups under his jurisdiction (except on few cases). In other words, every group had a fair and equitable share in the making of policies,



appointments, land disbursements, infrastructural development, social amenities, and other priorities in the Native Authority.

The Richards Constitution is often seen as the one that institutionalized ethnicity in the country by its regionalism. Ironically, however, according to its author, Arthur Richards (1943-1948), it was “designed to promote the unity of Nigeria”, and “to provide adequately within that unity for the diverse elements which make up the country, and to secure greater participation by Africans of (sic) their own affairs”. By dividing the country into the three regions of North, East and West, the Richards Constitution ended up entrenching divisive tendencies between and among the three ethnic monoliths of Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba respectively. Nor was this an inadvertent outcome of the Richards constitutional regional agenda.

Evidently, the British had always encouraged and pursued a policy of *divide-et Impera* in Nigeria. So regionalism was not only supported but also encouraged. Besides, rather than ensure adequate accommodation of diverse elements or cultural groups in the country in conformity with its vowed policy, as earlier indicated, the Richards Constitution not only lumped together the various ethnic groups in northern Nigeria into the Northern Region but made it larger both in land mass and in projected population than the two southern Nigeria – based regions of East and West. This not only created a situation of near-permanent domination of the North over the South, but one of enhanced hospitality and conflict between the East and the West borne out of rivalry for more prominent political participation at the national level, and expropriation of other economic patronages as earlier indicated. Thus, the regions became the basis of political divisions inherent in tribal or ethnic allegiance (Okoro, 2007:102).

At national integration and harmonious inter-ethnic relationships, the point must continue to be made that inter-ethnic hostility was largely fostered by the British because it served their larger strategic interests in maintaining a colonial state in Nigeria. It is common knowledge that there has been a division within the country, not only between North and South but also between East and West. We do equally know that division became more pronounced following the split in the Nigerian Youth Movement in 1941. What is important is that this division did not arise in a vacuum. The activities of the British in their attempt to create and consolidate a colonial state in Nigeria provided the setting for the flowering of divisive and conflictual inter-group tendencies.

Local Government System in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

The local government system in Nigeria was a creation of the colonial rule. It started with the colonial indirect rule/native authority system championed by Sir Frederick Lugard and moved further from stage to stage. The Local Administration was transformed through the democratization of the system and the separation of the traditional/emirate pattern to a new democratic Local Government system. The last stage of its transformations in Nigeria became prominent as it deepened democratic culture. According to Olasupo and Fayomi (2012:1) to date, there are about nine reforms of Local Governments which had taken place in the country:

The 1976 Guidelines for Local Governments Reforms; The 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; The 1984 Dasuki Report on the Local Government System; The 1988 Civil Service Reforms of Local Government System; The 1989 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; The 1992 Handbook of Local Government Administration; The 1998 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the 2003 Review of Local Government Councils in Nigeria.



Mu'azu et.al (2017) affirm that Local Government Administration had passed through different epochs. The first covered the period between 1914 and 1950; the second period fell within 1950 to 1966, the third stage between 1976 and 1976, whereas the final era was from 1976 to date. However, the Local Government system in Nigeria was essentially concentrative but in 1976, it became devolved and laid bare precisely what the word Local Government implies i.e. governing at the grassroots or local level (Olasupo and Fayomi, 2012: 1). Importantly, the 1976 Local Government Reform was designed to strengthen the Local Governments system in such a manner that it will stimulate democratic self-government; encourage initiative and leadership potentials at the grassroots.

The reforms were to ensure the availability of amenities, such as electricity, adequate water supply, improved transportation, health facilities, etc. It was, in addition, to firmly entrenched Local Government as the third tier of government activities in Nigeria, and endowed Local Government with the human, financial and materials resources that would enable them to competently “compliment the activities of the State and Federal Governments in their areas”. The partnership model which involved the devolution of substantial functions and power to local government together with the financial recourses to exercise such functions was heralded by the 1976 reforms. The politicians of the Second Republic frittered away the gains of the 1976 local government reforms by refusing to organize popular elections at the local level. Not only this, but they also violated Section 7 (i) of the 1979 Constitution where they engaged in the proliferation of Local Governments, which were generally designed to reap the maximum political advantage (Mu'azu et.al. 2017).

Among the mischief of the politicians was the appropriation of the revenue-yielding functions of the Local Government which includes tenement rates, market and motor parks by the various state governments and also assigned to the Local Governments the heavy burden of funding costly programs, just to ensure that Local Governments once again became subservient to their dictates (Aliyu, 1992:30).

Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Any Nexus?

In a global society, pluralism and diversity are not hindrances but rather requisites for societal and personal development. Oppression or negligence of differences denies the identity of communities and may undermine the social and political fabric of countries. Social cohesion and commitment to participate in the life of the community are strengthened when differences are recognized and valued. Persons identify themselves as belonging to more than one community. Their identities are mutable and change according to what is required by the circumstances. Governmental policies can contribute to an environment that values diversity and thereby promotes cohesion. An integral part of these policies is the tackling of the negative consequences of globalisation, such as uneven distribution of economic, social and cultural goods within and between communities, and the marginalisation and social exclusion of certain groups within society.

Ethnic pluralism holds the prevalence of different cultures in a society. Ethnic pluralism, which is usually used interchangeably with multiculturalism, denotes the multiplicity of ethnic groups with diverse cultures and the expressed desire to maintain and project these cultures in the society. Most societies today, especially developed ones, are strenuously promoting ethnic pluralism or “multiculturalism” and seeking ways to accommodate and mainstream divergent cultures that do not pose threat to the foundational precept of their countries as we have seen in western countries.



This is what developing countries should emulate. But in doing so, they should understand the deep structural and “civilisational” gap between them and the developed countries.

Ethnic pluralism needs to be firmly based on respect for differences, which implies equality, tolerance and non-discrimination. The assertion of cultural identities, shared values and a common history foster the sense of belonging to a community, be it a majority or minority community, a region, nation, state or continent. Acceptance of diversity and the interaction between cultures foster harmonious relations between people, enrich their lives and provide them with creativity to respond to new challenges.

It is not the denial, but rather, the recognition of differences that keeps a community together. Without respect for differences, communities may turn in on themselves, ultimately leading to their disintegration, decline or disappearance as seen in most Central and Eastern European states, not losing sight of a number of African counties bedeviled by protracted conflicts of identity today. Therefore, cultural diversity is a fact of life, not only between but also within countries. In democratic societies, a consensus is emerging that values cultural diversity and recognises the right to be different. Members of different cultures have their own traditions, heritages and views on the future. Cultural pluralism and interculturalism (the exchange and interaction between cultures) enrich life.

One of the major problems of developing nations is to achieve a reasonable level of social cohesion and political integration in societies that are culturally plural, and in many cases culturally diffuse. Local sentiments and local attachments are usually very strong and most times stronger than the national ones. Does this not corroborate the assertion that “Nigerians see themselves first as members of one cultural or ethnic group or the other, and secondarily as Nigerians”? (Egbule & Olari, 2018: 74). The point is that Nigeria should place more emphasis on local communities with ethnic pluralism so as to achieve a reasonable level of national integration. Indeed, local government in Nigeria has the potential in making cultural diversities for national integration, national consciousness and national development but lacks the legislation to do so.

This brings us to the very concept of Social Cohesion and how it can be achieved through Local Government legislation in a multiethnic and multicultural society like Nigeria. This paper finds a special publication of the Council of Europe (2000) on the subject quite useful. To start with, Social Cohesion in its theoretical and conceptual framework has to do with the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society. It is the degree to which mutual solidarity finds expression itself among individuals and communities. This concept stems from a democratic effort to establish social balance, economic dynamism, and national identity, with the sole goal to setting up a system that promotes equality, avoid social fractures and stimulates prosperity for all (Council of Europe, 2000).

In a socially cohesive society, citizens share common values, moral principles and behavior that engender them toward reaching common goals and objectives through inclusive political systems and established institutions (Kearns & Ray, 2000: 997). Therefore, “a socially cohesive society is one of the important prerequisites for the social sustainability, and thus the sustainable development” (Adil Mahmud, 2013: 4). In the wake of establishing a socially cohesive society among its native population and immigrants of over 180 different foreign backgrounds, the Swedish government has adopted what is called the Swedish Social Mix Policy. It was initiated as an instrument for socioeconomic equalization that aimed to decrease segregation and increase integration, social justice and equality. A key element in this social mix policy is the idea of equality. It emphasizes that all people are equal and should have equal rights (Council of Europe, 2000). In the words of Brigadier Joshua Dogonyaro, while justifying the coup of August 27, 1985, he said



that no nation can ever meaningful strides in its development where there is an absence of cohesion in the hierarchy of government, where it has become clear that positive action by the policy makers is hindered because as a body it lacks a unity of purpose.

Social cohesion practice in most western societies is usually in two forms: objective and subjective. In its objective form, it is concerned with “facilitating participation in the association and community work, inserting “service-learning” into school curricula, acting for inclusive growth (Tanzler, 2008).” The subjective form on the other hand deals with “encouraging media and civil society to self-regulate to reduce the diffusion of false information, improving tolerance across groups and removing stereotypes over immigrants’ perceived lack of integration in society” (Tanzler, 2008). Although it is clear that some of the points listed on “subjective” social cohesion is not applicable to Nigeria, it nonetheless portrays the extent of the concept as a tool of social engineering.

Since not all aspects of the different cultures in a society are prone to conflict, certain shared, universal cultures are to be harnessed, while areas, where conflict and disagreement are expected, should be disregarded. How do these cultures become gelled together to avoid each of them becoming extinct and at the same time not having frictions? The answer to this question lies in the extant laws and ideology that are the foundation of a state. And when these extant laws appear inadequate, it is the function of elected officials, especially elected lawmakers at the local government level to ensure that fissures of the society do not become too magnified.

The nexus between ethnic pluralism and social cohesion represents a huge challenge to the society and solution to forging a “multi-cultural” society that has social cohesion as an ultimate goal lies in the consciousness of policymakers and individual citizens to fashion out means through which differences would be reconciled without resorting to any form of self-help. In choosing an approach that would conveniently mitigate the consequences of ethnic tension and differences, legislation is the most enduring means of building social cohesion between and among disparate ethnic nationalities.

Ethnic Pluralism and Local Government

This section justifies the reason why ethnic pluralism is better investigated at the local government level than at the state and federal. In the first instance, local government is the closest government to the people; hence it is referred to as the grassroots government where everybody in the locality knows each other intimately. Secondly, it gives the people the opportunity to govern and conduct their own local affairs. People in a local community presumably know their locality very well and are likely to understand its needs far better than others from a distance. Each local government has its own economic, social and physical advantages and disadvantages, its own historical tradition and stage of social and economic evolution, its own way of life, and its own customs, beliefs and orientations within the larger context of the national culture (Ola, 1984:9). To this extent, all the ethnic and socio-cultural groups in the local government area interacts and mix with each other in the areas of marriage, trade and commerce, politics and socio-cultural aspects. Indeed, the local government should be responsible for managing ethnic diversity and promoting social cohesion since it is the government closest to the people at the grassroots. Local government can also be a platform for political education, enlightenment and political socialization of citizens within its jurisdiction.

Local government has the capacity to reduce conflicts caused by ethnic rivalry in the country. This it can do at the local level by involving every stakeholder and group in implementing socio-economic programmes that attempt to reconstruct the infrastructure necessary for an improved



way of life. With these, all the diverse cultures and differences in the local government will be united and bonded. This will also reduce conflict and tension. It is now felt that the local government is in a position to make a substantial contribution to this process of ethnic integration. Regrettably, the local government lacks the resources and legislation to enforce ethnic integration.

Realizing further that in a developing country like Nigeria, the vast majority of the population live in the rural areas where communication problems make it difficult, if not impossible, for the central government to reach many people, the significance of local government cannot be overemphasized. In addition, the needs of a particular locality may be different from those of another and it is essential to allow flexibility in the administration to suit the variations of local conditions. This can better be achieved by a system of local government that enables the people of an area to cater for their needs within the broad policies and standards laid down by the central government. The foregoing implicitly suggests that local government will be meaningless to the people if it has no real powers and legal functions to legislate on issues that affect its variant groups. Hence, local government becomes ineffective institution, mere talking shop, and reduced to a toothless bulldog.

Ethnic Pluralism, Social Cohesion and Local Government Administration in Nigeria

Nigeria's nature as a multi-ethnic state makes the discussion of ethnic pluralism and social cohesion a more significant topic of discussion. This is because at the root of almost every crisis in Nigeria is the problem of ethnic intolerance, sometimes occasioned by inevitable differences in culture. Even, most times, ethnic conflicts and religious crises occur in the rural or remote areas where the presence of governance and government is traditionally less strong and ineffective. While it is inappropriate and counterproductive to tell an ethnicity to undermine its culture and values for the enhancement of social cohesion, it is also proper to seek, through legislation; ways through which cultures and values that appear hostile and intolerant could be integrated into the mainstream of "National Ethos" to foster social cohesion – especially at the local government level.

The local government in Nigeria has undergone different forms of change, beginning from the colonial period to post-independent period. The objective of this transformation mirrored the tireless efforts of leaders of different eras, periods, and orientations conscious of bequeathing a credible system of government to the people at the grassroots. This sentiment obviously runs through in the work of Abdullahi and Chima. The duo stressed that:

colonial rule, which was based on the traditional administrative system, and existed from 1903 until the 1950s when the native authority system became obsolete; (ii) the more liberal and participatory approach to local governance introduced in the 1950s; (iii) the advent of military rule, which replaced the model of grassroots participatory democracy with military centralisation and a 'unity of command' scheme; and (iv) the comprehensive reform of local government administration in 1976, which restored liberal participatory values (Abdullahi and Chima, 2015:7).

The lack of adequate legislation at the local level is responsible for the dramatic and increasing incidence of ethnic conflicts and clashes among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The main goal of establishing the local government administration is to bring governance to the people at the grassroot which has been undermined due to certain structural and operational reason. One, they contend with dictatorial control of state governors that determine their tenure of office. For the fact that they could



not independently determine their tenure of office, it then rubs on other problems associated with local government in Nigeria. As Wilson noted:

On several occasions, the states of Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers truncated the tenure of the democratically elected councils and replaced them with members of the ruling political party in the state, as caretaker committees. In most cases, the state governments decided not to conduct elections for the [local] councils, as in the case of Anambra State which ran a caretaker system for over six years (Wilson, 2003: 142).

The Local Government Council is the organ empowered with constitutional responsibilities to make laws that govern the local government. As important as the local government system in Nigeria is, the legislative arm of the government is still partially visible. That is to say that, the organ that is responsible for the promotion of social cohesion in the local government through legislation is rarely seen and its activities are hardly felt by the people.

Without community cohesion, there will be more ethnic parochialism and discrimination. In fact, different groups in society will have different visions of what society should be, which might lead to violence and civil unrest. More so, a lack of community cohesion leads to ethnically/religiously motivated street rioting.

It seems obvious also that no level of government can help the people better in deciding on communal or cooperative projects and enterprises than the local government. With its wealth of experience and knowledge of the locality and its people, it can easily identify the groups that regard it as taboo to work together from those that would very happily and willingly do so. As mentioned earlier, it is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each ethnic group of the community. Local government knows what each socio-cultural group specializes in, what its aspirations and desires are, and what traditions it has for hard work on the farm, for recreational and festive pursuits, or for sports and gymnastics. This detailed local knowledge and experience could then be used for great developmental advantage, especially in improving the economic and social life of the local citizen.

The landmark Local Government reforms of 1976 gave autonomy to the local government in the area of budgeting (this is prepared in accordance with the terms of the general framework prescribed by the State Government from time to time), collection of revenue, maintenance of law and order, levy of rates and fees, provision and maintenance of roads and markets, motor parks and health services, and many other important functions (Orewa and Adewumi, 1983:121). The powers and functions of the council are enshrined in State Local Government Edicts; hence the council is not permitted to legislate on the cohesion of ethnic pluralism in Nigeria. This could have fostered unity and economic development in the country.

For the first time in the history of Nigeria, the Local Government Great Reform Decree of 1976 actually provided a true document that recognized the Local government as an important organ of government that directly interface with the grassroots and local people. The document gave power to the local government as the third tier of government to also legislate, called bye-laws, on behalf of the federal government. The legislation, policy and function of the local government do not include socio-cultural adaptation, ethnic integration, and social cohesion in the local government area.

There is a need to develop policy and other legal frameworks on integration and ethnic relations alongside policies regulating the incursion of different ethnic groups in the community. The development of integration policies is a part of, or profits from, changes in the countries' overall legal framework, including constitutional changes. Laws outlawing discrimination on the basis of



language, race and tribe, national or ethnic origin, religion and belief should be inserted into national and local government laws in Nigeria.

Several countries are reviewing their existing legislation on nationality and citizenship, not only to respond to the immigration situation but also to address the issue of national minorities and stateless persons. In some newly created states, the process of developing an independent citizenship policy is still underway and has not yet been finalised. In most countries in Europe, integration policies have been implemented and considerable experience gained as to how these policies work out in practice. In all of these countries, similar mechanisms have been adopted, including the securing of legal residence rights; measures to facilitate equal access to employment, housing, education and political decision-making; naturalisation and citizenship policies; and efforts to combat discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Integration policies are often based on varying political philosophies and traditions in some European countries, with regular adaptations to respond to changing situations within their receiving societies.

Rwanda is also a model in Africa in terms of the adoption and successful implementation of social cohesion and national unity Social Mix Policy using a bottom-up approach. The ugly experience of the country's 1994 genocide and the quest to prevent the nation from repeating such an experience, coupled with the strong urge to build a prosperous society after the genocide, has necessitated the country, under the visionary leadership of President Paul Kagame to adopt and implement series of policies that relegate ethno-religious and cultural divisions and strengthen national bonds among its citizens. Rwanda first, and every other thing follows appears to have become their motto in abstraction.

Rwanda's policy framework for social cohesion adopted in its new constitution through a referendum in 2003 has three larger goals in mind - reduce poverty and depravity among its population, inclusiveness at all levels and reduce if not eliminate social divisions (Institute for Social Policy and Research-Rwanda, 2012). What needs to be emphasized here is that the success of the Rwandan story of social cohesion and national unity for peace and prosperity lies more with local governance. This is to buttress my argument in this paper that strengthening local governance through legislation and promoting equality, ethno-religious and cultural pluralism from the grassroots up to the federal level is key to surmounting identity-based tension confronting Nigeria today. This commitment must not be reduced to paper work; it must be visibly seen and felt by the very people which such policy tends to bring together.

Conclusion

Apart from the problem of insecurity in Nigeria today, another dreaded challenge to nation-building is the problem of ethnicity and ethnic rivalries which has eaten so deep into the fabrics of the nation's polity and if not properly addressed could lead to the balkanization of the country. This study, therefore, examined the nexus between cultural cum ethnic diversities and social cohesion, with emphasis on how local government legislation unite these diversities for socio-economic development and national integration in Nigeria. In other words, it focused on the issue of ethnic pluralism and national development.

This study emphasized that the local government system in Nigeria is a genuine institution for the formulation of legislation that is capable of redressing or addressing any form of injustice, inequalities, and promotes unity in diversities geared towards robust economic development at the local, state and national levels. This is because legislation at this level is people centred, realistic and down-to-earth.



No doubt, First World War (1914-1918) which originate in Balkan states and Eastern Europe was greatly influenced by ethnic nationalism and ethnic pluralism. Therefore, after the Second World War (1939-1945) there was a paradigm shift and the European nations, in line with the American policy of ethnic integration, began to imbibe the policy of co-operation, integration and cohesion of their cultural and ethnic differences for a united and progressive society.

Since ethnic diversities and pluralism, most often than not degenerate into intra and inter wars, tensions, conflicts and crises, it is therefore argued that socio-cultural and ethnic cohesion at the grassroots enhances harmonious co-existence amongst the various ethnic groups. This will invariably provide a platform for both political and economic sustainability in the country.

Recommendations

1. Establishment of the office of Peace and Conflict Resolution in every local government in Nigeria to address and intervene in any likely conflict between or among ethnic groups within the local government area. The Third Party Alternative Dispute Resolution of Mediation, Conciliation, Adjudication, Arbitration and Negotiation should be adopted for conflict resolution at this level.
2. Full involvement of our traditional rulers and other traditional institutions to facilitate cohesion among ethnic groups in Nigeria. This can be done by encouraging the use of traditional or local approach frameworks in peace and conflict resolution.
3. Inclusive government. Every ethnic group in the local government area must be fully represented in governance, policy and in decision-making.
4. Absence of prejudice, discrimination, segregation, alienation in the area of appointments, employment, developments, provision of essential services, rural reconstruction and development.
5. Provision of adequate security and establishment of a special security outfit, different from the Nigeria Police. Such security outfits should be placed under the supervision of each local government council or authority.
6. Establishment of Equality and Human Rights Commission for local governments in Nigeria.
7. Creation of a communication strategy to enhance cohesion in each local government area. This may include sports, cultural festivals, tourism, and education among others.
8. Respect for every culture, language, symbol and norm within the local government area.
9. Political autonomy and power to legislate on socio-cultural and ethnic cohesion should be given to the local government system so as to facilitate socio-economic development in Nigeria.

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