

Role of cultural identity and social cohesion in national development: Nigeria in perspective

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Abstract

Every nation wants development in various facets of her national life. However, there are various factors that work against such drive. This paper engaged issues that serve as tinges of the roles of cultural identity and social cohesion in Nigeria's National development. With over 250 ethnic groups and their unique cultures, there is more of diversity than one identity as a nation. The calls for restructuring, rotation of the seat of power and agitation for secession further drive home the point that Nigeria is more divided than united. In other words, diversity in culture has in no small measure worked against social cohesion which is very instrumental in National development. It is against this background that this paper sought to provide direction towards national development by emphasising the common culture and practices that binds us as Nigerians and at the same time serve as adhesives towards social cohesion. Adequate theories were reviewed and adapted to the subject matter. This paper is of the view that National development in Nigeria is possible only when each person is made to have a common identity through the principles of fairness, justice, equality and moral uprightness.

Keywords: National development, social cohesion, cultural identity.

Introduction

To make progress in any facet of human endeavour signals "development". Every nation of the world desires to develop by advancing basic areas of human needs among the population under their influence. To a layman, development within the sphere of a nation is known as "National development". But more scholarly definitions exist. For example, Aziza (1998) defines National Development as a gradual and advanced improvement through progressive changes in the socio-political life of the nation. Further to this definition, Olaoye (2013) posits that National development refers to the growth of the nation in terms of internal cohesion, integration, unity, economic well-being, mass participation in government, and

educational growth. The latter definition gives us a 6-dimension approach towards understanding National Development. This means that for a nation to be said to have developed or "developing", each of the six factors should have recorded some positives.

In analysing, each of Olaoye's (2013) dimensions of National development with specific reference to the Nigerian situation, there is a very significantly poor internal/social cohesion in the present-day Nigeria as evidenced in the emphasis on being a Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo man first, before being a Nigerian. Compared to some developed countries like the United States of America and developing nations like Ghana, where the interest of their countries come first, Nigeria still has a long way to go as far as

social cohesion is concerned. This is in the light of recent happenings in these countries.

The absence of Social Cohesion has been a major challenge for many multi-ethnic societies such as Nigeria. Social cohesion has many recognised definitions. For Example, Maxwell (1996: 13), contends that “social cohesion refers to the processes of building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community”. On a daily basis, the social, print and electronic media in Nigeria is inundated with issues that promote division rather than cohesion. Or how can we talk about social cohesion in a nation where the fight against corruption seem to be one sided in favour of some select few who continue to milk the nation dry and get a pat at the back? Or should we talk about the terrorism menace that has promoted high sense of insecurity, distrust among nationals and a culture of individualism rather than collectivism? These questions are not rhetorical, they actually need to be answered.

It was Schmeets (2012: 128) who submitted that Social cohesion ‘describes bonds or ‘glue’ that brings people together in a society, particularly in the context of ethnic diversity’. If this definition is true, the bonds and glue that should bring people together in Nigeria is literally dividing the citizens. The bonds of being threatened by a common enemy and the glue of having no other nation to call our own should make us join forces, become cohesive and bring about the much-needed development. But

the opposite seems to be the case in the present-day Nigeria. Those who should promote cohesiveness are championing issues of division such as the supremacy of an ethnic group over others or a religion over others. National development can only be a mirage as long as these dividing issues are left unattended to or just scratched at the surface.

A twin to the issue of social cohesion is cultural identity. Actually, these are identical twins because if Nigeria is perceived as one singular culture of people with common goals and drives, then social cohesion will be achieved and ultimately National development. Culture is the “style of living” among the people within a group which denotes their values, beliefs, artefacts, behaviour and communication. It is communicated from one generation to another. According to Wood (2006), culture exists when a distinct way of life shapes what a group of people believes, values and does. The definition of culture by UNESCO is very apt and useful. According to United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2011, culture can be defined as the set of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group, encompassing, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of life, value systems, traditions and beliefs. It is palpable from the above definition that culture is the totality of ways and manners people live their lives and make sense of their existences.

The culture of one group is different from another based on diverse values, beliefs, norms, and other characteristics. The way a group understands and attaches meaning to an issue might be different from another group. This diversity in culture is

seen all over the world from continents which are the largest groups to sub-regions in continents (larger groups), to individual countries within the sub-regions (large groups) and also within individuals within the countries (small groups). In spite of these, nations of the world have “National culture”; common values, tenets, backgrounds, ethics and the likes which creates a bond among them.

There are components of culture. These are materiality and non-materiality. Material aspect of cultures consists of arts and other tangible elements for livelihood and security. Auto-mobiles, architecture, food, clothing and physical technologies qualify for material aspect of culture. No society can survive without material cultures and there has not been an exception to this. Material cultures’ manifestation demonstrate vividly the state of development of the society in question and the mix of their material culture’s elements can show their level of seriousness relative to growth and through this it is possible to project their growth pathways and patterns (Akanle, 2012).

The other aspect of culture is the non-material aspect. This is also known as social and organization aspects of culture (Akanle, 2012). This social aspect of culture is not less important than the material. Actually, the material aspect only manifests to the extent of permissibility of the social aspect of culture. This is the social action of the society in question. The social aspect of culture is the force and spirit of the material cultures and it propels the direction of growth of a society persuasively (Olutayo & Akanle, 2007). From the foregoing, it suffices to say that while cultural identity represents the material aspect of culture, Social cohesion

represents the non-material aspect. When people feel that there is a bond or cohesiveness within a particular group they belong, they would make significant contributions towards the development of such social institution.

Cultural identity is the distinctiveness of belonging to a group whether at the largest groups or the small groups. It is both characteristic of the individual and the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity (Ennaji, 2005). What this means is that cultural identity is part of a person’s self-conception and self-perception and is also related to such individual’s nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group an individual belongs to, which has its own distinct culture. When individuals form an identity based on a particular culture they belong, they would usually want to form a formidable bond within the sphere of such social identity. From an individual perspective, it assumes the existence of people who feel part of a community, participate in decision-making areas and can exercise active citizenship. It also involves the development of public policies and mechanisms of solidarity between individuals, groups, territories and generations.

The population of Nigeria is over 150 million. This confers on it the status of the most populous country in Africa which is close to 20 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa. In the same light, Nigeria is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. It is thus, a multi-cultural nation with about 500 ethnic groups with very diverse socio-cultural system deeply rooted in ethnic segmentation (Olutayo & Akanle,

2007). The form of cultural identity being portrayed in Nigeria today is not an identity of being a Nigerian, but one of being from a part of Nigeria. For example, an Igbo man from Arochukwu in Abia state, will see himself first as an Arochukwu man, from a particular clan, before thinking about being an Igbo man or a Nigerian.

This form of mentality about “cultural identity” is prevalent among citizens. Being employed in a government parastatal is no longer based on merit but where one is from as evidenced from major unscientific for a where discussions in this direction have been engaged. Federal character is de-emphasised and “ethnic character” is emphasised. Such form of cultural identity promotes disunity, distrust and the absence of social cohesion. The slogan is now “all man for himself”. How would there be any form of significant development in an atmosphere of greed, selfishness instead of selflessness, being unpatriotic instead of a culture of patriotism, unabating corruption instead of high level of honesty and integrity? Little wonder Nigeria is where she is today in the comity of Nations.

A couple of theories provides explanations for these issues. They are reviewed and applied to the context of this discourse.

Theoretical Underpinning

Modernization Theory

Modernisation Theory by Reyes (2001) has been defined as a theory that uses a systematic process to move underdeveloped countries to a more sophisticated level of development. The theory is actually a United States and European centred normative model of development. The emphasis of

Modernisation Theory is cultural change directed at institutional structures in non-industrialized countries. This Theory explains inequality within or between states by identifying different values, systems and ideas held by different nation states (Martinussen 1997). The Theory emerged in the late 1950s when it appeared as a North American political scientists’ reaction to the incipient failure of many of the prescriptions of development economists (Rapley 2002). While Modernisation Theory stresses the importance of political development in the progress and climactic improvement of a nations’ economic standing, it also acknowledges social and cultural reforms.

This theory aptly captures the subject matter in this article. For a Nation to truly develop, such Nation must undergo social and cultural reforms. Such reforms would address issues of cultural diversity, cultural identity and social cohesion. These are issues that affects “people” directly rather than institutions. Development is not likely to occur in a situation where conflict and division hold sway along the lines of religion, tribes and ethnicity. This happens to be the unfortunate situation Nigeria has found herself. How can there be National development in a Nation where almost all issues are politicised, a place where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, a Nation where actions do not correspond to promises and political manifesto. For development to be seen, this theory posits that individuals be given a sense of belonging in the Nigeria project, a sense of identity and much more, a fair share of resources, opportunities and responsibilities. This theory is however deficient in several respects as highlighted by the dependency theory.

Dependency Theory

Dependency Theory has been presented as a theory of development that improves Modernisation Theory. It was developed by Reyes (2001) It puts together elements from a neo-Marxist theory and adopts a “revolution of under developed nations model”. The emphasis of this theory is the totality of society and social system periphery, which brings to the fore differences between countries that are imperialistic in the first world as compared to underdeveloped countries. The Theory explains these differences by focusing on regions and structural conditions in different nation states. According to this theory, the system of the capitalistic world causes a labour upheaval that damages the domestic economies of under-developed countries. It diminishes the economic growth rate and ends in the increased inequality of income. It also has a negative effect on the welfare of the majority of people. Further, since there is no basic equality in the goods that are processed and the exchanged raw materials, major and minor countries have been separated from one another more and more by the application of trade dependency (Shareia, 2015).

From this theory, the relationship between the capitalist world and the developing world can be likened to the relationship between the upper class and lower class in Nigeria. The gap keeps widening and deepening thus making the lower class “always” depend on the upper class. There is a clear absence of the middle-class in the entire scenario. Such dependency is one-sided and unhealthy. The ideal is that there should be an upper class, middle class and the lower class. Where these categories exist, there will be

even distribution of the resources and opportunities in a geographical location through the principles of equality, fairness and justice.

McClelland's Need for Achievement Theory

This is a motivational theory that seeks to explain how the needs for **achievement**, **power**, and **affiliation** disturb the actions of people from the context of a managerial setting. This model was developed in the 1960s by McClelland who stated that we all have these three types of motivation regardless of age, sex, race, or culture. More relevant to this paper is the fact that the type of motivation by which each individual is driven obtains from their life experiences and the opinions of their culture.

For individuals with the need for achievement (nAchiv), they prefer working on tasks of moderate difficulty and those in which the results are based on their effort rather than on anything else. They also prefer to receive feedback on their work. These individuals according to McClelland tend to avoid both high-risk and low-risk situations. Low-risk situations are seen as too easy to be valid and the high-risk situations are seen as based more on the luck of the situation rather than the achievements that individual made.

For individuals with the need for affiliation, they prefer to spend time creating and maintaining social relationships, enjoy being a part of groups, and have a desire to feel loved and accepted. People in this group tend to adhere to the norms of the culture in that workplace and typically do not change the norms of the workplace for fear of rejection. This person favours collaboration over competition and does not like

situations with high risk or high uncertainty. This is quite opposite for those with the need for power.

Persons with the need for power enjoy work and place a high value on discipline. The downside to this motivational type is that group goals can become zero-sum in nature, that is, for one person to win, another must lose. The bright side however, is if such “enjoyment of work” and “high value for discipline” is associated with group goals in an organization, there will be development and positive growth. But where the need for power is for selfish gains and for antagonistic reasons, development would only exist in the dream world.

Application of McClelland's Theory

Nigeria is like an organization where different individuals from various backgrounds, with different experiences and culture agreed to come together through Lord Lugard's Amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate. They further agreed to exist together as one nation governed by a constitution which is supreme to other constitutions of groups within the larger group. Like McClelland's organizational context, the various individuals in Nigeria have varied needs which must be geared towards a common goal – National development.

However, the positive aspects of the needs for achievement, affiliation and power is farther than the reality on ground in the present-day Nigeria. The reality on ground is that individual needs have coloured the collective needs in the society. If the needs of Achievement, affiliation and power are geared towards improving the common lot of the generality of the Nigerian people, then the positives of the application of this theory would have been

accomplished. The folks in the industries and academia can be seen as those with the need for achievement. They want whatever success they record to be based on their effort and not due to luck or chance. As much as this is admirable, basic technological advancement and education transformation is still lacking. Perhaps this is due to the channelling of this energy to the wrong course. Researches should bring about development, policy changes and technological breakthroughs. But what we see is that researches outputs end up on the shelves and mediocrity keeps ruling.

Affiliations in the present-day Nigeria is not based on the “one Nigeria” campaign that is in the public domain, it is now based on who you know, who knows you and how much you have. People affiliate not because of what they want to contribute to the system, but for what they want to take from the system. Hence, the system is sucked and looted dry at the expense of the masses who cannot have neither their way, or their say.

In other climes, power is sought for development, progress and unity. A very clear case is the South Africa scenario. Nelson Mandela sought for power to end the apartheid's era of segregation, racial discrimination and civil war. He was not power drunk, neither was he unruly with power. Infact, he was literally begged to seek for a second tenure, but he respectfully declined. His need for power was for development and not personal enrichment. The crop of leaders today in our beloved country seek power for ethnic cleansing, racial favouritism and for religious sentiments. The only culture citizens understand is the culture of where they come from while the other culture they have

observed among those entrusted with power is the culture of impunity.

If we must develop as a country, our various needs must be channelled towards the overall good of the nation. Whether it is the need for achievement, affiliation or power, it must be for the common good of all. Achievements should not be based on selfish needs but to make the nation proud. Achievements such as making breakthroughs in medicine, technology, agriculture, education and other sectors. Affiliation should be one that will promote social cohesion while the need for power must be towards development in all ramifications.

Equity Theory

This theory focuses on determining whether the distribution of resources is fair to both relational partners. It stresses that equity is measured by comparing the ratio of contributions (or costs) and benefits (or rewards) for each person. As a theory that explains social justice especially in the place work, equity theory was first developed in the 1960s by J. Stacy Adams, who was a workplace and behavioural psychologist. He asserted that employees seek to maintain equity between the inputs that they bring to a job and the outcomes that they receive from it against the perceived inputs and outcomes of others (Adams, 1963). The belief is that people value fair treatment which causes them to be motivated to keep the fairness maintained within the relationships of their co-workers and the organization. The structure of equity in the workplace is based on the ratio of inputs to outcomes. Inputs are the contributions made by the employee for the organization

This theory proposes that individuals who perceive themselves as either under-rewarded or over-rewarded will experience distress, and that this distress leads to efforts to restore equity within the relationship. It focuses on determining whether the distribution of resources is fair to both relational partners. Equity is measured by comparing the ratios of contributions and benefits of each person within the relationship. Partners do not have to receive equal benefits or make equal contributions as long as the ratio between these benefits and contributions is similar.

Application of the Equity Theory

Nigeria is a nation where equity exist only in theory. It is a place where equity begins and ends within the four walls of institutions of learning; again, just on paper. Perceived inequality by citizens can better explain for the religious, ethnic and all forms of crises that we see today. Having a sense of marginalization, ethnic cleansing and uneven distribution of appointive positions pervades the entire Nigerian landscape. When Nigerians begin to feel that their input to the commonwealth of the nation far outweighs the output, there is bound to be distress and conflict.

For instance, the agitation of the south-east to secede from Nigeria to form “Biafra” can be considered as an outcome of perceived inequality. The continued unleashing of mayhem by the “boko-haram” sect can also be described as a perceived sense of inequality on their part. The agitation of the Niger-delta, being the proverbial hen that lays the golden egg is borne out of perceived inequality. How can we begin to think of national development if we keep pretending that these issues do

not exist or just wish them away? They can never be wished away. These issues and many more needs to be addressed now when the centre can still hold some fragments before things fall apart completely.

Conclusion

The puzzle, therefore, is, if the feeling of cultural identity is being threatened by an increasing cultural diversity, what can a nation like Nigeria do? This question has dominated the political and intellectual spaces over a long time. The proposition from this paper is that smaller units represented by various ethnic groups should be given a sense of belonging to the national cause. This can be achieved by fair and just representation in national affairs, giving a voice to the less populous ethnic groups and minorities.

Another proposition of this paper in this line is that for national development to happen in Nigeria, policies that will make Nigerians become proud to be one should be advanced. A Federal legislator had suggested that in the place of “state of origin” in various forms being filled for various purposes as touching the federal government, “state of residence” should be inserted. According to him, it will begin to close the gap caused by our diversities if a Yoruba man can become a state legislator in the south-eastern part of the country, or if an Ijaw man becomes a governor in the Northern part of the country due to “place of residence”. This will give Nigerians a sense of “National identity” rather than “ethnic identity”.

Furthermore, social cohesion can be achieved through strengthening of the common ties that binds society together such as equitable distribution of the common wealth, justice, having a common

goal and vision for the Nigeria project. This can also be achieved by reducing inequalities in interpersonal incomes, promoting balanced development among various communities in different geographical areas of the country. When this is done, the myriad of issues currently facing the Nation would be significantly addressed and then pave way for National development. The development of any Nation is a collective responsibility and a common project to all members of the Nation, therefore, if there is any time that the leadership apparatus in Nigeria should arise and take the bull by the horn, it is now.

Declaration:

The authors hereby declare that there is no competing interest to this paper, neither has it being published in any other research outlet

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