

Research Article

Diversity, Inclusive Governance and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: The Federal Character Principle in Focus

Roseline C. Onah¹, Gabriel Igwebuikwe Ayogu² (Ph.D)

^{1,2} Department of Public Administration and Local Government University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

ABSTRACT: The need for inclusive governance has become more urgent in the face of the ethno-politically propelled violence prevalent in the world especially in Africa. The Federal Character Principle though introduced to redress geopolitical imbalance and bring about national integration, has become the Achilles heel of Nigerian politics. Thus, the thrust of this paper is an in-depth analysis of the Federal Character Principle as an instrument of retooling Nigeria diversity for inclusive governance and sustainable development. Through a documentary search, the paper examined the application of the principle and its effect on key principles that promote effective public service delivery and sustainable development. Our findings show that the principle has gone a long way to reduce various factors of mutual distrust and rivalries among states and geopolitical zones for sharing of the Nigerian commonwealth. However, the implementation of the principle has impinged on the application of the merit principle in public service recruitment and selection which is key to effective service delivery and sustainable development. In its varied application, the principle tries to prop the weak but downplays excellence thereby brewing injustice and inefficiency. Based on the thesis that Nigeria can only continue to seek unity and development upon the continuing basis of ethno-political diversity, the paper makes some recommendations towards a more effective application of the Federal Character Principle. These include applying the principle only at the entry level into the service while climbing up the ladder should depend on solely on merit, recruitment for post requiring specialist training should not be based on Federal Character Principle but strictly on merit among others.

Key words: Diversity, Inclusiveness governance, sustainable development, Federal Character Principle

Introduction

Historically, modern-day African nations are creations of British, French and Portuguese colonization. Colonialism merged geographically and ethnically different people together for administrative and economic convenience but failed to unite them. The process of colonial amalgamation only joined diverse people and regions in an artificial political entity. Consequently, there has been ethno-politically propelled violence in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Mali and Nigeria to mention a few. These violence have continued to claim lives and property as well as make life very insecure in these nations. The international community has continued to act swiftly to stop the hemorrhaging in parts of Africa ridden with ethno-political violence (Kenya, Liberia, Sudan and Nigeria etc), advocating inclusive power sharing agreement with multi-party coalitions.

After Somalia established a Transitional Government in 2004, the United States called it “an important step towards the re-establishment of stability and effective inclusive governance (U.S Dept of State, 2004). Reflecting on the horrors of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda’s government said that the bitter lesson is that only a national and regional environment based on all-inclusive governance can prevent such suffering in the future (Mazimpaka, 2007; Levan, 2011). Following corrupt elections in 2007, Nigeria’s new president proposed an “all-inclusive government” (Olagide and Machika, 2007). The

language of inclusion used by political leaders typically implies a need to appease disenfranchised political parties or to accommodate rebel movements or social cleavages (Le Van, 2011).

In Nigeria also, the need for inclusiveness has grown increasingly as the country shifted from three regions (North, East and West), to six geopolitical zones and then to 36 states. For example, to ensure inclusiveness in the 2014 National Conference, there were three members from each state in addition to representation from ethnic minorities, geopolitical zones, physically challenged among others. National Assembly Leadership positions are also subject to quotas related to location of the three largest ethnic groups (Dan-Musa, 2004). In this complex federal context, achieving an ethic of inclusion depends upon where one defines the boundaries of representation. Hence, the initiation of the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria as a means of ameliorating the challenges to her diversity and national integration becomes invaluable.

The broad objective of this paper is to examine the application of the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria for harnessing the country’s diversity towards sustainable development. Specifically, the objectives of the paper are to:

- ❖ Explore the genesis of the Federal Character Principle,

- ❖ Examine how the Federal Character Principle has been applied in Nigeria,
- ❖ Explore the strengths and weakness of the Principle as an instrument for harnessing Nigeria's diversity towards sustainable development, and
- ❖ Proffer measures towards a more effective application of Federal Character Principle.

Conceptual Clarifications

Inclusive Governance

Inclusive governance implies that all people (including the poor, women, ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged groups) have the right to participate meaningfully in governance processes and influence decisions that affect them (Dias and Sudarshan, 2007). It is a system of and practice of governance characterized by accountability, responsiveness and integrity among public sector service providers that ensures gender equality and social inclusion in policies, programmes and practice of government (Sigdel and Sharma, 2014). The foregoing definitions are pointers to the fact that inclusive governance is necessitated by the existence of diverse forces which may comprise ethnic, religious or cultural differences, gender and disparity in resource endowment among others. Inclusion involves bringing together and harnessing diverse forces and resources in a way that is beneficial (Jordan, 2011). By creating an environment of involvement, respect and connection of the varied groups, inclusion puts the concepts and practice of diversity in action. Inclusive governance fosters an inclusive participatory environment where uniqueness of backgrounds, talents, capabilities, resource endowments and ways of living are welcomed and leveraged for better decisions and services delivery.

Federal Character Principle

The Federal Character Principle infers that the composition of the federal government or any of its agencies and the conduct of such government or council and the conduct of any of the affairs of the government or such agencies shall be carried out in such a manner as to recognize the diversity of the peoples within its area of authority and need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty of all the peoples of the federation. The federal character principle has its root in the passion for fairness. The federal character principle is articulated in Section 14 (3) of the 1999 Constitution thus:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

Sustainable Development

Sustainability is related to the quality of life in a society. It is concerned with whether the economic, social and environmental systems that make up the society are providing a healthy, productive, meaningful life for all residents both the present and the future. Against this backdrop, the Brundtland Report of 1987, provided the often cited definition of sustainable development as, "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United General Assembly, P43, cited in Emas, 2015). Definitions of sustainable development however abound (Ciegis and Streimikiene, 2005; Kates, Parris, Lieserowit, 2005; Dzemydiene, 2008). This is in line with the argument of Ciegis, Ramanauskienė and Martinkus (2009) that the concept of sustainable development may be difficult to understand and may have different meanings depending on the analyzed literature on the context in which it is used.

Although sustainable development is variedly defined, as a general concept, it involves three equivalent components, viz; environmental, economic and social as well as three dimensions of wellbeing (economic, ecological and social with their complex interrelations (Ciegis, Ramanauskienė and Martinkus, 2009). In the promotion of the well being of the present generation, sustainable development demands that available resources must be harnessed in a manner that will not jeopardize the ability of the future generation to promote their own well being.

Historical Background Of The Federal Character Principle

A cursory study of Nigeria's history points to the fact that the country comprised independent kingdoms prior to colonization and independence (Odumosu, 1963). The British policies of indirect rule implemented through their divide and rule tactics further polarized the various kingdoms within the present day Nigeria (Ozekhome, 2004). These kingdoms were later brought together to form a federation by a colonial fiat. These features make Nigerians incompatible and compel citizens to be ethnic conscious, giving their loyalty to their regions and ethnic enclaves rather than the nation (Babwal, 1985). This loyalty has in time past, manifested in the form of promotion and championing of ethnic chauvinism, tribal jingoism and regional superiority by the citizenry.

The amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914 unified the diverse ethnic groups under the protectorates into an entity called Nigeria, but failed to unite them. The establishment of the northern, eastern and western regions following the 1946 Richards Constitution and the subsequent emergence of ethnic based political parties within the three regions further entrenched diversity, ethnicity and separatism. Against this backdrop, the British colonial masters designed what they euphemistically dubbed federalism with unity in diversity (Nnamdi, 2009). The Nigeria federation as described by Suberu and Agbaje (1998) was established to hold together the diverse ethnic groups and nationalities that

had been forcibly and arbitrarily incorporated into a unitary colonial state. However, a major challenge that faced various government was to ensure fair play in a plural society such as Nigeria, characterized by diversities and inequalities of various magnitudes and dimensions.

The reasons why citizens prefer to toe the ethnic, tribal and regional lines are not unconnected with the quest to foster nepotistic patronage through the control of the nation's resources. Since the control of the nation's resources by any person or group of persons will automatically mean that those close to that person or group of persons will inevitably be empowered through the lavish and indiscriminate award of contracts and managing of the nation's wealth from the powers that be, it becomes a do or die affair in ensuring that ethnic, tribal or regional interest is enthroned and protected (Ozekhome, 2014).

Consequently, the agitation for even and fair distribution of national resources culminated in a political solution in 1978 by the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), as the federal character concept and was first entrenched in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979. Its origin is linked to an address by the CDC in October, 1975 (Opadere, 2009). In the address, General Mohammed charged the committee to consider the adoption of an executive presidential system of government in which the election of the president and vice president and the selection of members of the cabinet would be done in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of the country.

In line with the suggestion of the General Mohammed, the CDC headed by Chief Fredrick Rotimi Alade Williams resolved that, fear of domination was an important feature of Nigerian politics and that the fear could be allayed by instituting measures that would prevent the predominance of persons from few states, ethnic or sectional groups in government or its agencies. Consequently, the committee adopted the principle of federal character as the framework for promoting equitable ethno-regional representation in government (FGN, 1976). Accordingly, Section 14, subsection 3 of the 1979 Constitution stated:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

The flagrant violation of the provisions of the constitution however, led to the promulgation of the Federal Character Commission Act, 1995 (FGN, 1999). This act established the Federal Character Commission (FCC) with the responsibility to promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principle of the proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all levels of government (FCC, 2006).

The Federal Character Commission And The Federal Character Principle

The major task of governance is to gain social acceptance of policies with minimum resistance from the governed. No matter how well conceived, public policy needs social support and one of the oldest methods of securing such support is to draw a wide segment of society into the government to convey and to merchandise a policy (Krislor, 1974). Complex modern bureaucracies therefore need the legitimization of representativeness. This need for the administrative penetration of society through representativeness is even more acute in countries like Nigeria where bureaucrats exercise enormous discretionary powers. Though regional quotas were introduced for military recruitment in the 1950s, the quest for reforms after 1966 has meant the entrenchment of affirmative action within Nigeria's political and constitutional systems. Affirmative action that is, planning and acting to end the absence of some categories of people (those who belong to groups that have been subordinated or left out) from certain jobs and schools (Bergman, 1996) is the key premise of the federal character principle. Such affirmative action is often defended on three grounds: to offset past discrimination; to counteract present unfairness and to achieve future equality.

In Nigeria, all three motives for affirmative action were implied in the drive for reforms. Alleged victims of nepotism and tribalism wanted action to correct past discrimination; champions of ethno-regional interest wanted to counteract present unfairness; while ardent nationalists wanted the stability and effectiveness that would result from the promotion of diversity (Ugoh and Ukpere, 2012). There are two distinct waves of reforms, culminating in the creation of the FCC. The first wave of reforms started in 1967 and included dismantling the old regional institutional framework and replacing them with smaller states. The objectives were to: deny regional elites the institutional framework for ethno-regional politics; create administrative cleavages within ethnic majorities; give administrative autonomy to ethnic minorities, and tilt the balance of power away from the regions in the direction of the centre (Ugoh and Ukpere, 2012).

Another set of reforms in this period sought the deliberate creation of a national (as opposed to erstwhile regional) political dynamics, again tilting the centre of gravity away from the regions. This was achieved through the deliberate dismantling of relics of colonial era native authority power in the north and the concerted effort to defeat Biafran secession. Finally, there was the introduction of informal quotas as the basis for representation within the federal cabinet and in the admission process in federal educational institutions.

The second wave of reforms was triggered by constitutional debates about the nature of the post-military political settlement. They started in 1979 with the introduction of a majoritarian presidency that must get a national majority of votes cast and also cross a threshold of not less than 25% of votes cast in at least two-third of all the states. These were also the introduction of pan-ethnic rules for the formation of

political parties, and the constitutional entrenchment of occasional power-sharing rules (federal character principle). These were all institutional designs aimed at forcing politicians out of their ethno-regional cocoons towards the promotion of diversity (Ugo and Ukpere, 2012). It is this reform process that led ultimately to the creation of the Federal Character Commission to give administrative teeth to the Federal Character Principle.

Section 14 subsection 3 of the 1979 Constitution where the Federal Character Principle was entrenched was non-justifiable. However, other justifiable sections which reiterated the Federal Character Principle were: (a) Section 135, which stipulated that the president must appoint at least one minister from among the indigenes of each state; (b) Section 157, which compelled the president to take due regard of the federal character of Nigeria in appointing persons to such offices as the secretary to the federal government, ambassadors, permanent secretaries of federal ministries, and the personal staff of the president; (c) Section 197 (2), which stipulated that the officer corps and other ranks of the armed forces must reflect the federal character of Nigeria; (d) Section 199 which called for the establishment of a body to ensure that the composition of the armed forces does comply with the federal character principle. The federal character provisions have been incorporated into all subsequent Nigerian Constitutions including section 14 (3) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

Provisions/Powers of the Federal Character Commission

In Section 150 of the 1989 Constitution, many new institutions, such as the governing bodies of state-owned companies and the governing councils of the universities, were brought under the purview of the federal character principle. The National Constitutional Conference convened by General Abacha in June, 1994 went furthest in promoting occasional power-sharing in Nigeria (Ekwueme, 2005) and also came to the conclusion that a Federal Character Commission was to be established, to monitor and enforce federal character application and proportional representation. By the time the FCC was established by Decree No. 34 of 1996, its powers, including the powers to prosecute heads of ministries and parastatals for failing to carry out its instructions (Section 4 subsection 1c) were enormous. Actually, the scope of its operations had been extended beyond governmental bureaucracies, to address the inequalities in social services and infrastructural development, along with the inequalities in the private sector (Section 4, subsection 1di and 1dii). It also had powers to work out a quota formula for the distribution of jobs and to establish by administrative fiat, the principle of proportionality within the federal civil service (FCC, 1996).

Though, it was argued that the Commission 'must not be used as a lever to elevate the incompetence or associated 'with the lowering of standards'. It nevertheless established that within any federal establishment, indigenes of any state shall not constitute less than 2.5% or more than 3% of the total positions available including junior staff at head office of any

national institution, public enterprise or organization (FCC, 2014). Where there were only two posts, one must go to the north and the second to the south; where there are six posts; one must go to each six geopolitical zones of the country. Where a state cannot find a candidate to fill its slot, that fact is officially noted and a candidate from another state in the same zone shall be given preference in filling such vacancies. Indigenes from a state shall constitute not less than 15% and not more than 18% of the senior level positions in each establishment. At the level of the 36 states bureaucracies, senatorial districts, local government areas and wards are the functional units used to distribute posts. The powers of the commission can be summarized as: (a) Working out formula for sharing posts and services; (b) Monitoring compliance; (c) Enforcement of compliance through the courts; (d) Demanding and receiving data on staffing; and (e) Instituting investigations. It is an offence in law to forward false information to FCC or withhold information from it, or supply it with incomplete information.

Although there is a proviso that under no circumstance shall an unqualified candidate be shortlist purportedly on the basis of federal character consideration (FCC, 2014), application of the principle does insist on the selection of the best candidate in absolute sense but only in relative terms. To buttress this fact, the procedure for recruitment into the federal civil service stipulates that the best and most competent candidates from each state or Federal Capital Territory shall be shortlisted to compete for positions reserved for their respective states/zones (FCC, 2014: 25). The implication of this provision is that merit can only be applied within the confines of the quota for the respective zones. That does not offer the country the opportunity to optimally harness the diverse talents and expertise across the country, crucial for effective service delivery. Consequently, the extent to which the application of the federal character principle affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service becomes of great concern.

The application of federal character principle in the public service has attracted negative comments from scholars pointing to the fact that it erodes the principle of merit in employment which is the hub of effective service delivery. The merit principle is compromised for equity in distribution. Commenting on the issue, Ekeh (1989) described the application of federal principle to the public services, as most radical and damaging. He argues that the application of the principle has invaded the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and other governmental bodies that normally should be shielded from ravages of politics. In a reaction to the application of the principle, Adamolekun (2007) queried whether the area or ethnic region of an individual becomes the key factor in determining the quality of the individual. This comment is pertinent since it is only quality which is achieved through meritocracy in the employment process that can ensure high productivity and optimal service delivery for sustainable development. Forrest (1993) also posited that the application of federal character principle in the public service not only led to poor appointments but also enhanced

mediocrity rather than merit. Similarly, Gberevbie (2010) criticized the principle as a negation of the merit principle. Some assert that federal character is tribal character (Oyovbaire, 1983), while others condemn it as geographical apartheid (Suberu, 2001). The major thrust of these criticisms is that the federal character principle is inherently discriminatory.

Federal Character Principle and Sustainable Development

The desire to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging as encapsulated in the definition of Federal Character (FRN 1999, 14(3)) is germane to sustainable development. To buttress this fact, the mission of the federal character Commission, (FCC) which was established to give effect to the federal character principles is clearly articulated as “channeling public investment towards sustainable development” (FCC 2014:11). FCC also has the mandate to ensure fair and equitable distribution of socio-economic amenities and infrastructural facilities. Against this backdrop, there is no doubt that the use of Federal Character Principle to promote sustainable development was a key objective of the architects of the principle. The FC principle arguably negates the principle of merit in its pure form. There are convincing points raised to the fact that this negation constitutes an impediment to the realization of sustainable development through optimal services delivery. It has also been argued (Oyediran, 1986; Suberu and Diamond, 2004, Onimejisin, 2005, Bello, 2012) that by emphasizing zonal representation, the FC principle projects the diversity or differences among Nigerians rather than their similarities, thereby becoming a factor of disintegration rather than integration which constitutes a crucial factor in sustainable development.

Apart from this, the work of the FCC has the problem of using arithmetic quotas. While quotas are easily understood and implemented, they nevertheless shift emphasis to the group and geographical zone represented, and away from the relative qualifications of the candidates under consideration. The individual establishments handle all technical questions about the competence of candidates and the short listing of candidates. However the FCC expects the establishments to take federal character into account even at this early stage of the recruitment process, sorting the applicants by state of origin (Krislor, 1974). What is often lacking in practice, however, is any effort to establish the most qualified candidate within each state, and to systematically relate the qualifications of applicants across states so as to monitor and manage the tensions between equity and merit. The FCC quota formula does not therefore ensure that the best candidate from a state is chosen. Concern for the relative qualifications of the candidates would have moved away from the pure quota model of affirmative action and more towards the trumping model. The trumping model would require that only the best candidates from the states and zones are considered that preferences across states are also monitored (Ugoh and Ukphere, 2012).

The federal character commission has also been criticized for ignoring ethnicity and religion, two critical cleavages in Nigeria (by law its focus is on states and geopolitical zones). It is technically within Federal Character Commission rules for a Yoruba from the southwest zone to be a director in an establishment, with another Yoruba from the north-central zone as another director in the same establishment. Meanwhile, many minority ethnic groups remain unrepresented. Similarly, it is possible to have three Hausa-Fulani directors in an establishment from the three northern zones. This means that the silence on ethnicity works out in favour of the majority ethnic groups spread across states and zones, and against the ethnic minorities, most of who are contained in particular state or zones. The 2014 National Conference of the people of Nigeria consequently argued that the Federal Character Commission should be changed to an ‘Equal Opportunities Commission’ because ‘the constitution and operations of the present Federal Character Commission were lopsided and strongly in favour of the major ethnic groups in the country. Similarly, the neglect of religious affiliation can sometimes cause controversy as a pamphlet released at a meeting of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in March 2005 made clear. When Obasanjo constituted the cabinet for his second term in office, he appointed 42 ministers, comprising 16 Moslems (38.1%) and 26 Christians (61.9%). In the whole of Kwara, Kogi, South-West, South-East and South-South, there was not a single Moslem (minister) (Jokolo, 2005). The simple arithmetic quota is therefore deficient in not taking into consideration, important variables like ethnicity, religion and relative merit. It also fails to take into account issues such as the relative population size of states, the number of ethnic groups in a state, the ethnic structure of the state, or the level of educational attainment by various groups within the state. It seeks to advance equity but not proportionality. Moving beyond the comfort zone of the arithmetic quota is a major challenge facing the Federal Character Commission.

The Federal Character Commission has faced a credibility crisis on account of its poor showing so far. Some, like the Egbema Ijaw community, have accused the Federal Character Commission of ‘dereliction of duty’, in the face of their chronic underrepresentation in the local government bureaucracy. Others expressed frustration that the Federal Character Commission failed to stop ethnic favouritism under President Obasanjo who was accused of the ‘Yorubalisation’ (Monguno, 2005) of the federal bureaucracy during his tenure. Similarly, President Yar Adua in 2007 also faced similar accusations of favouring Hausa-Fulani appointees from the far north (Afenifere, 2009). President Buhari is presently being criticized for favouring the northern geo-political zones in the appointments he has made so far.

Furthermore, the most damaging application of the federal character principle is the education sector where candidates from different states in the country are adjudged on varying standards that eliminated the brightest students and elevated the not so bright. The impact on the younger generation is

better appreciated in a situation where two secondary school students in the same class—one from say Enugu State and the other from Jigawa State—both with similar level of performance in a qualifying examination into the universities. While the student from Enugu State is unable to secure admission because the cut off mark for his state is among the highest, his friend and classmate from Jigawa State gets admitted on account of the lower cut off mark for his state that is classified as educationally disadvantaged. The impact on the psyche of the school children that are unable to secure admission despite scoring marks similar to their mates from other states is such that the impression that hard work, excellence and merit do not count in determining development. Consequently, some have called for the scrapping of the federal character commission and the removal of the federal character principle from our constitution.

Based on available evidence, the federal character principle as presently applied can be considered ineffective instrument for the promotion of sustainable development. However, coming to such a snapshot conclusion ignores the important fact that the policy is best understood as a process, with significant potentials for mid to long term consequences.

Merits of the Federal Character Principle

The Federal Character Commission has failed on a number of important points, and it is fair to demand that it should try harder. It has, however, a number of increasing new norms and procedure for the nonviolent resolution of conflicts over ethnic and regional access. In a country in which trust in democratic institutions is low and resort to violence common (Adegoroye, 2005), this is an important achievement. Secondly, the federal character commission is increasingly generating the data through which the nagging national problem of representation can be objectively assessed, monitored, and pronounced upon, away from the screaming headlines of ethnic entrepreneurs. It is a credit to its professionalism that we now know about trends within the federal bureaucracies. Previously, we could have been inundated with the competing partisan claims of self-interested newspaper editors. Importantly, the pervasive fear of marginalization can now be calmed by a national engagement with federal character commission data. Individuals and communities now go to the federal character commission both for concrete data, and for remedies; more openness, computerization, and transparency will increase the level of trust and calming effect of the federal character commission. Thirdly, federal character commission has positively changed the culture and norms of bureaucratic recruitment in Nigeria towards inclusive diversity. Gone are the days when a chairperson of a public institution can surround himself or herself or herself with co-ethnics with reckless impunity.

Chief Executives are now more conscious of their obligation to strive for ethnic diversity, if not balance. The hue and cry over the recent appointments by the head of state, Muhammadu Buhari, clearly demonstrated this fact. The media and social network are replete with comments of

dismay over the non application of the federal commission principle in the allocation of these key positions (Daily sun September 2, 2015; Vanguard August 29, 2015; Premium Times August 28, 2015; Daily Post August 28) 2015. The situation is that of thirty-one appointments made as at the time of writing this paper, the north which is predominantly Hausa/Fulani, has twenty four (24) while the south has seven (7). Out of the seven given to the south, the south-south has four and the south-west has three while the south-east has none (Obioha, 2015).

In a presentation by Premium Times, (August 28, 2015) the distribution of thirty key appointments according to geopolitical zone is as follows:

i.	North West	=	13-43%
ii.	North-East	=	6-20%
iii.	North Central	=	3-10%
iv.	South South	=	5-17%
v.	South West	=	3-10%
vi.	South East	=	0-0%

In a reaction to the lopsidedness of President Buhari's appointments, a former minister of state Chief Ebenezer Babatope had this to say "Democracy to Buhari is government of the northerners by the northerners", (Vanguard 6th September, 2015). On the same issue, Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe lamented that the appointment as they were, do not support the effort to weave a more cohesive country that would metamorphose into a nation where unity and love shall prevail. The founding fathers of our nation had this in mind when the notion of the federal character principle was enshrined in the constitution and a commission created for it, he averred (Umoru, and Asomba, 2015).

This public concern is indicative of the continued relevance of the federal character principle in the political geometry of Nigeria. It can be deduced from the comments that, marginalized Nigeirans still consider the federal commission principle as a source of redress.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Federal Character Principle is a necessary evil that Nigerians have to endure for now. It is a sacrifice we have to make for the emergence of the just and egalitarian society we all aspire to have. The greatest challenge facing the principle is how to effectively apply it toward enhancement of national integration and sustainable development. Nigeria can only continue to seek unity upon the continuing bases of ethnic diversity. If the federal character principle is faithfully applied, the country can achieve inclusiveness and equity in governance without necessarily sacrificing efficiency and merit in service delivery. This demands tinkering with the application of federal character principle to mitigate its negative effects.

As obtains in India and America, equity and inclusiveness (federal character principle) are to be pursued at the entry level into the service. Therefore, climbing up the ladder should

depend solely on merit. Furthermore, the appointment of persons to various positions should be made from the best available in any part of the country concerned. Besides, recruitment to posts which require specialist training such as medical practitioners, architects, engineers and pilots should be essentially based on merit. Finally, the federal character principle should be applied with less stringency but with fairness among ethnic groups, states and local governments that are homogenous to avoid creating division where none may have existed.

The reality in Nigeria is that there are still problems of poverty, illiteracy, infrastructural decay and political deprivation in parts of the country. This prevailing socio-economic environment impacts negatively on the effective use of federal character principle as a tool for sustainable development. These factors aggravate mutual distrust and the tendency for political chieftains to exercise overbearing influence on the allocation of positions and distribution of values.

Although the application of federal character impinges on the merit principle in recruitment and selection of key public service officials, that lacuna can be closed through intensive training and staff development. This suggestion is apt, considering its undeniable positive effect on enhancing inclusive governance and ensuring equitable representation in the public service. There is hardly a perfect policy and federal character principle is not one. But if there is transparency and accountability in its application, federal character principle has the potentials of harnessing the diversity of Nigeria towards sustainable development. Promotion of governance devoid of sentiments and unethical behavior is fundamental to achievement of sustainable development. The mission by the incumbent administration to engage issues of competence, commitment, corruption and transparency is a laudable one and should be pursued with vigour. From there come the threat to effective application of federal character principle and opportunity for it to build a nation which will sustain the present and future generations.

Finally, great imbalance that exists in economic and social development among parts of the country does not make for national integration, sustainable development, peace and stability just as manifest injustice will be inimical to national unity and stability. Quotas when not well-managed kill incentive, competition, competence and breeds hatred. So some sort of ethnic arithmetic must be ensured in our representative institutions. A multi-ethnic state, like Nigeria, cannot be stable unless its constituent parts are represented in government and bureaucracy on a fairly equitable proportion.

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