

## Evaluation of the Role of Public Service in the Integration of Nigeria

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**Dominic Shimawua**

*Department of Public Administration,  
Veritas University Abuja-Nigeria*

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### Abstract

Public service in Nigeria is the major machinery of government for the formulation and implementation of public policies. The public service plays a major role in integrating the country. In Nigeria, the public service principle is anchored on the distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote National Unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, public service has however been greatly affected by certain factors like crass mediocrity into the public service, weak at fighting ethnicity, cronyism and corruption. The paper therefore, recommended that Punishments should also be meted out to those who steal pensioner's funds to prevent others who may have the mind and the erring operators to forestall more pension scams in the nation. Not only that, PENCOM too is advised to improve on the delivery of its services; avoid unnecessary bottlenecks in processing pensioner's entitlements, invest pension funds in viable investments to ensure prompt and regular payments to the pensioners, and make the services mobile as much as possible.

**Keywords:** *Evaluation, Role, Integration, Public Service*

*Corresponding Author:* Dominic Shimawua

### **Background to the Study**

Public civil service is recognized as being a major influence on a country's development (Turner and Hulme, 1997; UNDP, 2005; UNPAN, 2004). In this view, the public service is “an essential and vitally important instrument of development” (Turner and Hulme (1997), while the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have also emphasised this point saying that “the public service is the institution that is charged with transforming government and donor resources into poverty reducing services” and sustainable development (World Bank and Asian Development Bank, 2003).

The federal and state public services in Nigeria and other countries of the world in view of Oyedele (2015) are usually regarded as the bridge between the citizens and the government. Therefore, it is the legitimate expectation of all citizens of a country that the public services should concern themselves with the effective organization, management and prompt delivery of public services by implementing various public policies for the good of the people. However, in order to make the civil services perform this role of setting public agenda effectively, the federal character was introduced in Nigeria to bring sanity in the public service through equal representation across the geo-political zones with the goal to accommodate the diverse linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic groups in the decision-making, socio-political and economic apparatuses of the state.

Evidence from Ugoh and Ukpere (2012), revealed that the aim of the policy was to achieve the fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence. The policy was also aimed to foster unity, peace, equal access to state resources and promote the integration of the less advantaged states for better improvement and good conditions of living in the country. Nevertheless, as laudable as the policy was there was a yawning gap between intent and actual practice of the policy, thus making it counterproductive due factors like crass mediocrity into the public service, weak at fighting ethnicity, cronyism and corruption and has been politicized. It is thus seen as engendering instability and ineffective for the integration of Nigeria.

The focus of this paper is however on the role of public service in the integration of Nigeria. This is necessitated by the fact that the role public servants must play should be in the area of collective effort towards equitation and morale productivity. This means that civil servants should develop a conscious attitude, realizing the existence of principles related to the matter at hand; developing a responsible attitude, deciding which will be adopted and acted upon; and developing an experimental attitude, and experimenting and watching results. By so doing optimum capacity will be achieved in the establishment as these would go a long way in ensuring that sufficient, motivated and competent workforce remains in the civil service to help take the service to the next level of integration and development of the Nigeria collective effort towards equitation and morale productivity.

### **Public Service**

The public service is described as the body of men and women employed in a civil capacity and non-political career basis by the federal and state governments primarily to render and

faithfully implement and give effect to their decisions. Such career officers normally derive their appointment from the civil service commission, which also exercises power of delegating duties and responsibilities to departments in accordance with laid down rules (Ipinlaye, 2006).

In the context of the definitions of the civil service above, the Nigerian constitution has therefore bestowed on government, the duty of promoting the political, economic, social, education, foreign policy and environmental objectives of the Nigerian State. The process of formulating and implementing these objectives is called governance, while the organ employed for such purpose is the civil service (Olagunju, 2006). For this reason, public administration scholars and practitioners usually describe the civil service of any country as the bridge between the citizens of a country and the government of that country. Indeed, it is the heart of the government or the engine hub of governance.

Civil services are the chief instruments for implementation of the will of the state as expressed through public policy. They are indispensable to the functioning of the modern state. With the change in the philosophy of the state from laissez faire to social welfare the modern state has taken upon itself multifarious tasks which are performed by the civil service (Bash, 2012). In terms of its importance as an institution of the state, it is perhaps the most important institution of the Nigerian state affecting the life of citizens daily. It is essential to modern life because of the role it plays. Therefore, the quality of the civil service is important to the quality of modern life (Omotosho, 2006)

Public service is a body or department in the executive arm of government with the responsibility of assisting in the planning and implementation of government policies. It is not profit-oriented but an institution established to deliver essential services to the people (Arowolo, 2012). The public service consists of the civil service – career staff whose appointment, promotion and discipline are under the exclusive control of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), at federal, state and local government levels, the national assembly service, the Judiciary, public officers in the military, police and paramilitary services, employees of parastatals, educational and health institutions. From the above, it could be said that the public service and the civil service are clearly different in concept. The public service is a broader concept that encompasses the civil service together with the Armed Forces, the Judiciary, the Police, Government Institutions, Parastatals; Government owned Companies and Statutory Agencies.

### **National Integration**

National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though citizens belong to different castes, religions, regions and speak different languages, they still recognize themselves as one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. National integration can also be seen as the process whereby several desperate groups within a given territorial are united together or cooperate under conditions which do not appear to permit satisfaction of their system needs in any other way (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2012). It implies unity in diversity. According to Aderonke (2013), national integration is determined by the degree to which members and

groups in a plural society adapt to the demands of national existence while co-existing harmoniously.

On the practical note, national integration is a process, not an end in itself and it is usually affected by contending social forces. It is a process leading to political cohesion and sentiments of loyalty toward a central political authority and institutions by individuals belonging to different social groups or political units. It is a process whereby political actors in distinct national setting are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institution possess or demand jurisdiction over preexisting nation-state (Aderonke, 2013). Okorie and Greg (2013) also note that, National Integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. Nigeria is a country with about 250 ethnic nationalities distinctively isolated in terms of religion, languages.

National integration implies that we should de-emphasize these differences and promote such policies that could unite Nigeria. Some of the policies aimed at achieving national integration according to Okorie and Greg (2013) include the introduction of Unity Schools, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), state and local government creation, quota system and federal character. It seems that despite all these policy measures, achieving national integration and unity in among the various ethnic and religious groups has been a mirage. Aderonke (2013) posits that the ability of the state to resolve or regulate the recurring crises and to create an enabling environment where the people's respect and love for their nation is enhanced would definitely affect the tempo of the national integration positively.

### **Elite Theory**

The theoretical base of this paper is elite theory. Higley (1980) posits that the origin of the Elite theory lies most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). Mosca emphasized the ways in which tiny minorities out-organize and outwit large majorities. He posits that “political classes” – Mosca's term for political elites– usually have “a certain material, intellectual, or even moral superiority” over those they govern (1923-1939).

Pareto postulated that in societies with truly unrestricted social mobility, elites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals. But in actual societies, elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections (1915/1935). Pareto sketched alternating types of governing elites, which he likened to lions and foxes. Elites (“oligarchies”) according to Michaels originated from organizations that were in dear need for leaders and experts that could operate them efficiently. As these individuals gain control of funds, information flows, promotions, and other aspects of organizational functioning, power becomes concentrated in their hands. In the same vein, that Elitism' score tenets are deceptively simple, due to their strategic positions and resources under their control, they affect political outcomes regularly and substantially” (Jan, 2012).

Jan (2012) further explains that Elites have the power that the majority of people or non elites lack, and they make systematic use of their power in democratic and non- democratic politics. However, while power is portrayed by elitists as concentrated in elite hands and exercised in the top-down manner, even in the modern democratic regimes, the elite perspective does not dismiss non-elites as inconsequential or powerless. This is because elites are always constrained by non-elite orientations and preferences, which they – the elite members – have to shape and cultivate to sustain their rule, even if they act in an autonomous way. Higley and Burton (2006) in Jan (2012) reminds us that power-holders must cultivate mass support and “frame their appeals to accord with the interests and political orientations of non-elites”. It is in view of this that the author is in agreement with Agbodike (2003) in Okolo (2014) that federal character has been manipulated and channeled to serve the overall interest of the petty bourgeoisies ruling class.

Elitism represents the interests of the few minorities. Implicit in the above explanations is that those who champion the principle and policies are indirect benefactor hence it is another form of expanding their solid-political and economic empire. Nigeria today wallow in the blind alley of development, it is obvious that the elite's roles in national development is numbed, trapped, and caged by ethnicity. Ethnic movements is created and use by the elites in furtherance of their own special interests which are time and again constitutive interests of the emerging social classes. This elite's class depend on the state devices to increase their benefits from the society. Part of the ethnic scheme is Federal Character, quota system amongst others which are the mechanism through which the political elite maintain power and exercises influences. The basic idea and discussions of this paper are tailored alone the above assumptions.

### **Factors that Promote National Integration**

Nigeria is a multitude to averse and dappled partners, efforts have been put in place starting from the colonial era to create systems, institutions and programmes of government aimed at promoting national integration. Scholarly works of Ojo (2009), Akpan (1990), Ugoh and Ukpere (2012) and Onifade and Imhonopi, some of these have been identified below:

Firstly, the colonial administration in Nigeria in 1954 using the instrumentality of the Lyttleton constitution introduced federalism into Nigeria as an integrative mechanism. The colonialists must have been swayed by the opinion that such a system of government was necessary to preserve both integration and stability in a deeply divided society like Nigeria. As Osaghae (1987) observed, whenever events seemed to demand that a compromise be effected between the necessity for unity and co-operation on a wide territorial basis on one hand, and the need to accommodate the legitimate claims of sub-national groups for self-rule on the other, “the temptation is to proffer a catch-all management formula such as federalism.” While federalism has been applauded as a silver bullet to the ethnicity problem in Nigeria, the skewness and perversion of this typology of governance has frustrated the benefits it could have provided the nation.



Secondly, the creation of states and the land use decree were put in place to strengthen Nigeria's unity. Immediately before the Nigerian Civil War, as a way to strengthen the reversion of the country to federalism, General Gowon resorted to the creation of more states in a bid to keep the country united. Gowon felt the problem confronting the operation of federalism in the three regions was that "the regions were so powerful as to consider themselves self-sufficient and almost entirely independent. The federal government which ought to give the lead to the whole country was relegated to the background. The people were not made to realize that the federal government was the real government of Nigeria." In order to strengthen the federal government, the regions were taken to the slab of sacrifice resulting in the creation of 12 states in 1967.

Subsequently, the creation of states curtailed the domineering tendencies of the major ethnic groups and secured some measure of autonomy for the minority groups. Members of the major ethnic groups now find themselves as minorities in some new states, while those who have hitherto been minorities in the old states now find themselves as majorities in some new states.

As Onifade and Imhonopi (2013) noted, the old regional hegemony by the three major tribes in their respective regions is now a thing of the past. Between 1960 and 1996, creation of states within the federal system comprised 3 regions (1960), 4 regions (1963), 12 states (1967), 19 states (1976), 21 states (1987), 30 states (1991) and since 36 states in 1996. The Land Use Decree on its part vests all land in a state in the Governor of the state that holds the land in trust for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians. The rationale being that the Governor can allocate land to any applicant irrespective of his or her state of origin. However, in reality, Nigerians are discriminated against from buying certain pieces of land because of ethnic and religious considerations.

Furthermore, the National Youth Service Corps was conceived as another policy that could help unite the country. Created by Decree No. 24 of May 22, 1973, the National Youth service Corps sought to enhance the interaction among the nascent educated elite in the country scattered in different parts of the country by providing them with the opportunity of living and serving in some developmental capacities in states other than their places of origin so they could better understand the cultures, perhaps the language and general lifestyle of their host communities. Thus, while helping to develop different parts of Nigeria through their one-year compulsory national service, young educated Nigerians were to also understand more about their other "brethren" living in other parts of Nigeria, their strengths and challenges. This was to be useful for these young ones when they assume leadership position because they would be able to proffer solutions to the challenges other Nigerians are facing and be guided and inspired by the strengths of other Nigerians.

Another nation-building policy was the Federal Character Principle initiated by the government. The aim of the policy was to achieve the fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence (Ugoh and Ukpere, 2012). The federal character principle was later enshrined in the 1979

Constitution of Nigeria with the goal to accommodate the diverse linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic groups in the decision-making, socio-political and economic apparatuses of the state. The policy also aimed to foster unity, peace, equal access to state resources and promote the integration of the less advantaged states for better improvement and good conditions of living in the country.

### **Factors that hinder National Integration**

There are many problems hindering national integration in the Nigerian public sector; some of which among to Okorie and Onwe (2015) include indolence and low productivity, inequality, corruption and lack of transparency and above all tribal dominance. These problems have adversely affected performance output in the public sector.

#### **i. Indolence and Low Productivity**

Before now, Nigerians are known and widely respected for hard work, and good work ethic. These traits are gradually being replaced with dull, nagging, lazy and venal. The culture of indolence and low productivity has now dominated recruitments and appointments in the public sector. Key policies that would ordinarily reposition public sector are based on the principle rather than specialization and chosen areas of interest and proven capability. Workers in the public sector are not only recruited on this basis, but their promotion and ascendancy to positions of leadership in their respective offices are based on the dictates of the principle. It is more problematic given the imbalance in the state creation and representation among the regions, and the loose statements by implementers of the policy. It is therefore very essential to redefine the principle so as to provide for clause that would engender hard work and promote enviable ethic in the public sector.

#### **ii. Inequality**

The principle promotes inequality as the few privileged ethnic groups and key actors share juicy positions in the public sector among the favored individuals from few states. In the recent times, the principle is not considered in the resource allocation; instead other principles were introduced in that sector. In the view of Haruna (2008), whereas the goal should be to empower each of the geographical regions in the provision of social amenities, such a proposal empowers a couple of states and continuously increases ceaseless drift of young and ambitious men to a particular area. The principle should be redefined to widen its areas with constitutional protection. There is the need to ensure quality in the states of the federation as well as sharing of amenities and positions among the states, but emphasis should be placed more on effective out rather than the principle.

#### **iii. Corruption and Lack of Transparency**

The principle promotes corruption, burry transparency and due process in the public sector. It is instructive to note that corruption and poverty have been identified as the bane of the nation's development as they have paralyzed activities in the public sector (Ocheni and Nwankwo 2012) Introduction and implementation of Due Process principle by former president Olusegun Obasanjo (2003-2007) was seen as a right step in the right direction in fighting corruption. Chijioke, (2004) noted that the principle of due process which was

introduced because of the manner public officers go about circumventing laid down procedures in the award of contracts and other transactions. The manner in which ministers and their cohort share federal contracts negates contents of the principle of federal character. It is very rare for a minister of the federal republic to award contract in respect of federal character except where he has interest. It is rather a tradition for public officers to float companies and award contracts to themselves in negation of the contents of federal character principle. There is therefore the need to constitutionally empower anti graft agencies to nose and prosecute violators of the principle.

### **The Role of Public Service in the Integration of Nigeria**

Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution provides: “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 State or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.” It means that: The composition of the Government of the federation or any of its agencies, shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies (Nnoli, 1996 in Adeosun, 2011).

Pursuant of the above provision, Section 135(3) states that in the appointment of Ministers, the president shall reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria” provided that in giving effects to the provision aforesaid, the president shall appoint at least one Minister from each state who shall be an indigene of such state (Nnoli,1996 in Adeosun, 2011). Moreover, Section 157 provides that appointment by the President into the offices of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Head of Service of the Federation, Ambassadors, or the principal representatives abroad, Permanent Secretary or other Chief Executive in any Ministry or Department of the federal Government, or any office on the personal staff of the president shall have regard to the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity. Section 197(2) provides that the composition of the officer corps and other ranks of the Armed Forces of the Federation shall reflect the federal character of Nigeria. Various other provisions were made in the constitution to ensure that the federal character principle was operative in the political process (Nnoli, 1996 in Adeosun, 2011).

Section 153 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution established the Federal Character Commission, as a federal executive body, empowered in Section 8(1) of the Third Schedule of the Constitution to oversee and monitor the implementation of the federal character clauses. The mandates of the Commission are as follows:

- i. Work out an equitable formula subject to the approval of the National Assembly for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the public service of the Federation and of the States, the armed forces of the Federation, the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies, government-owned companies and parastatals of the States;



- ii. Promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principle of proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all levels of government;
- iii. take such legal measures, including prosecution of the head or staff of any ministry or government body or agency which fails to comply with any federal character principle or formula prescribed by the Commission, and as provided for in Section 8(3) of the Schedule,
- iv. Notwithstanding any provisions in any other law or enactment, the Commission shall ensure that every public company or corporation reflects the federal character in the appointment of its directors and senior management staff.

Aderonke (2013) asserts that public service principle is anchored on the: .....distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote National Unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Ezenwa (1987) and Heirmexy (2011) in Okorie and Greg (2013) also posit that federal character been an agency of the public service was introduced for equitable sharing of posts and even distribution of natural and economic resources. Federal character suggests an attempt to build a nation where equal opportunities abound and where every individual must feel that he has equal chance to participate without bias of ethnic affiliation (Talih (1987). Federal character is both a reaction as well as a system. It is a positive reaction to correct those practices of the past, especially in the conduct of public management which tended to exploit the diversities of the nation and by so doing cause ill will. Also it is a reaction to those practices which tended to reflect selfish and parochial consideration, especially those negative forces which placed self interests above national interest. The federal character principles involve a deliberate plan to construct means of ensuring the proper distribution of amenities and government projects in the country. The principle of federal character was formulated and put into use by successive governments in Nigeria to address and hopefully mitigate the problem of diversity so as to ensure a peaceful, stable and united Nigeria.

Basically, Oaikhena and Osaghea (2015) observed that the role public servants must play should be in the area of collective effort towards equation and morale productivity. This means that civil servants should develop a conscious attitude, realizing the existence of principles related to the matter at hand; developing a responsible attitude, deciding which will be adopted and acted upon; and developing an experimental attitude, and experimenting and watching results. By so doing optimum capacity will be achieved in the establishment as these would go a long way in ensuring that sufficient, motivated and competent workforce remains in the civil service to help take the service to the next level of capacity building or integrating and development of the society.

Concisely, Oaikhena and Osaghae (2016) further explain that the role of building a society presupposes the following functions and behavioural traits of the civil servants, these are:

- i. Adequate measures should be put in place for policy implementation;
- ii. Achievement oriented behavior should be encouraged;
- iii. Judicious use of authority is necessary;
- iv. Pursuit of happiness for the people should be paramount;
- v. Use of reason and experience as the basis of decisions is a criteria;
- vi. Uprightness, friendliness and firmness of devotion in dealing with others;
- vii. Improving bureaucratic functions by way of simplification of rules, regulations and procedures of work;
- viii. Civil servants should be open and transparent in their working environment
- ix. Civil servants should be instruments for a responsive and accountable administration;
- x. Mobilizing the society to support the system of rule of law;
- xi. Putting an end to the system of patronage and nepotism from government organizations;
- xii. Civil servants should focus on economic, social and political development; and
- xiii. Civil servants should work within a value system that determines the conduct of their actions. Values, that consists of opinion of colleagues and cultural values of the society.

### **Challenges of Public Service in the Integration of Nigeria**

Nigerian public service covering various perspectives, Nwogwugwu and Oluwabukumi (2015) regard it as a tool for nation building and development through elimination of dominance of any particular group and marginalization of other groups, while others see its implementation as defeating the purpose for which it was adopted. The concept of federal character was first popularized under the Murtala/Obasanjo regime (1975 – 1979). It became a constitutional matter in the Constitution Drafting Committee as well as the Constituent Assembly, which were the progenitors of the 1979 constitution. It finally inculcated into the 1979 constitution as a directive principle of state policy (Osaghae, 1988).

Gboyega (1989) writes that the: Fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy in the 1979 constitution explains federal character to mean that the composition of the federal government or any of its agencies and the conduct of their affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to recognize the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and to command national loyalty. Accordingly, the predominance in that government or its agencies of persons from a few ethnic or other sectional groups shall be avoided. The above constitutional mandate was made with a view to enhance participation of people from different segments of the Nigerian society in the process of governance (Gboyega, 1989)

Afigbo, (1989) provides a historical perspective to the understanding of federal character principle. While stating that federal character is directly linked to the character of the Nigerian federation, he highlights the factors that must be noted in order to have a clear understanding of the character of the Nigerian federation: The innate or primordial characteristics of Nigeria's federal society going back to the days of yore; the quality and performance of the statesmanship which has sought to harness the inborn characteristics of Nigeria's federal

society to a federal constitution; the degree of harmony existing between the primordial features and usages of Nigerian society; the structure and usages of the constitution; and the fact that the character of the Nigerian federation has been rather dynamic in response to the changing perceptions of statesmanship and other relevant forces (Afigbo, 1989).

The introduction of Federal Character Principle in Nigeria was aimed at fostering unity, peace, equal ability, as well as equal access to state resources and to promote the integration of disadvantaged states for better improvement of the living conditions of people living across the country (Ugoh and Ukpere, 2012). It was to take care of some problems in the political process including, ethnicity, the national question, minority problem, discrimination based on indignity, resources allocation, power sharing, employment and placement in public institutions, amongst others (Afigbo, 1989). The federal character principle while aiming at ensuring equality amongst the component units had as its very heart the eschewing of all forms of group imbalance in public institutions and affairs (Obiyan and Akindele, 2002). Ezeibe (2013) writes that federal character principle involves a deliberate plan to construct means of ensuring the proper distribution of amenities and government projects in a country. The implication is that it is a policy that was introduced following observed differences in culture, tradition and inequality in human resources as well as the capability to have access to resources.

Heirmexy (2011) writes that federal character principle was introduced for equitable sharing of posts and even distribution of natural and economic resources. The federal character principle as an integrative mechanism stands for fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence. It is to ensure a broad public participation in the nation's affairs while fostering even development. However, the application of the principle had remained problematic because of the disparity in the standard of western education attained among the states in the federation (Mohammed, 1998). The educationally disadvantaged states expect a lowering of standards in order for them to be accommodated, thereby ensuring equality; this sometimes may involve sacrificing merit in the selection process.

Olaopa (2012) writes that the federal character principle has been one of the “effective nation-building strategies invented for managing the combustible diversity in Nigeria, however, it had badly eroded professional and competency capacity of the public service”. It has been argued that in striving to ensure equality for the unequal, federal character principle has become discriminatory. The interpretation of the federal character on the basis of state and ethnicity is regarded by some as inadequate as other social division in Nigeria include class, religion and ideological divisions. Operations of federal character tend to give more powers to the politically dominant groups, creating wider power disparity between the stronger and weaker groups (Ikime, 2002).

Suberu and Diamond (2004) write that federal character as defined and pursued by the 1979 and 1999 constitutions cannot succeed in integrating the people because it was an ideology of the minority ruling class aimed at protecting their interest. The operation of the

federal character in Nigeria has given more powers to the politically superior groups thus creating a wider power disparity between the strong and the weak. A situation in which the politically weak are subjected to a form of double jeopardy is antithetical to national integration which federal character was aimed to achieve (Bello, 2012).

Onyeoziri (2002) writes that though the federal character principle was introduced to foster national building, its implementation had been fraught with different problem as it had resulted in tension among the component units of the federation. The reasons for the tensions are as follows: the fuzziness that pervades its application in certain areas; the arbitrariness that seems to accompany its application even in areas where the application seems straight, especially during military regimes; lack of political will from the leading elite to employ sanctions when the rules are breached; and lack of definite guideline in achieving balance between equity and efficiency in the application of the principle.

These factors tend to highlight the liabilities to the judicious practice of the principle and poses serious encumbrances to the realization of sustainable development in Nigeria. Federal character principle instead ameliorating the negative effects of ethnocentrism, provokes ethno-regional division; it suffers from a fundamental contradiction as a policy for ensuring nation building or national integration. The principle does not encourage treating individuals as members of the nation-state, but views them from the lens of ethno-linguistic group within the nation state, thereby reinforcing the integrating of the units instead of the nation-state (Onyeoziri, 2002).

In emphasizing the shortcomings of the application of the federal Character principle in Nigeria, Gboyega (1989) writes that issues of making public institutions reflect the federal character was taken up haphazardly giving rise to arbitrariness and victimization of some unfortunate public servants. Ekeh (1989) taking a similar position argues that “the most radical and damaging application of federal character has been in the bureaucracies and public services of the federation, where permanent secretaries have been kicked around, removed and sometimes dismissed”. The argument of Ekeh, (1989) is that federal character principle “has invaded the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy as well as other governmental bodies that normally require some protection against the vagaries of politics”.

Commenting on the negative effects of federal character on public sector performance in Nigeria, Forrest (1993) writes that the implementation of the principle of federal character in the public service “not only led to poor appointments but also enhanced mediocrity rather than merit”. Ojo (2009) writes that federal character principle as practiced in Nigeria is elitist and class biased. Its implementation results to a blurring of the boundary between the pursuits of meritocracy and ethnic balancing thereby create inadvertently a multiple system of citizenship in the polity.

The principle and its application have brought about the unintended effect of creating situations of 'elimination by substitution' which makes it counter-productive; this is undertaken through discrimination in appointment and promotion, as the principle attempts

to achieve equality of all states, whereas states are not equal in population, and size of the pool of candidates for appointment. Tonwe and Oghator (2009) take the argument further, when they write that “federal character allows ethno-regional patrons and their clients to exploit and mismanage state resources without contributing to any meaningful development”.

To promote administrative effectiveness for performance in the Nigerian public service, Utomi (2002) argues that the emphasis should not be on federal character; rather Nigeria needs to engage on the issues of competence, commitment, corruption and conflict of interest and career certainty. Adamolekun (2008) makes very robust contribution regarding implementation of federal character principle: Has the federal character principle promoted or retarded national loyalty and stability? Or has the area or ethnic region of a person become the key factor in determining his quality as an individual? Federal character principle that was introduced as Nigeria's path to achieving 'representative bureaucracy' was morphed into the bed of politicization. Capacity development programmes for public servants that were a major concern during the immediate pre and post independence years was progressively neglected notwithstanding the strong case made for it in the Udoji report of 1974 (Adamolekun, 2008).

Suleiman (2009) contends that poor capacity of the majority of civil servants, sometimes to the point of illiteracy arising from the application of federal character is one of the reasons for poor performance of the Nigerian public service. The neglect of capacity development programmes for public servants and the implementation of federal character offer a credible explanation on the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian public bureaucracy for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Public service is seen from different dimensions by Nigerians from different regions. As Suberu (2001) writes, those from the northern part of the country, see public as an equalizer that ensures proportional absorption into federal institutions. Those from the southern part of the country see it as an attempt by the 'North' to infiltrate into areas which they hitherto regarded as 'their' by right. Public service is one of the most controversial issues in contemporary Nigeria; the divergences of views point to the fact there are definite solutions in sight given the political implications of its implementation and its linkage to access to power and state resources in the country.

## **Conclusion**

Integrating Nigeria, the federal character principle was introduced into the public service to promote unity. However, the federal character principle negatively affects appointment into the civil service system in Nigeria, when mediocrity is promoted in the name of quota while meritocracy is put on the back burner. This would ultimately result in low level of administrative efficiency, with consequent truncating of national developmental efforts. The federal character principle which was introduced in Nigeria to redress historical imbalances among the component units of the federation has become the Achilles heel of administrative efficiency in the country. It was designed to reduce those factors that would result in mutual distrust by ensuring equality among the states. Federal character is the guiding principle that regulates recruitment into the civil service with the implication that sometimes merit is sacrificed to ensure equality of representation among the states.



Though the principle is usually justified from the angle of representativeness of all the thirty six (36) states in Nigeria, adoption of meritocratic approach in recruitment would not adversely affect national integration as other mechanisms for attaining national integration exists in the country. Strategic ministries such as the federal ministry of Education which are at the fulcrum of national development need to be staffed by the most qualified, most skilled, most experienced personnel and not encumbered by non performing staff who have nothing to contribute, but are only recruited to their position to fulfill the principle of federal character.

Emphasizing quota over merit will make Nigerian civil service to remain inefficient regardless of the number of reforms that would be carried out. Federal character had become a divisive instrument instead of an integrative one. People who are favoured end up having greater affinity to their ethnic group given that it is the platform to their elevation, while those who are marginalized see it as an instrument to suppress them in spite of their sterling qualities, thereby bonding with those of their group who share the same fate and as such, federal character has become a divisive rather than integrative mechanism in the country.

### **Recommendations**

- i. It is a known fact that there is no substitute to civil service as an instrument of implementation of governmental policies and programmes. Therefore, the civil servants must revert and maintain their roles of unobtrusive advisers and faithful implementers of government decisions, policies and programmes and become real obedient servant of the people.
- ii. It should give succour to the weak and marginalized, and limit the power of the strong, not to reverse development trend by deliberately putting on hold the progress of the nation through encouragement of mediocrity over merit.
- iii. There should be a combination of merit and federal character in the appointment of officers into the civil service system as the best personnel are required to achieve the development which Nigeria desires.
- iv. In order to ensure administrative efficiency in the civil service, only competent and qualified manpower should be engaged and where there are qualified people by merit, then federal character can apply to ensure that no section or state is marginalized.
- v. There is need for government at all levels to pursue vigorously, the building of a country that is based on fiscal federalism, prudent and accountable spending of public funds for national development.
- vi. There should be promotion of professionalism in the civil service; ethical reorientation and attitudinal change; effective career management and workforce training; building and fast tracking the internal and external processes for concrete outcomes; and ensuring that civil servants imbibe and actualize the spirit of dignity of labour at all levels towards enhancing productivity.

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