

# Policies And Programmes Aimed At Promoting National Unity Since The Colonial Period

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**Abstract:** *The evolutionarily process of the country has witnessed tension and tranquility. In time of tension, such as that of 1967 and 1993 it was as if the entire nation would collapse and cease to exist. But it survived and has continued to wax stronger. Of course, agitators from different sections of the country flooded the streets protesting for the carving out of nations within Nigeria, but their protestations are gradually ebbing. Attempts at balkanizing the nation on several occasions have not succeeded due to the labour of our heroes past who worked tirelessly day and night to ensure the unity of the nation in the colonial through the post – colonial phase. Using the historical method of approach and review of extant literature, the author examines programmes and policies put in place since the colonial period aim at promoting the unity of the country and concludes that if not for the series of efforts made by some patriotic elements at ensuring the nation's unity, Nigeria would have gone the way of Russia, Sudan, Czechoslovakia, etc. while Russia disintegrated and about fifteen nations rose from its ashes, on the other hand, after a prolonged internal strife, Sudan was eventually divided into North and South Sudan. Czechoslovakia was once and indivisible entity until 1993 when it split into two sovereign state of Czech Republic and Slovakia.*

## Introduction:

Since the colonial period, Nigeria governments have been making serious effort to pursue policies and programmes that are aimed at national integration. This is not unconnected with the observations of both the foreign and the indigenous policy makers of the country who had one time or the other presided over the affairs of the nation. Some of these people had described Nigeria by various expressions such as; 'Nigeria is a mere geographical expression', 'Nigeria is an artificial creation of the British' etc. Despite efforts of government in promoting programmes and policies targeting the nation's unity Nigeria oneness has continued to be plagued by socio cultural, religious and political differences. But in spite of occasional eruptions of crisis capable of obliterating the corporate existence of the entity, the country had on several occasions survived. This survival was hinged on programmes and policies which successive government of the country had pursued such as introduction of British legal system, construction of roads, promotion of learning, entrenchment of federalism, creation of states, revenue sharing formula etc. this paper will examine programmes and policies via two phases. The colonial and post – colonial phases.

## Literature Review

Upon decolonization of Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, educated elites in the field of humanities and social sciences were bordered about building nations in African society with diverse ethnic composition, religious and racial differences. Green (2009) in his treatise on national integration in Africa identified the various nation building policies put in place by government of nations in Africa on attaining independence. According to him, some of these policies include: adoption of new names for state, moving the capital cities to new locations, adoption of new currency notes, recruitment into national services, establishing national parties, naturalization policy etc. Attah, (1987) in his work "The National Language Problem in Nigeria", identified various disintegrative force in Nigeria to include numerous ethnic tribes, various religious beliefs divide across geo – political link of Muslim north and Christian south, ethnocentrism, minority questions, ethnic policies, indigene settler problem, resources control. Shuaibu, (2012) observed that the problem has brought about reduction in production, encumbered the impact of government efforts in various productive sector, resulted in food insecurity, worsened social insecurity, worsened the deterioration of social infrastructure and affected the living standard of the people negatively.

The above challenges to national unity have made well meaning Nigerians to see the unity of the country as the only way for the nation to attain greater height among the committee of nations. The realization of this made former President Goodluck Jonathan to make it clear that the unity of Nigeria cannot be compromised (Ukaibe, 2012). Equally, former Heads of State of Nigeria, Ibrahim Babangida and Olusegun Obasango equally reiterated that the unity of Nigeria is priceless and a non – negotiable. Nigeria being a host to unwilling and variegated partners and having experienced problems that threatened her peaceful co – existence means efforts to mend internal peace should be constantly revisited so as to curb crisis that may likely affect her peace both in the present and future.

## The colonial phase – programmes and policies

Every nook and cranny of the geographical entity called Nigeria was embroiled in crises on the arrival of the British. The Yorubaland stretching from the coast to interior, the Sokoto caliphate stretching from the northeast to the peripheral of the northwest and then some part of the middle belt, all had their share of crisis. While the political entities were being plagued by crisis, the British appeared in the coast of Lagos. Realizing that peace is a sine-qua-non to economic growth, the British embarked on war of conquest. Lagos was subdued just like any other parts of the region around the Niger. With the imposition of peace – pax Britannica – the entire place witnessed peace Tidy(2001). With the European/British conquest of Nigeria, all Kingdoms that were ruled by different rulers were all placed under a central British government. Thus a central system of government started evolving.

A further step taken after the wars of conquest towards promoting unity was the naming of the region as Nigeria. Prior to this period, the communities were known by various names such as Oyo empire, Borno empire, Benin empire but the completion of conquest, the whole area was christened Nigeria. While the different places retained their individual names, a corporate name known as Nigeria emerged. With this development, the people within the region started seeing themselves as Nigerians. This promotes unity among the people.

One other step taken by the British at promoting unity in Nigeria in the colonial period was entrenchment of English as our official language. In the period before colonial imposition, a multitude of languages existed and this hinders political interactions. However, with the imposition of colonial rule, English Language became the official language in Nigeria. To facilitate the adoption of the language by the indigenous natives, schools were set up with reading, writing and arithmetic curricular (Asiwaju & Oloruntimehin 1988). The adoption of English Language and the setting up of schools both promoted interaction among the Nigeria natives where interactions were limited in the pre – colonial period.

Improved communication network was another way by which the colonial government promoted unity among the diverse natives of Nigeria. With the conquest and imposition of British rule on Nigeria, the interior of the country was linked with coast through the railway lines that were built to facilitate the evacuation of agricultural produce from the interior (Hopkins 1973). But it also served the unintended benefit of promoting unity as both the coastal and hinterland people could interact economically and on friendly terms than that of pre - colonial period. Equally, communities that could not be reached by railway were linked with road network. The road network promoted commerce among the communities.

In addition to the above, the colonial power also introduced the British legal system which to a large extent helped in checking excesses of the colonized (Ajayi, 1975). Prior to the imposition of British rule in Nigeria, people were governed by custom and tradition which varied from one place to another. However, the British legal system introduced was uniform. As a result of this, people who shared similar experience viewed themselves as having common destiny.

The colonial government in Nigeria in 1954 through the Lyttleton constitution introduced federalism as a means of promoting the unity of the nation (Akinyeye 1997). While the introduction of federalism was meant to safeguard the interest of the colonial power by ensuring centrally coordinated policies at regional level, it equally benefited the colonized by making Nigerians to see themselves as stakeholders in the Nigeria project. The British colonial master must have been convinced by the opinion in certain quarters that federalism was necessary to promote integration, peace and stability in a nation of multi ethnic background like Nigeria.

**Post colonial phase:** In the post – colonial phase, efforts made to promote unity in the country were championed by the indigenous people having realized that unity is strength. The following steps have so far been taken:

Before the Nigeria Civil war, government at the centre made series of efforts to avert the looming crisis. One of the steps taken by the government headed by General Gowon was the creation of more states. Gowon felt the problem confronting the operation of federalism in the 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”. Therefore, to strengthen the central government twelve(12) states were created from the existing regions in 1967. With the creation of the twelve (12) states and the power of the existing regions became weak. Since 1960, state creation has become a recurring decimal. By 1976, seven additional states were created, 1987 witnessed the creation of two more states. Nine (9) more states were created in 1991. The latest change in the political map of Nigeria occurred in 1996 which resulted in the number of states being increased to 36 (Ugonna 2001).

Secondly, another step taken by the government of Nigeria in the post colonial period was the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). The NYSC created in 1973 with the aim of enhancing interaction among the education elites from diverse background by providing them with the opportunities of living and serving in areas different from their state of

origin offers the opportunity to understand the cultures, and lifestyle of their host communities. Thus while helping to develop different parts of Nigeria through the compulsory one year national service; the young educated Nigerians were to equally understand more about others living in different parts of Nigeria. This would enable these young people ones when they assume leadership position to proffer solutions to the challenges, people of other climes are facing. The programme recorded a huge success in its early days as fresh university graduated were posted outside their states where they were exposed to ways of life different from their culture. Some of them were able to acquire the language and imbibe other aspect of the culture of the host community. Some during their service year were able to secure jobs and also meet their future wife or husband. Some corps members also found their places of primary assignments conducive for settlement. This in a way encouraged inter – ethnic marriages, thereby fostering unity among the people of Nigeria. Till today, the programme remains an important integrating program promoting national unity in Nigeria. (Osuntokun, 2008).

Federal character principle initiated by the government of General Muritala Muhammed is another method of promoting unity in Nigeria. The aim of this policy was to ensure that all the various ethnic group in the country have access to the position of power and that no group is marginalized. Other aims of the federal character principle include: (i) To involve diverse linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic groups in decision making. (ii) To promote and integrate less advantaged states. As laudable as the policy, there was a yawning gap between intent and actual practice of the policy.

Another effort was the introduction of the revenue formula which is aimed at addressing the violence taking place in the oil rich region of Nigeria, was a response to quell the agitation for resource control. For instance, the 1999 constitution allocated 15% to those oil producing states via the derivation principle (Omotosho, 2010). Although the policy had brought about a huge infrastructural development to the area, government at various level in the region is characterized by kleptocracy, corruption leading to infrastructural decay and incessant agitation by youth from the region.

Zoning leadership position was another method employed in the post colonial period to promote unity in Nigeria. Zoning leadership positions especially the presidency is not new in Nigeria politics. The People Democratic Party zoned its presidential ticket to the Northern Nigeria and later to the Southwest and South -south. Zoning brought about rotational leadership and promote participation and sharing of political offices among the different ethnic group within the country. It equally brings a sense of belonging to the regions and promote national unity.

#### Zoning Distribution in Nigeria by Geopolitical zones, 1999 – 2015

S/N	Position	1999 – 2007	2007 – 2010	2010 – 2011	2011 – 2015	2015 - 2023
1.	President	Southwest	Northwest	South-South	South South	Northwest
2.	Vice – president	North-East	South-South	Northwest	Northwest	Southwest
3.	Senate president	South -East	North Central	North Central	North Central	North East
4.	Speaker, House of Rep	North West	South – West	South – West	North – East	North - Central

Source: Journal of Social Science, 7(3) P. 332 – 333

The ministry of Education at Federal level is Nigeria’s official medium or agency with the primary duty and responsibility for socialization into national culture. Thus, in addition to other key functions, such as the definition and execution of policies regarding the acquisition of basic skills in language, science and technology. It also seeks consciously to promote national unity among Nigerians. This is done through the Unity schools, Federal colleges of education, polytechnics and universities.

The establishment of Federal Character Commission is another method adopted by government of Nigeria to promote national unity. Elaiwu (2009) defines it as a process of creating unity and sense of belonging among the heterogeneous groups in the state. From 1914 – 1953 the principle was silently applied as encapsulated in the amalgamation policy. From 1953 – 1976, it

was applied under federalism introduced in 1954. From 1979 till date, the principle is constitutionalized and fully practiced. The reasons for setting up the Federal Character Commission are expressed in section 14(3) of the nation's 1999 constitution.

Sport in Nigeria has grown from a humble beginning as an entertainment and past time activity to a phenomenon whose influence is felt by all the citizenry (Aibeku 2002). Success at competitions creates euphoric atmosphere which inject pride and patriotism into citizens. Sport is therefore as important to Nigerians as the basic necessities of life. Consequently, sport has become an important aspect of the Nigerian culture due its popularity among the citizens (Ajisafe, 1977). Realizing the role which sports can play in nation building, successive government in Nigeria have been playing active role in funding and organizing sporting activities at national and international level.

### **Conclusion:**

Even though internal strife is not alien to most countries of the world and with outbreak on two occasions of two world wars in 1913 and 1939, the belief widely held is that peace is an indispensable to growth and development. As a result of this, all countries of the world and even the United Nations have been busy, since establishment, working day and night to ensure the promotion of peace and unity which to some extent are responsible for holding the country together. This paper highlighted and explained steps taken by the Nigerian government since the colonial period till date in promoting unity among the diverse element of the country.

**Recommendations:** The unity of Nigeria would be further enhanced if the following steps are taken:

Zoning of leadership position being promoted by the two leading political parties should not be jettisoned.

There should be judicious use of natural resources such as crude oil, gold, natural gas so as to ensure development in every part of the country.

Apart from taking part in international sporting competition, national sport festival should be promoted.

Inter tribal marriages should be encouraged. This should be done by ensuring the teaching of cultural education in schools.

Equality of all the ethnic group should be adopted in the distribution of sensitive political post so that all sections would have a sense of belonging.

Nigerians should be tolerant of one another, political leaders should set common goals and ensure implantation of the set goals.

History of Nigeria should be taught at all levels in schools.

Lastly, various enlightenment organs should be boosted financially so as to enable them carry out their enlightenment.

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