ETHNIC PLURALITY, PREBENDALISM AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Poverty is as old as man in the society. In Nigeria, since independence in 1960, the federal government hasbeen battling to reduce poverty in the country. Many poverty programmes (NAPEP, OFN, Green Revolution, and FEAP) have been put in place to control poverty, and minimize the sufferings of the poor masses. Regrettably, the general outcome of these poverty programmesyielded no positive result as conditions get worse daily at the grassroots due to the politicisation of ethnic plurality and the existence of prebendalism. This paper therefore suggests that ethnic plurality and prebendalismcan be curtailed through adequate sensitization whereby the citizens develop anti-ethnic, and anti-prebendal attitudes towards nation building.

Keywords: Ethnic plurality, prebendalism,poverty reduction, politicisation

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1. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the coastal nation-states in the Sub-Saharan Africa. The country occupies about 923, 700km^2 with a populationof 140,431,790 (National Population Commission, Abuja, 2006). It consists of several multi-ethnic groups (with different languages, cultural tradition, and historical background) that were amalgamated under the umbrella of modern Nigeria by the British imperial government.

The Northern part of the country is inhabited by predominant ethnic groups like Hausa, Fulani, and Kanuri. In the Middle Belt, the area is occupied by Igala, Idoma, Tiv, Nupe, Igbirra, and in some parts by Kwarra Yoruba. The Western area is predominantly occupied by the Yorubas. Other ethnic groups in the region include Edo, Ishan (Eshan), Urohbo, and Itshekiri. In the East, the Igbos formed the majority ethnic group. Further East are other ethnic groups like Ijaw, Ubani, Ibibio, Efik, Yakurr, Bekwarra, Ejagam, Boki, and Ukelle, etc.

All these ethnic groups share one thing in common: widespread poverty with series of afflictions that are difficult to eradicate. To be precise, since 1960, poverty as a pernicious challenge have been confronting the people and government of the federation. The World Bank ranked Nigeria as a poor country having low income which result in heavy external debt burden on the federal and state governments, and with low debt-serving capacity (Nyong, 2015).At present, data from the National Bureau of Statistics on Nigeria Poverty Profile indicates as follows: 2010 (71.57%), 2011(60.9%), 2012 (93.9%), 2013 (77.7%), 2014 (76.3%), 2015 (86.4%) (NBS, Abuja, 2015).

Consequently, the federal government has at different times introduced various poverty programmes in order to minimize if not eradicate poverty. These programmes include: National PovertyEradication Programme (NAPEP), Better Life for Rural Women, Green Revolution, Family Economic Advance Programme (FEAP), etc. Unfortunately, these programmes, tended not to meet the expectations of the people, as they have achieved minimal success. Commenting on the state of affairs on poverty reduction efforts, Sunday &Duru (2010) notes that, "while poverty is ravaging the economy at a terrific speed, progress towards curtailing the menace is moving rather slowly". The failure to reduce poverty in Nigeria may be attributed to

prebendalism (Joseph, 1999).Collaborating this view, Eteng&Agbor (2006) argued that prebendalism"finds resting hands" in ethnic plurality which often result in discrimination in career appointments or businesses as well as promote favour for one's family members or kinsmen to the neglect of others. Nevertheless, despite government effort to resolve this problem, for instance, by creating the Federal Character Commission (FCC) aimed at ethnic balancing through quota system, this situation in most cases result in "disensus and inherent instability" (Imobighe, Bassey&Asuni, 2008). In fact, Furnivall, Smith &Kuper, opined that this problem is linked to "differential incorporation resulting in cultural, social, and structural pluralism" (cited in Imobighe, Bassey&Asuni, 2008). Therefore due to this deplorable situation in the country, the study seeks to analyze the problem, and suggest the way forward.

2. Conceptual Clarification

For purpose of easy understanding, certain terms used in this study needs to be clarified. These are: ethnic plurality, prebendalism, and poverty reduction.

i. Ethnic plurality: This refers to a large number of people who belong to a nation-state with different cultural traditions, lifestyle, and heritage. The phenomenon consists of several ethnic groups or communities that share common geographical area as distinct from modern western culture.

ii. Prebendalism: This is a variety of political behaviour in which an individual enjoys the backing of a "big" person (often described as a master or "Oga") in order to benefit from the government in the area of contract award, employment, appointment into the Board of a parastatal, award of scholarship as well as success inbusiness (Joseph, 1999). It is entirely the sociopolitical process of attaining good success through patronage due to linkages with the political leaders.

iii. Poverty reduction: This is a programme of action which is intended to minimize if not eradicate poverty by giving the citizens hope and confidence in life through the provision of financial empowerment, skill acquisition or opportunity for gainful employment. This is intended to assist them to be self-reliant and be useful to themselves and the society.

3. Theoretical framework to the study

Sequel to widespread poverty in Nigeria, it is expedient to seek an appropriate theoretical framework for the purpose of analyzing ethnic plurality, prebendalism, and poverty reduction in

the country. Since poverty is real, and is commonly manifested in the society, the use of pluralism theory as a theoretical framework is suitable since Nigeria is largely comprise of different ethnic groups with claims to diverse cultural traditions.

The theory of pluralism seeks to explain how power is distributed within the structure of a governmental system (Kuper& Smith (1969), Furnivall (1948). The theory highlights the fundamental process of decision-making among government institutions in a fragmented society. Imobighe, Bassey&Asuni (2008) articulated that a plural society as one with multi-ethnic struggles for resources allocation or distribution:

Stresses the enduring nature of plural diversities, the discontinuities between sections differentiated by ethnicity, religion or culture and the high productivity of violence in the process of political change.

Also, Rabushke and Shepsle (1972) argued that a plural society is one in which there is diversity in culture, and these cultural sections are often organized into cohesive political sections. Kuper and Smith (1968) viewed a plural society as one in which:

There is pressure on subordinate cultural sections to deny legitimacy to the imposed order and to reject not only specific laws, and authority, but law, order, and authority as such (cited in Joseph, 1999).

The basic theoretical assumption of a plural theory from the above analytical framework is that there exist "selective segregation" (Eteng&Omenka, 2016) in which the citizens are marginalized or favoured based on ethnic, culture or religion as is commonly practiced today in the Nigerian public service or government parastatals. Joseph (1999), further argued that these "primordial identities" result in ethnic rivalry, chaos or anarchy. This social condition of rivalry and discrimination among the various ethnic groups in the country had in the past resulted in Tiv riot (1965), Kano riot (1954),Ijaw crisis (2000), Ogoni uprising (1990s), Western Nigerian Crisis (1960s), and the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency. The political leaders in most cases, fighting under ethnic mask tend to promote ethnic sentiments against any form of class oppression in the sharing of social and economic benefits (Nnoli, 1980). Ethnic based protestations become

pronounced when members of a particular group are apparently sidelined, and this creates a sense of madness among the poor who are not privileged as the rich who oppress them but are merely used by the political class to cause ethnic tension and instability in the society (Eteng, 2015).

However, ethnicity, viewed as "an evanescent, retrograde phenomenon" (Imobighe, Basey&Asuni, 2008) from the perspective of the Marxist will disappear through class solidarity that will further increase, and worsen the sufferings, and sorrows of the poor by creating a gap between the privileged few, and the underprivileged poor masses. This is because what sustains class solidarity is the struggle to hold power for primitive accumulation through the instrument of the state.Therefore, the struggle, and competition among the multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria; existence of class solidarity, and the pursuit for material wealth using the institution of the state to the detriment of the suffering poor masses makes the application of the pluralism theory relevant to the study.

4.   Prebendalism and poverty reduction in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country where there is inequality among the people. The rich live in affluence while the poor are the miserable in the society. A few rich men own oil blocks amounting to several billions of US dollars, while majority of the poor can hardly feed being beggars and destitute on the streets. This condition result in increase in frustration among the poor while those who cannot bear it resort to armed robbery, hostage taking (kidnapping), prostitution and advanced fee fraud to maintain themselves and their families. It was these desperate and unpleasant socioeconomic conditions that prompted the federal government to introduce several poverty reduction programmes to control poverty in the country. As already indicated, some of these programmes include: National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Family Economic Advance Programme (FEAP), Green Revolution, Better Life to Rural Women, Farewell to Poverty, etc.

The programmes introduced by the government were aimed at improving the social living conditions of the poor masses by empowering them with skills in order to enhance their capacity for self reliance, and to open up opportunity for wealth creation. This is intended to give hope to

the poor, promote happiness, and enhance their economic well-being. Apparently, appropriate machinery within core ministries and parastatals were created by the government to facilitate poverty reduction. Indeed, several poverty reduction strategies spreading over important sectors of the economy were adopted to cover health, transport, agriculture, education, industry, water, and telecommunication. This is aimed at providingequal opportunity to the citizens in terms of employment and reducing inequality.

Unfortunately, the poverty reduction programmes adopted by the government over the years have tended not to meet the needs of the people. Conditions at the grassroots are depressing and people become daily frustrated due to inequality in areas like contract award, employment opportunity, skill acquisition, andcapacity enhancement. There is also the problem of inaccessibility to loan, lack of qualitative education, portable water, and roads to ease urban-rural transportation. In business cycle, many businessmen and women become dissolution due to discrimination in the issuanceof business licenses and in the forwarding and clearing matters. This is the precarious situation in Nigeria where ethnicity is politicized, and people mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling (Furnivall & Smith cited in Joseph, 1999).

In the light of these, poverty reduction programmesthat were originally aimed at improving the conditions of the poor now becomes a matter of preference which is determined by the values of the political leaders. The failure of the poverty programmes in Nigeria is basically due to the indices of prebendalism like corrupt financial enrichment of the political leaders, appointment by patronage, favouratism based on ethnicity and unemployment which further aggravates poverty situation in the country. This point of corrupt practices is buttressed by the observations of the Auditor General of the Federation (AGF) on the financial irregularities of some government officials as shown in the table outlined in this study.

Table 1: Facts and figures of financial irregularities in Nigeria

Amount involved	Facts of the matter
$235.6m	Gas cash diverted to an undisclosed escrow accounts
N73.5b	Spent contrary to established purpose.
N10b	SURE-P funds undisclosed
N9,514,568,222.62	National Assembly's management disbursed this amount without payment vouchers.
N5,199,864,234	No evidence of accounting for this amount meant for the utilization of the Police Reward Fund.
N803,165,879.78	Beneficiaries of this amount withdrawn from Ministry of Niger Delta not named
$2.3m	Contract awarded by Nigerian High Commission in Jamaica without due process.

Source: *The Nation*, Tuesday, March 15, 2016, Vol. 2, No. 3518

The above corrupt practices as pepertuated by people in high places have colossial effects on poverty reduction in the country. For instance, Eteng & Omenka (2016), observed that several programme managers short changed beneficiaries at different times. Such funds were diverted to private pockets rather than being used for the poverty reduction programmes.Thus, by stealing, siphoning or diverting funds to their private pockets and that of their kinsmen or family members, they rob the poor masses the opportunity to have access to good roads, employment, skill acquisition, portable water, health facilities, qualitative education, rural and urban mass transit that are tools for poverty reduction. Most of these corrupt public officials are highly connected to the political "godfathers" of the land, and in most cases, they enjoy the immunity of the law as "untouchable" and therefore, cannot be prosecuted by the law.

However, in order to sustain this process of corrupt enrichment, the political leaders often prefer to be succeeded by their tribal kinsmen, relatives or friends. This is because only in such a situation can the leaders enjoy a cover for their rapacious activities. This false move by many leaders have resulted in a spoil or meritless system in which political appointments are entirely

predicated upon patronage. In most cases, theappointees are novies with no requisiteexperience, and cannot relate cause and effect in the policy process. They are sometimes appointed as political advisers but lack what to advise due to shortsightedness and lack of knowledge. An analysis ofseveral political appointments shows that a carbal of tribal kinsmen often surround the political leaders when the vast majority of the poor are roaming the streets for jobs, and gainful employment. The idea is to "allow the crumbs to fall" (Joseph, 1999) only on those within the prebendalized cycle of supporters or relatives. Nnoli (1980) observed this practise as being "harmful to the interest of the underprivilege classes, the working class, and the poor farmers who constitute the vast majority of the population".

In Nigeria, the concept of representation, participation and identification in government dominates the thinking of many people particularly "ethnic watchers" (Nnoli, 1980). People always want to have their tribal kinsmen in public agencies as managers or chief executivein order to get contracts, have access to import and export licenses as well as obtain visas to travel overseas. Nnoli (1980) in giving account of the fact of the situation in Nigeria, maintained that commercial patronage such as government loans, licensing and contracting were channeled through public agencies that were political in character.

The above situation in most cases send signals to ethnic groups to clamour for representation in government to enable them benefit from the "national cake". Therefore, it is a common practise to see communities or tribal groups sending delegates or representatives to the Political Executive in government to seek for the appointment of their tribal kinsmen into public offices as ministers, permanent secretaries, board chairmen or ambassadors. The idea of a balanced representation is therefore a means to attract government projects into one's community. This is because getting anything from government depends on linkages or connectivity with the political leaders who have the power to influence the choice of beneficiaries of government programmes.

In the bureaucracy, ethnic domination in the federal civil service is prevalent. The three major ethnic groups (commonly calledWAZOBIA) constitute the largest number in the federal civil service when compared to other minority groups combined. The service is characterized by

the prebendal practises of appointment, promotion, and transfer based on who is occupying what position in the service. The Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) and the Federal Character Commission (FCC) are often incapacitated due to pressure from political leaders seeking for favour for their kinsmen, family members or relatives. Joseph (1999) argued that these practise by the political leaders is basically to maintain a social structurethat enables them to predominate in power and politics in their domains. This gives rise to a condition of stealing and diverting public funds to private pockets. Therefore, to maintain such a structure, one must be influencial, and be able to steal or embezzle public funds or else will be hated or perceived to be selfish and to be deserted by his followers.

In a study conducted by Anna Persson, Bo Rothsteir and Jan Teorell, (2012) in Kenya and Uganda, it was evidently clear why political leaders behave the way they do (cited in Joseph, 2013). The research demonstrated the dilemma of the political class due to pressure from their followers which explains the reason for the difficulties confronting policy makers in the effort to reduce poverty, prebendalism, and ethnic rivalry. According to these scholars:

… if you have an office but have not stolen – if you have not helped your family … they are actually going to curse you… So there is pressure from everybody that you should take as much as possible … You eat on your behalf but also let some crumbs
fall on those who are with you…

…People are seeing their relatives and friends in high offices and they don't care how they get the money as long as the money is going to the village and they benefit.
...If the State is allowing people like this (high-level public officials) to continue with looting, why should I be stopped from giving a clinical officer a hundred shillings to get faster health care service (cited in Joseph, 2013).

The above scenerio in Nigeria have made poverty reduction difficult to achieve as funds meant for programme implementation are often misappropriated by the programme managers. Eteng & Agbor (2006) maintained that "the situation seems unabating largely as a result of the weak and inadequate poverty reduction strategies". Therefore, government finds it difficult to

possitively impact on the live of the poor. This is because not much have been done by the government to assist the poor in order to be free from this dangerous situation.

5. Wayforward to poverty reduction in Nigeria

It is imperative at this juncture to narrate the following possible path to take to reduce poverty in Nigeria.

i. Poverty is an enemy to man with several afflictions. It is necessary to embark upon a serious war against this national scourge. This will involve mobilizing abundant resources to create wealth. Also, through efficient manpower planning, capacity utilization, industrialization, and employment opportunities, the teeming population of unemployed graduates, and other school leavers can be absorbed to reduce poverty.

ii. The use of programme managers with proven integrity and uprightness is an imperative tool to implement poverty reduction in Nigeria. This well help to reduce corrupt enrichment of officials and other personnel involved in poverty reduction. The process will enhance transparency and minimize or eradicate nepotism. The use of ant-graft agencies like the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) as necessary tools to punish offenders is imperative to eradicate corruption, and favouritism.

iii. The idea of ''godfatherism'' as a political disease should be abolished. Beneficiaries or the target group should not be discriminated on the basis of favouritism. In Nigeria, majority of the people are poor, and therefore selecting beneficiaries based on the values of the political leaders would only discourage participation, and make void the vision and goals of the stakeholders of poverty reduction programme in thecountry.

iv. The politicization of ethnic plurality as a means to promote tension, and rivalry among competing ethnic groups in Nigeria should be discouraged. This should be done through instilling national consciousness in the minds of the people, and minimizing or eradicating ethnic utterances that are damaging. The spirit of one brotherhood despite differences in culture, language and religion should be promoted. This will facilitate peaceful co-existence of ethnic groups in Nigeria as a pre-condition for national development. The teaching of ethnic tolerance, and love should be part of the socialization process in Nigeria among families, homes, churches,

and mosques. The school syllabuses should be revised to incorporate the teaching of ethnic tolerance and love among Nigerians.

6.   Conclusion

Poverty causes social and economic backwardness, and therefore should be controlled. Being a condition of deprivation of physical and mental well-being in Nigeria, there is need to abolish it by providing job opportunities, skills and empowerment to the poor citizens. This will help the poor who have been relatively deprived in Nigeria to meet their needs, and thus reduce inequality.

The general politicization of ethnic plurality is the bane of poverty reduction in Nigeria, and as such appropriate mechanisms like national orientation of all citizens, and creating awareness among Nigerians, should be utilized as fundamental ways of discouragingprebendalism, and ethnicity. However, ifprebendalism is checked through creating national consciousness, and with the use of the law, majority of the citizens especially the poor will have hope, and participate in the affairs of the nation.

Ethnicityin Nigeria is often used to deprive other citizens the right to the "national cake". The use of quota system that promotes ethnic balancing should be emphasized, and offenders punished. Ethnic domination should be made a national crime so as to protect the interest of the minority groups that are often marginalized by the big three ethnic groups (namely: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba). This is because Nigeria belongs to all, and therefore no citizen should be denied the right to the national cake or access to economic well-being.

Finally, prebendalism should be checked because it is anti-unity and anti-national to progress. The citizens should be made to adopt anti-prebendal attitudes like protest movement or boycott against the excesses of government officials. Similarly, Anti-corrupt Practices Agencies should clamp on erring public officials especially those who corruptly enrich themselves.

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712

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