



RESTRUCTURING THE NIGERIAN STATE: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT: *The restructuring debate is an ongoing one in the country, especially in the past ten years. Available evidence shows that restructuring is an ideology which time is overdue in Nigeria today. This paper is a discourse on the argument for and against restructuring in Nigeria and the desirability of the process as well as the likely benefits that would be derived when the country is properly restructured. The main objective of this paper is to show that Nigeria stands to benefit immensely when it is properly and honestly restructured. The work reveals the concept restructuring had been variously construed to meaning true federalism, fiscal federalism, devolution of power and resource control. Also, restructuring have the ability to bring about massive national development through constitutional amendment, reduction in power contestation and extravagancy of public office holders, provision of security at the different levels of governance, etc. Thus, the paper recommends that relevant institutions of the state, particularly the executive and legislative arms, should put plans in motion to effect restructuring, political elites from across the nation should bury their ethnic and regional interests and pursue restructuring for the overall good of the country and that citizens should take their destiny in their hands and fight for restructuring to achieve national development.*

KEYWORDS: Restructuring, Fiscal Federalism, Resource Control, Ethnic Interest, Centralization, National Integration

INTRODUCTION

The clamour for restructuring has been a reoccurring decimal in Nigeria since the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914. Consequently, at independence in 1960 the country had three regions (West, East and North), and later in 1964 a fourth region, the mid-western region, was added to the number, all of which were substantially autonomous. Further agitations for restructuring resulted in the creation of 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and 774 Local Government Areas. Yet the clamour for restructuring had remained unabated. This shows that the present agitation for restructuring is not mainly about the physical structure of the nation but is has more to do with the power structure and wealth distribution of the nation.

Indeed, the issue of restructuring has become more heightened in recent times dominating public discourse in the country, particularly in the last 10 years or so. So much so that public office holders including former presidents, vice presidents and former governors, the academia, civil societies, professionals, students, politicians, religious leaders, serving governors, etc have all made their contribution to this debate (Farayibi, 2017). The concept



has been given different meanings or explanations to reflect the view point and/or the interest of different geo-political zones of the Nigerian federation.

The argument for and against restructuring in the country is tilted largely in favour of its proponents and its actualization, to the extent that in the views of some ardent supporters of the position, the nation cannot make any meaning progress unless and until it is restructured. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to examine the centrality and aptness of the agitation for restructuring and its necessity for national development. The paper argues that restructuring of Nigeria at this time in the nation's history is critical to its politico-socio-economic development and by extension national development.

The Concept of Restructuring

The concept of restructuring has been in the public space over the years since independence in 1960. However, the term is more pronounced in public discourse in the past ten years. Consequently, different segments of the Nigerian federation have proffered different meaning to the concept. So, what is restructuring? According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2014) restructuring is to organize something such as a system or a company in a new and different way. Hence, Ideobodo, Okolo and Eze (2018) assert that restructuring as a concept entails alteration and re-organization of an existing system or structure in a way or ways different from how it used to be. According to Okonkwo (2018) restructuring means to change an existing status quo in order to make it more functional. It follows from the above that restructuring is a conscious and deliberate effort at re-organizing a society and its processes so as to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in governance. As Ideobodo, Okolo and Eze (2018) have argued, it is a purpose-driven activity that hinges on replacement of an existing nature of a system with a new one that will be suitable to achieve the purpose of the system.

Advocates of restructuring have presented a number of argues, painted scenarios and elements that would be captured in the restructuring ideology and outcome. For instance, Farayibi (2017) posits that the term restructuring as used in Nigerian political system has so many meanings, including true federalism, constitutional overhauling, devolution of power, resource control, etc. Many observers argue that the present structure of Nigeria is a unitary system disguising as a federal system, therefore, there is need to adopt a true federal system, which the country operated in the first republic, 1960 – 1966. This will entail overhauling the constitution to enhance the balance of power between the central government and the subunit governments, such as the states and local governments. At present, there is so much concentration of power at the centre to the suffocation and subjugation to the component units. For example, Nigeria has one central police force and prison service for the entire country, overloaded exclusive legislative list that puts federal government in a position to take over 52 percent of total national revenue and about 48 percent for 36 states and FCT and 774 local governments.

Thus, restructuring to some other Nigerians is political arrangement that allows federating units to control resources within their localities and the devolution of powers to the component units. This would involve the reduction of the powers and roles of the federal government so that it will concentrate only on those matters best handled by the central government such as defense, foreign policy, monetary and fiscal policies, immigration,



customs and excise, aviation, as well as setting and enforcing national standards on such matters as education, health and safety (Farayibi, 2017).

It follows from the above that restructuring will ensure economic and financial viability of the states and local governments by zonal system of power and wealth generation and utilization. This will also address the concern of minorities about domination by the three major ethnic groups. As Farayibi (2017) asserted, moving substantial power, revenue and resources away from the centre to the federating units essentially elevate the states from mere consumers of oil rent to auto-viable, productive and co-equal components of the federation.

The Structure of the Nigerian State

The Nigerian state came into existence in 1914 following the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates. The amalgamation proclamation brought previously independent nations under one unified state, Nigeria. “As soon as the amalgamation came into force, the British Government enacted the mineral ordinance 1914, investing all the mineral, including coal, tin, oil and gas, etc, in Nigeria in the British Crown. This was not amended until 1958 – two years to the country’s independence in 1960” (Omoso, 2013). However, at independence in 1960, through series constitutional development conferences preceding the independence, the nation adopted the federal system to accommodate the ethnic diversities of the different nations brought under the Nigerian state. In the First Republic (1960 – 1966) three regions, and later four regions, co-existed as independent sub-units, with substantial control over their own resources while the central government played the supervisory role and protecting the territorial integrity of the country (Farayibi, 2017). During this period there was healthy competition among the regions to grow at their own pace in every sphere of human endeavour. For instance, in the West, through Cocoa and other agricultural products, free education was adopted, industries built and other social services delivered substantially. Same could be said of the other regions, each growing at their pace without hindrance(s) of any kind.

In spite of the political tension occasioned by the majority ethnic groups to dominate the body politics of the nation, tremendous development strides were achieved independently by sub-units till the military incursion in 1966, which over threw the democratically elected government and suspended the constitution. The military incursion into politics and governance obliterated the political structure (a truly federal system) put in place by the founding fathers, knowing the ethnic and cultural configuration and diversity of the vast majority of the people. In the new dispensation the country operated a unitary system but still calls it federal republic of Nigeria. There is now excessive centralization of operations that remove the independence and autonomy of the sub-units and this make them appendages of the central government.

The implication of the above situation is that achieving equality, contentment, and access to natural/national resources have been dealt a serious blow because of the centralization of the country’s operations, which some have described variously as unitary-federalism” or “feeding-bottle-federalism”; depicting the states and local governments’ dependence on the central government for survival. Consequently, we now living in a country where the system breeds massive corruption among the political class and/or ruling elites. The corollary is the disappearance of the gains and prosperity made in the early years of independence, which had now been replaced with nepotism, unprecedented massive poverty, unemployment,



underemployment, high crime rates and mass despondency, in a country in which the leaders once said “money is not the problem but how to spend it”.

At present, the central government still retained control of all minerals/natural resources, including oil and gas. Hence the component units are starved of resources and revenue to the boom of the central government. This stifles the federating units of the much-needed revenue and therefore hinders real development. It is not therefore surprising to see a fierce battle among the political class to occupy elective offices at the centre (federal government). As Farayibi (2017) has observed, the present structure has generated a lot of marginalization and discord that is awakening secessionist movements, which represents their solution to their discontentment, arising from the sharing of the “national cake”. Thus, we have to correct the national cake mentality whereby each region is waiting and struggling to get their share of the monthly allocation, appointments and political largesse which are the main sources of the discontentment and conflict in the country.

It is generally believed by proponents of restructuring that it will enhance the balance of powers in the country among the federating units, make resources/revenue available to the states and local governments and bring the much-needed development to the citizenry where ever they might reside.

Restructuring and National Development

Human societies are in constant need of development and Nigeria is not an exception. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) argued that for development to be meaningful, it must of necessity set in motion a process of self-reliance and sustainable growth through which social justice can be achieved, and provide equal and appropriate opportunities to overcome income gaps and inequalities among men, between men and women in the society (Harry, 2016). This implies that development is human centered. Following from this, national development could be described as conscious effort and processes put in place to improve the quality of lives and the living standards of the people of a nation. Obviously, restructuring the Nigeria nation-state would to a very large extent put in place those processes that would improve the quality of lives and standards of living of the people across Nigeria in many ways.

First, restructuring as envisaged in this work would involve constitutional review/amendment that would allow the states to explore and exploit the mineral resources in their localities and consequently make enormous resources/revenue to carry out developmental projects and programmes in their states. This desire for the federating units to exploit resources in their localities have been various called true federalism, fiscal federalism, resource control, etc. This will erase the sharing of “national cake” mentality prevalent in the country, but rather encourage the baking of cakes at the states and local governments. As Najakku (2016) has observed re-arrangement of the country in this regard would foster national unity and development.

Closely related to the above is the view that where there is no more “national cake” to scramble over the ethnic tension that has characterized Nigeria’s politics would be largely reduced, if not eradicated. Rather there would be an era of states/ethnic collaboration in various areas through comparative advantage of states resources endowment. Indeed, this will reduce to the bearest minimum the tribal colouration given to every decision of government



and by implication reduce threat to national integration, unity and cohesion. All these will result in regional/state competitiveness and development.

In addition, knowing that there is no more “national cake” to be shared on the 26th of every other month, the extravagancy of public office holders in the management of public funds will reduce. This is because they have to generate the revenue needed to run the government of their respective states and local governments. Similarly, the contestation for power at the federal level will reduce since the wealth, resources, revenue and power presently controlled at the centre would have been drastically reduced (Uzochukwu, 2018).

Also, very important in relation to restructuring and national development is the argument that it will enhance decentralization of security operations, particularly the police force and prisons service(s). For instance, in a country of over 180 million people has one central police force, which is obviously under staffed is unacceptable. Whereas in nations with lesser population policing, which is government’s responsibility to provide security, is available at every level of governance. At present, governors are the chief security officers of the states but do not have any control over the police deployed in their states. In the present arrangement where the Commissioner of Police in the states must take orders from the Inspector General of Police from Abuja and not from governors hence the maintenance of law and order suffer. Indeed, restructuring would enhance institutional reform and transformation across every sphere of government activities, provide opportunities for sub-units governments, generate productive activities at the federating units, create wealth nationally and foster national unity, integration, cohesion and ultimately national development.

Challenges to Restructuring in Nigeria

The restructuring debate has been an ongoing one in the country for over decades, especially in the last ten years. However, there has not been concerted effort to bring it to actualization in spite of the inherent benefits. Some of the challenges of the restructuring campaign are as discussed below: First, is the issue of the definition of restructuring among groups across the country. It is difficult to proffer an acceptable meaning to the concept of restructuring in Nigeria among the different states and ethnic nationalities in the country. Different groups have advanced different meanings and definitions to the concept, hence the difficulty in execution.

Second is that of elite interests in the present structure, which are manifestly averse to restructuring, believing it will not benefit them as much as they have enjoyed in the situation today, therefore, the status quo should remain. Obviously, many elites across states are enjoying wealth they do not work for because of the corruption the present structure bred, hence their resistance to the change restructuring will bring. This resistance is mainly from the northern political elites. As Ujah and Agbakwuru (2017) assert “one of the reasons the northerners shun the call for restructuring is because of their landmass and population which grant the northern elites the opportunity of being appointed in large numbers into government positions and using it to hustle for fund in Abuja. Similarly, a former governor of Akwa Ibom State, Obong Victor Attah disclosed that, no governor today will lift a finger or put himself out to diversify or second restructuring when every month he can come to Abuja to collect his share of the booty” (Ujah and Agbakwuru, 2017).



Third is the fear of discomfort among some ethnic nationalities, particularly those in the northern region. For instance, Nuhu (2016), quoting Sani stated thus:

The north is opposed to restructuring because there is nothing to restructure... those who clamour for restructuring or true federalism to enable each region and/or constituent unit to develop at its own pace are unwittingly advocating that Nigerians should live as if they are in different countries, where some citizens would live in comfort zone while other would live on the fringe.

The fear is drawn from the fact that since the oil boom era of the 1970s to date, states enjoy revenue they do not generate and have become comfortable with the idea of sharing revenue every month without working, thus any change of the status quo would be very discomfoting.

Fourth is political docility of the citizenry who have resigned their fate to the dictates of the elites and are now ready accept whatever the political class or ruling elites throw at them without resistance. Irrespective of the obvious benefits of true federalism/fiscal federalism or restructuring majority of the citizens are not ready to agitate for such a regime that would enhance their well-being.

Lastly, ethno-regional rivalry or consideration is also one of the challenges to restructuring in Nigeria. Nigeria is sharply divided into north and south, and there has been subtle supremacy contest between the ethnic groups in the two divides over the years. This contestation is multifaceted; however, the south appears to be more developed and wealthier than the north, which is more in landmass and population. The main stay of the nation's economy is from the south, therefore restructuring that would make states control their resources it is believe would make the southern region more developed than the northern region and as such the region thinks that restructuring might not fully favour the north having in mind the rivalry that exist between the two divides. Hence the north tends not to accept the adoption of political restructure as a way to eliminate the pseudo-federalist practices in Nigeria (Ideobodo, Okolo and Eze, 2018).

Prospects of Restructuring the Nigerian State

The need for restructuring the Nigerian state, irrespective of the over politicization of the thinking, is quite overwhelming in the present situation of Nigeria. Indeed, restructuring, if actualization is achieved, has the capacity of turning things around and bringing about national prosperity and development. Some of the prospects and the prosperity restructuring will bring are discuss below.

First, restructuring in form of devolution of power and resource control intends to free the central government most of the functions in the 68 items exclusive list by releasing such functions to the states and local governments and allow sub-unit governments to explore and exploit mineral resources in their localities thereby increase the revenue base of the federating units. For instance, such freedom would result in productive economic activities in the country across states and regions. This means Enugu State could invest in coal mining, Plateau State in tin mining, while Kano, Zamfara, Sokoto and other northern states in agriculture and limestone mining for cement factories. No doubt, these economic activities would create massive jobs, wealth and drastically reduce poverty in the country.



Second, with huge resources/revenue at their disposal federating units governments can embark on massive infrastructural development in the area of roads, railways, electricity, telecommunication, education, health care, etc. This would result in regional competitiveness and development across the regions.

Third, availability of infrastructure would attract investments into the country on a large scale. Obviously, the eastern region could be transformed into the manufacturing hub of Africa through foreign direct investments and licensing arrangements with foreign capitalists in search of investment destinations. This would strongly reduce the unemployment figures in the country.

Fourth, inter-ethnic and inter-regional conflict will stop or reduce to the barest minimum since there would be no more “national cake” to fight for, rather every state will focus on ways and means of generating revenue to run its operations (Harry, 2009). Also, this would create the much-needed synergy among states to cooperate and complement each other in their drive toward development. As Oseloka (2018) posited, as the debate on restructuring gathers steam, there is a corollary, the fear that equates restructuring with the breaking up of Nigeria. This is obviously misleading and missing the point. According to Oseloka (2018), Nigeria has been restructured several times without negative consequences. Essentially, the present democracy and is to make the nation and its component units more efficient and more acceptable, more productive, more functional and above all more equitable.

Fifth, restructuring would make Nigeria a truly federal system and get rid of the unitary system that masquerades as federalism. Tinubu (2017) has argued that for a country as diverse and large as Nigeria, only the practice of true and fiscal federalism can deliver effective administrative and political governance and achieve critical deliverables in the areas of poverty reduction, infrastructural development, education, health care services, etc. It follows that more powers and resources would be available to the state and create institutions of governance hitherto in the control of the central government. This would remove pressure on the federal government to be involved in matters that ordinarily could have been handled by the states. Essentially, the work load of the federal government would be reduced substantially to enable it focus on defence, customs and excise, monetary and fiscal policies and general regulatory and supervisory roles.

Lastly, states would be creative in the ways and manner they generate revenue locally to run their affairs since there would no longer be central purse from which to seek for funds. At present, the availability of oil money at the centre has made state governors and public office holders at the state levels lazy that they have left so many things they ought to do undone (Harry, 2009). The constant release of revenue (oil money) from the federal government encourages laziness in wealth creation and mismanagement (through corrupt means) of state resources, for there is hope that at the end of the month the federal government will release more money down to the states. As Sambo Bello Ingawa had argued, this type of release of oil revenue on monthly basis for domestic use is a major factor hampering economic growth in the Nigerian states (Harry, 2009).



CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that in all intents and purposes the thinking of restructuring the Nigerian state highly needed at this point in the country's history. Restructuring, which has in its nature and character devolution of powers, fiscal federalism, resource control and true federalism will put Nigeria on a solid path to global and regional competitiveness and consequently national development. The present situation in which the federal government on a monthly basis releases oil money to the federating units to run their affair discourages creativity and therefore serves as a major factor hindering economic growth in the country. Irrespective of the views and opposition from certain quarters in the country against the idea of restructuring, it is an ideology which time has come, for which failure to actualize will spell doom for the nation. Thus, the conclusion of this paper is that for Nigeria to enjoy politico-socio-economic development, national unity and cohesion as well as all round national development, restructuring the Nigerian state is a sine qua non. The relevant institutions of government should put motion the necessary legal instrument to achieve/actualize the restructuring aspiration to avert the impending doom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the above submissions of the study, the underlisted recommendations are made:

- (i) The relevant institutions of the state, particularly the executive and legislative arms, should put plans in motion to affect the restructuring of the Nigerian state.
- (ii) The political elites from across the country should bury every ethnic and regional interests and rivalry and think of the peace, progress and unity of Nigeria above anything else.
- (iii) The citizens (masses) should take their destiny in their hands and fight for the survival of the country through well mapped out restructuring effort that would engender national development.

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