



The Value of Diversity: Restructuring To Save Nigeria

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 By

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**Introduction**

Ladies and Gentlemen,Lions and Lionesses,I consider myself privileged standing before this gathering of erudite scholars to share my thoughts on the issue of diversity and the imperative of restructuring. First, I must say I am intimidated by the presence of professors here. The reason is that I am not a professor and I do not know if I will be able to meet their individual expectations. Also, I have not been in the academia. I believe that makesmy task a little bit different because I will speak like a businessman and a politician, maybe not like a professor. That means I shall be a lot more practical.

Again, I know I am standing in front of students who want to learn. Therefore, I shall try my best to take them through a discourse that will enlighten them and broaden their knowledge of the system we operate and why the agitations for restructuring have been strong lately. So, to the students, where I do not talk like a professor, please accept it because I am not one.

**Diversity**

Let me take us through ordinary definition of diversity. The ordinary dictionary meaning of diversity is “a state of being diverse” as captured by the Collins Dictionary of English language. Diverse itself connotes difference. That is why synonyms of diversity include variety, miscellany, assortment, mixture, range, array, multiplicity and medley. Diversity has been used in different forms and in different contexts. We have seen it used in the science and sociology when we talk about biodiversity and cultural diversity. Either way, it connotes difference. The University of Oregon in the United States of America, writing about diversity said “the concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual”.

Deriving from the above, diversity simply means difference. There are 1055 entries in the Encyclopedia Britannica on the specific issue of diversity all discussing the different applications of the word. But none of the 1055 entries take anything away from the fact that diversity is about difference. For the reason of this discourse therefore, we shall dwell more on ethnic diversity.

Ethnic diversity, according to thesaurus.com can also be discussed as conflation, fusion, multiculturalism and pluralism. While conflation means the merging of two or more sets of information, texts, ideas, etc., into one, fusion connotes the process or result of joining two or more things together to form a single entity. Its synonyms include blend, blending, combination, amalgamation, joining, bonding, binding, merging, melding, mingling, integration, intermixture, intermingling and synthesis. Multiculturalism indicates the presence of, or support for the presence of, several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society; just as pluralism, as a political philosophy, is the recognition and affirmation of diversity within a political body, which permits the peaceful coexistence of different interests, convictions and lifestyles. Beyond these, ethnic diversity has to do with the different ethnic groups which make up a society. Wikipedia defines ethnic group, as a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, language, society, culture or nation. In the study of anthropology, we read that membership of an ethnic group is often defined by shared cultural heritage, ancestry, origin myth, history, homeland, language or dialect, symbolic systems such as religion, mythology and ritual, cuisine, dressing style, art, and physical appearance.

If the above is correct, it therefore means that Nigeria, as a country, is a nation of diverse people who are culturally, politically, linguistically, religiously, historically and even mythological diverse or different. Wikipedia lists the ethnic groups found in Nigeria. I lost count as I scrolled through. But a May 2017 publication in Vanguard Newspapers by Zents Kunle Sowunmi, says there are 371 ethnic groups inhabiting this space called Nigeria. It also listed their names. Implication of this is that Nigeria is a nation of 371 different cultures. Each of these groups seeks political control of the center. This breeds conflict.

Worldatlas.com gives a breakdown of ethnic dominance in Nigeria listing the top 10. It lists Hausa as the most dominant ethnic group consisting of 25.1 percent of Nigeria while Yoruba comes second with 21 percent and Igbo third with 18 percent. According to the website, Ijaw is ranked fourth with 10 percent while Kanuri consist of 4 percent of Nigeria and Fulani taking up 3.9 percent while Ibibio and Tiv consist of 3.5 percent and 2.5 percent respectively. The above is however a corruption of figures generated by the 1953 population census which puts the population of Eastern Nigeria at 7.2 million with the Igbo dominating at 5million. That census also puts population of the Hausa at 5.6million with Fulani at 3.1million while the Yoruba population was put at 4.27million. I cannot establish the authenticity of figures from worldatlas.com but having been published; it will remain an instrument of measurement until our ethnographers interrogate the figures and present us with alternatives.

What the above statistics show is the reality of the Nigerian situation. It is a statement on the conflicts that we have lived with. Writing in “Ethnic Diversity and Conflict in Nigeria: Lessons from the Niger Delta Crisis”, Wilson Akpan, states that “A Bill of Rights’ issued by the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) castigates Nigeria’s federalism as arbitrary and constructed to favour the major ethnic nationalities (namely the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo).” He also noted that “Another declaration, the ‘Kaiama Declaration’, issued by the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) similarly denounces Nigeria’s ‘unbalanced’ federalism and the exploitation of ‘Ijaw resources’ for the benefit of other groups.”.

The summary of this is that Nigeria is a nation of diverse ethnic groups with diverse ways of life, culture, mannerisms, ideologies, philosophies etc. The leadership challenge it therefore presents is one that challenges the leadership to appreciate that no president is leader of his ethnic group, but the leader of a multi-ethnic, multicultural and pluralistic society where each distinct group has its own expectation from the leadership. To my mind, these individual expectations breed the sort of conflict that had attended our expression of nationhood giving rise to the call for restructuring. So, it is not really about the diversity itself, but about managing the diversity.

**Restructuring**

The simple meaning that comes to the mind, for restructuring, is to change the status of something and make it more functional. But knowing that I am going to face an audience like this, I did not play around chance. So I looked up further definitions to be sure that I am on the right track. The dictionary tells me that it simply means to “organize differently”. While Wikipedia sees it as “the corporate management term for the act of reorganizing the legal, ownership, operational, or other structures of a company for the purpose of making it more profitable, or better organized for its present needs”, the business dictionary explains it as “bringing about a drastic or fundamental internal change that alters the relationships between different components or elements of an organization or system”.

There are several other definitions of restructuring but the central meaning in all of them is that it is about altering the way something is structured in order to make it more functional or effective. We all go through some form of restructuring in our lives, either in our homes or workplace. Some people restructure their wardrobes every year to reflect their social status. Some restructure their homes to keep up with the times. As a businessman, I recently embarked on a restructure of The Dome Entertainment Centre, by re-modeling it and changing the outlook and offerings. The aim was to make it more effective and profitable. I am also sure that even here in the University, the management embarks on systematic restructure to make academic delivery more impactful. The new developmental projects that leadership of the Faculty of the Social science has embarked on are all part of the restructuring process. So, it is not in doubt what exactly restructuring means as a concept.

However, it has become clear to us that simple things are not as simple as they seem and should be. The simple thing here would be to argue that if things aren’t as effective for Nigeria as originally designed or envisaged, the easy thing to do would be to change the system. If your computer system can no longer function optimally, and keeps suspending operation, the thing to do would be to shut it down and reboot. If the radio station or television channel you are listening to, or watching, has become boring, you simply tune to a better station. You don’t sit back lamenting that the radio station is not entertaining enough. Therefore, change is an integral part of restructuring.

Hu Jintao, one-time leader of China, speaking on the need to restructure the political system in China said: “The political restructuring we pursue in China is aimed at advancing the self-improvement and development of the socialist political system. We will continue to expand people's democracy and build a socialist country under the rule of law in keeping with China's national conditions.”

Faced with the challenge of drop in its entertainment programmes that cater for older people , the leadership of ABC television in the United States of America embarked on a restructuring exercise aimed at capturing the older demographic. Matt Dallas, an actor who is best known for playing the title character on the ABC Family series Kyle XY, justified the effort thus: “ABC Family is really restructuring their network because there's a new kind of family, so I think they're really trying to step away from that younger audience, and they're bringing a network that can bring more to an older demographic”.

David Miliband, who was succeeded by Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in the UK, also spoke of restructuring of the British economy. He said “the whole of government needs to contribute to the shared goal of restructuring the British economy. But that means taking on the myth that the Treasury either knows best or can run it all. It just doesn't.”

In South Korea, we had Park Geun-hye, who, speaking as president to justify efforts made by her father to restructure the economy and the outcome, said “My father was criticized as a dictator, but that should not overshadow his accomplishments in restructuring the country. He brought Korea out of 5,000 years of poverty. What he left unaccomplished was democratization of the system.”

In the United States of America, B. Kevin Turner, a businessman and Vice chairman of Albertsons and a member of the Board of Directors at Nordstrom, told Microsoft while he was Chief Operating Officer there that “phones remain a critical component of the Microsoft device portfolio and an important piece of our mobility strategy, but a restructuring is in order”. He made the call at a time Microsoft phones were facing very strong competition from other top brands from Asia and United States. It lost market share and value. I don’t know how many of us here that use Microsoft phones. It is not impossible that our not using Microsoft phones here may be an outcome of the way and manner management of the company responded to Turner’s call for restructuring.

In 2017, Deloitte, an international accounting firm, embarked on a project to market restructuring to businesses in West Africa. Its reasons were captured in this brief statement on its website www.deloitte.com. It reads: “The region has faced severe macroeconomic conditions marked by low commodity prices and foreign currency crises. Companies have sought to manage their exposures, and businesses have struggled to meet their obligations. This situation has necessitated the need to redefine efficiency and explore new options in unlocking value”. It titled the statement “redefining efficiency”. Further down, Deloitte said “low commodity prices, exchange rate fluctuations and decline in government spending have left many West Africans under strain. Nigeria, for instance, has experienced a “perfect storm” of economic and political events which have placed significant pressure on the economy”.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Lions and Lionesses, I have no doubt that so far we have been able to establish the grounds for restructuring. It comes back to say that restructuring is a necessary process to bring a failing enterprise back to life and put it back on the path of profitability. As a businessman, I know that any business that fails to restructure its vision, processes and finances (debt) is headed for failure. Nokia used to be one of the biggest telephone manufacturers. When Samsung and others went smart, it remained analogue and refused to restructure. Its story today is different. Kodak used to be the biggest colour photography company. It used to have the best camera and films. But it did not see the need to restructure when digital photograph hit the market and smart phones adopted the technology. Today, not many people still see their signposts. Canon and Nikon dominate the market space today.

But is business the same thing as politics? Perhaps!However, politics is about interest. So also is business. A business that is not profitable is not worth the time and energy. A political enterprise that is not rewarding for the constituent groups is also not worth the time and energy. In the end, what matters most is how politics, like business, has been able to impact on the lives of shareholders, in this case, the diverse people who make up the polity, and for whom government exists. Remember that at Annual General Meetings of companies, shareholders are also invited to vote. That they vote means that they have a voice on how their company operates. It is the same in politics. The few in power hold power in trust for the people whom they must also listen to in drawing up policies and laws for the good ordering of society. This is where the most critical issue of our nationhood –amalgamation- comes in.

**Restructuring Efforts**

One cannot exhaustively discuss diversity and restructuring without touching on amalgamation. In the early paragraphs of this text, we talked about diversity and one of the issues we touched on in discussing ethnic diversity was fusion. One of the synonyms of fusion, according to the thesaurus, is amalgamation. It means the process of combining or uniting multiple entities into one form. In geopolitics, it is the joining of two or more administrative units. In Nigeria, this happened in 1914 and Sir Frederick Lugard was behind it. The implication of the merger was that both the northern and southern protectorates, which had hitherto existed as separate entities with different forms of government were amalgamated into one entity. The significant thing about this 1914 exercise was that no member of the diverse ethnic groups that make up the two protectorates was brought to a negotiation table to agree on the merger.

When companies merge, the leaderships negotiate terms. Before the ruling party, All Progressives Congress, formed, there were negotiations that led to a merger which gave birth to the party. Even in marriage, you negotiate with your girl to agree to leave her parents and join you as wife.

Ladies and Gentlemen, what happened in 1914 was a restructuring of Nigeria. In fact, that was the first restructuring that the country underwent and it eased governance as it enabled the fusion of the northern and southern protectorates for ease of trade between the north and the south. It also brought about the restructuring of Nigeria’s governance model. In 2014, Nigeria celebrated the centenary of that restructuring exercise. Between 1914 and 2014, Nigeria underwent several restructuring exercises. Between 1914 and 1960 when Nigeria won her independence, steps were taken to restructure the country. These were expressed in the constitution making of 1922, 1946, 1951, 1954 and 1960.

Nigeria had the 1914 amalgamation constitution of Lugard which was replaced in 1922 by Sir Richard Clifford. That constitution restructured Nigeria and created a 46-member Legislative Council. The Council had powers to make laws also for the Lagos colony and the southern province. It also introduced several changes including the elective principle with Lagos and Calabar having the franchise to elect representatives to the council. Arthur Richards changed the constitution in 1946. With that, he restructured the country into three regions –northern, western and eastern regions. The enactment of that constitution coincided with the enactment of the United Nations Charter after which recognized the right of people to self-determination. It also restructured the polity and enabled the formation of political parties like the NCNC -National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons.

In 1951, John Macpherson jettisoned the constitution and created his own. Macpherson was clever. He allowed a level of consultation in the making of the constitution because its predecessor suffered the charge of imposition from the British colonialists. He created regional constituent conferences to harness inputs before the national constituent conference in Lagos. With that constitution, the political space was expanded for more participation. However, three years after, it was replaced by Oliver Lyttleton who gave Nigeria another constitution in 1954. This came after some conferences in London. The Lyttleton constitution also restructured Nigeria and granted more autonomy to the regions. It also removed Lagos from the control of any regional administration and made it the federal capital territory. If other constitutions before it worked to restructure Nigeria, the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 pushed the restructuring further.

It is believed that the Lyttleton Constitution effectively prepared Nigeria for Independence in 1960. With independence in 1960, Nigeria was again restructured with the introduction of a parliamentary system of government, a bicameral legislature, regional parliaments and devolution of powers. That constitution retained the Queen as Nigeria’s Head of State with a Governor-General. While the queen held ceremonial office, the Governor-General exercised executive powers. However, three years after, Nigeria underwent another restructuring which made it become a republic. That was when the 1963 Republican constitution berthed. The 1963 constitution made drastic changes including creating office of a President who was to be elected by the people. It replaced office of governor-general which was appointed by the British monarch. It also restructured the judicial system creating the federal Supreme Court.

But the 1966 military intervention ended the life of the constitution and Nigeria was restructured into a unitary state with a 1966 military decree. That episode began Nigeria’s romance with military rule which ended in 1979 after four military rulers –General Thomas Umunakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi, Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed, Olusegun Obasanjo- have taken turns running the country.

The 1979 constitution began Nigeria’s second cycle of restructuring and constitution making. It was an Olusegun Obasanjo effort which eventually brought about the government of Shehu Shagari. That constitution restructured Nigeria further with the introduction of a presidential system with a federal government. It allowed a 19-State structure and a federal capital territory, with three arms of government. It also allowed for a three-tier government –the Federal, State and Local Government.

That constitution operated till December 1983 when the government was removed by the military. The following years that terminated in 1999, saw Nigeria operating under military decrees. During these period however, different leaders made efforts to restructure Nigeria for effective management. Nigeria has, as a consequence grown from four regions in 1963 to 36 States as at today. The 2014 National Conference further recommended the restructuring of the country into 54 States with the addition of 18 more States.

As I got to learn later, the creation of 18 additional States in 2014 by the National Conference was in furtherance of efforts to answer to the need to appreciate the country’s diversity and tap into potentials inherent in these diverse ethnic groups for national growth. It was observed that the amalgamation of 1914 did not take into cognizance the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of the country. That failure was in view while delegates to the National conference debated on the need to cure logjams that had prevented ethnic groups from achieving their potentials. Were the delegates right or wrong? Time will tell more.

Before the 2014 effort, Nigeria got a constitution in 1999 with which the country was returned to civil rule. Shortcomings of that constitution havefueled allegations of marginalization and estrangement. Following that, efforts were made in 2006 to alter the constitution and restructure the political system in the country. That did not scale through. Besides, the above which were centrally-based actions of government seeking to restructure the federation, there have been actions taken by sections of the country to raise questions and seek answers on why things are the way they are.

Down our history, we have had cases like those of Isaac Adaka-Boro and his agitation for a Niger Delta Republic. Issues raised in that struggle did not end with the death of that young man. We trudged on and managed ourselves with all the short-comings till we were faced with a civil war which was basically driven by the need for balance in our federation as underscored by the Aburi Agreement of January 1967. The end of that war still did not stop agitations for balance. We have seen other actions including the formation of the Odua’a People’s Congress, Movement For Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, Niger Delta Youth Volunteer Force and many others. We have seen the call for resource control dominate the polity at a time. We are witnesses to the rise and development of Boko Haram and their initial demands. Today, we are faced with the herdsmen menace. In all, we have seen regional efforts aimed at re-drawing the map to give ethnic diversities in the federation a greater sense of belonging. But have we managed the situation better?

Recently, the call for the restructuring of Nigeria has become deafening. Those who have championed this call insist that Nigeria has come to the point where there is need for a review of the systems and foundation upon which the present structure was built. Many have described our federal system in various terms including “feeding bottle federalism”. Many have wondered why states of the federation cannot develop at their own pace using resources which nature has endowed them with. Many still wonder why we gather in Abuja every month to share money for the ineffective running of the States. There are also those who have asked why certain realities, like policing, have to be dependent on the federal government. There are questions as to why all the regions do not have equal number of states. There are more questions as to why we have to go to the federal government to obtain something as little as a license to drive a car. Many wonder why we have discriminatory unity schools and university admission policies. Some still ask why States cannot build and maintain their own railway lines. Many Nigerians are still asking to know why the federal government has to decide for State how much they must pay their workers as minimum wage even where the States lack the resources to do so.

Many have wondered why we still have three-tiers of government or still fund local governments from the federation account. Many are asking why the federal government has to be involved in the creation of local governments. So many other people are raising questions as to why communities where natural minerals are found still do not have rights to participate in the mining of same. Many have argued that the revenue sharing formula which gives more to the federal government is reason for lack of development in the states and also, for high level corruption at the center. There are those who believe that our structured quota system which makes it mandatory for every section of the country to be involved on the leadership ladder is reason our country has been held back. Everyone who has asked such questions may be right or wrong depending on how they view reality.

A critical examination of the exclusive legislative list of the Nigeria’s constitution brings home the reality of our problems. It shows you exactly where we are and where we ought to be. I am told that at the 2014 National Conference, the committee on the Devolution of Powers was the hottest because it was charged with just one assignment which turned out to be the most difficult –a review of the exclusive legislative list of the constitution. While some members of the committee wanted a radical unbundling of the list to give more powers to States, some others insisted on maintaining status quo. In the end, the committee did not achieve much because there was fear of moving from the known to the unknown and therefore, many of the delegates felt that it was better to stay with the known. But, that is where most of our problems lie. The liberalization and restructuring of Nigeria to free it to become more functional will have to begin with a dismantling of the exclusive legislative list to grant more powers to the States. Such powers will give the States more autonomy and responsibilities which will enable them pursue development. I do not believe that it is the business of the federal government to build roads and bridges in States and call them federal roads. Our federation needs to be unbundled such that the federal government will busy itself more with such things as defence, immigration, foreign policy, Customs Service, legal tender/monetary policiesand a few others. States can manage their resources and pay taxes to the central government.

However, this paper is not meant to be a critique of the current political system that we practice. It is about our diversity and the value it brings to the management and survival of our country. What this paper simply says is that our diversity is our biggest asset in the task of building a nation of values. Like we said earlier, Nigeria is a country of about 371 ethnic diversities. This could also become 371 nations within a nation. It means that we have 371 options to choose from; it also means that Nigeria is endowed with survival options, if harnessed.

**Diversity and Restructuring**

Former Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, speaking at a book lunch in Abuja September 2017 said: “we should all be mindful of and sensitive to the feelings and preferences of those who may not think the way we think, the way we speak or worship, the way we worship or belong to the same political party as us. Our diversity ought to be our strength and, together, we can still build the Nigeria of our dreams. Our first constitution carefully considered Nigeria’s character as a diverse nation and chose the secular path in order to accommodate the diversity and peaceful coexistence.”

He re-echoed same in his recent lecture at the Chatham House in London. It shows that it is not only you and me that are concerned about the future of our country with the present system. Those who are calling for restructuring have great reasons to do so. Those who are asking that our diversity become a pillar for our development are making genuine calls that we need not ignore.

Adele Jinadu, writing in an article published in The Guardian of June 7, 2017 states: “The country must not fall victim to the fetishism or magic of legal-constitutional design. It must also begin to find ways of strengthening and deepening the spirit, the political culture of democracy and federalism, as mechanisms for managing diversity and for pursuing the public interest in a plural society; otherwise the design effort will be in vain.”

Former Military president, General Ibrahim Babangida, in his 2017 Eid-el-Fitr message to Nigerians said: “The talk to have the country restructured means that Nigerians are agreed on our unity in diversity; but that we should strengthen our structures to make the union more functional based on our comparative advantages.”

He also said: “Restructuring has become a national appeal as we speak, whose time has come. I will strongly advocate devolution of powers to the extent that more responsibilities are given to the States while the Federal Government is vested with the responsibility to oversee our foreign policy, defence, and economy. Even the idea of having federal roads in towns and cities has become outdated and urgently needs revisiting. That means we need to tinker with our constitution to accommodate new thoughts that will strengthen our nationality.”

These statements are a few indications that we still have something to talk about on our country. Nigeria’s diversity is its main strength. Our worry should be on how to manage the diversity.

We have seen, in recent times, how fractured our country has become. The only underlining reason for this brokenness is the mismanagement of our diversity. This mismanagement does not only rest with our political diversity, but also with our cultural diversity which should actually be a source of pride and great foreign exchange earner for our country. Our cultural diversity leaves us with options for revenue generation. But we are not looking at that area yet because oil is still with us.

Like I said earlier, 371 ethnic groups is power. Almighty God that created this diverse group of people imbued in each group some special talents found nowhere else. Many people refer to the Southeast people as great traders. Yes, we are not only great traders but fantastic business people who, through our little efforts at trading, rebuilt our home base from the ruins of devastation caused by war some 47 years ago. The effort the Igbo people put in rebuilding their homestead is a statement that there is something special in this segment of our national diversity. It is also an invitation to other segments of the diversity to study this specialness and build on it.

Like we read in the Holy Books, the God that created them called them into different jobs. It says to us that the God that created Nigeria gave her a diversity that it needed to manage for its own good. The Nigerian diversity is such a huge pool of talent waiting to be unleashed in an environment that recognizes and rewards talent and know-how. Our failure to do these fuels the call for restructuring behind which is the veiled call for appreciation of talents and unbundling of the systems that we operate to free Nigeria and make her grow.

When Nigerians call for restructuring, they are in essence telling themselves that they do not understand why their country is not developing at the speed at which others are developing. The 1960s is not the 2018s. In the 60s, the number of Nigerians travelling abroad was limited to a privileged few. In fact, going abroad then was seen as a huge achievement. Today, Nigerians just hop into a plane and fly out to foreign lands. What they see when they travel challenge them to ask why their country is not catching up. They come back home to ask questions and get no answers. How would any one explain the fact that the Dubai we all know today was a desert in the 1980s? Yet, the Lagos which experienced developmental touch much earlier is nothing near it? How does anyone explain to Nigerians that the good things of life that they enjoy abroad are not yet possible in their country? How do you tell younger Nigerians that governmental systems elsewhere work but their own cant?

Young Nigerians saw Barrack Obama become president of the United States of America. They have seen Emmanuel Macron become President in France. They have followed electoral developments in other countries where young people were elected to lead and they come back to observe the same is not yet possible in their country. Why? They see advancements made in technology, medicine, transportation, agriculture, sports in Europe, America, Asia etc., and they have no explanation as to why same is not possible in their country. The questions they ask bounce back without answers. Yet, they are told to believe that things will get better. While they actually do believe that things will get better, the realities that they see convince them otherwise. So, what exactly is the problem?

The fact, ladies and gentlemen, Lions and lionesses, is that until we unbundle the governmental system and unleash the powers of our diversity on development, we may not really achieve our collective dreams. Our country will continue to struggle until we agree to unbundle the federation and allow the component units, whatever we call them, to tap into their local talents and endowments to grow. We shall remain a “third-world nation” if we do not appreciate the value that our diversity adds to our development and growth. This is the message in a publication on www.iiste.org titled ‘Managing Ethnic and Cultural Diversity for National Integration in Nigeria’, where Patrick A. Edewor, Yetunde A. Aluko and Sheriff F. Folarin argued that “national integration and its benefits can be realized only with the development and entrenchment of a supportive public culture; understanding, respecting and tolerating differences occasioned by socio-cultural diversity; as well as the development of new institutions and mechanisms that address poverty, revenue allocation and other national issues peacefully.”

**Should Nigeria Restructure?**

The above is a question that several Nigerians have asked and answered before now. I am sure many in this hall have their own opinions on whether Nigeria should restructure or not. However, going by the political trend since 1999, there seems to be only one answer to this question and that is a resounding yes. For me however, I will like to raise more posers which will guide us towards an answer.

Like many other Nigerians, I will like to know why the southeast for instance, has only five States while the northwest has seven and all others have six each. We may all not be convinced about the import of this but in a representative democracy, it means a lot. Five States for the south east translate to 15 Senators for the southeast. On the other hand, seven States for the northwest means 21 senators for the northwest while other geopolitical zones have 18 each. Is this the meaning of equity and balance? Do not forget that States are the basic units for sharing national revenue.

Let’s go further a bit. I am also at a loss as to why of the 774 constitutionallyapproved local government areas in Nigeria, the southeast has a total of 95 while the northwest has 186 local government areas. The northeast has 113 while the south-south region has 125 and the south-west has 137 and the north-central region comes in with 112 local councils. Thus far, no one has explained to the southeast people why this sort of structure exists. Also, no one has been able to justify this reality. The pain of this situation comes home when one realizes that revenue allocation and development planning are often times, based on population. The simple explanation for the skewed revenue allocation that we currently have will be that the population is more in places where there are more local governments. It therefore means that if each local government in Nigeria were to get a primary school, the Southeast will get one that is not proportional to what the northwest zone gets. Yet, our constitution opens with the statement “we the people of Nigeria having agreed to…”I ask, did the southeast agree to subjugate itself in this manner or some people agreed to subjugate it?

Let me bring this home further. In a recent recruitment exercise into the Nigeria Police Force, each local government in Nigeria was allowed only 10 recruits. Implication of this is that while Bayelsa State had only 90 recruits, Kano had 440 recruits. If the numbers are pruned every year at 10 persons from each state, in nine years, Bayelsa State will have no person in the Police while Kano will still have some 350 persons. Why wouldn’t Kano have more candidates for consideration as IGP than Bayelsa? Do you see why we must restructure?

Ladies and gentlemen, has it ever occurred to us that there are more natural resources buried under the soils of the north-central zone of Nigeria? Imagine if we restructured Nigeria such that each State will mine and harness resources endowed on it by nature and then pay royalties and taxes to the center. If we think in that direction, we will begin to see the opportunities that nature has given us to develop. North central will become the new bride for solid mineral exploitation and development. The value chain it will create will make the north central the new industrial hub in Nigeria. The potentials for job creation will be huge. But we are not yet thinking in that direction.

Further, I am yet to understand why, despite high secondary school enrolment figures from the Southeast, only 12 unity colleges are built in the region against 24 in the north central and 15 in the north east. North West has 18 unity colleges same as South west while South-South hosts 17. The reality of this is that a state like Imo State, which has high secondary school enrolment figures, hosts only two unity colleges while the Federal Capital Territory plays host to five and Anambra State houses three. You may not know the implication of this until you relate them to allocation sharing.

However, I have heard highly placed Nigerians suggest that restructuring means dismemberment. While I acknowledge the right of everyone to hold an opinion, it must be stated that change has no other name than change. We cannot build something on nothing. If we look critically at ourselves without the usual mutual suspicion that attends every national discourse, we will see the need to unbundle our national governmental system and adopt workable systems. For instance, what sense does it make to have a minister appointed from every State of the federation even when they do not have a job to do? What that means is that we must create jobs for them to be accommodated. This trend denies us the services of our best hands and brains as someone has to be appointed to fulfill requirement, qualified or not.

I have also heard many people quarrel over the high cost of governance and maintenance of a presidential system of governance. To my mind, while the system of governance may not necessarily be our problem, I strongly suggest that we restructure the governmental system to eliminate wastages, enthrone merit, purpose and accountability. I am inclined to believe that what Nigerians desire more is good governance and not necessarily who is driving it. For us therefore to have a good governmental system, we must agree to a lean legislature which should also operate on a part-time basis. Some of the political problems we have had in States leading to assassinations and arson are directly tied to the quest for office and financial benefits. If however we restructure and make the offices less attractive, and on part-time basis, those who will line out to be voted for, will be persons of deep integrity who already have legitimate addresses; they will be successful business persons that communities will go to beg to represent them because they have proved, through their successful endeavours, that they have integrity and capability; to legitimately pursue a cause for public good.

In essence, I will advocate that no person who has been unable to create, nurture and grow a private enterprise;one who has been unable to achieve excellence and success in previous endeavours, with proven impact on the society, should be allowed to represent the people in any capacity. I say this because politics should not be a profession for the hungry and deprived but a vocation just like priesthood. As the priest offers himself, sacrifices personal comfort and luxury to be of service to the people not taking into consideration whether he will be rich or poor, so also should the politician offer himself not for the benefits the office confer on him but for the sake of the people. After all, the politician holds public office in trust for the people.

On the part of the electorate, they must also understand that though the politician holds office in trust for them, such trust does not translate to paying schools fees for children of voters, or paying hospital bills or sharing money among voters. In other words, the electorate should appreciate that the work of a legislator is to make laws for good governance while the executive implements same. If voters do not moderate their monetary expectations from the elected, they will remain victims of bad governance as those who share money to the electorate, must work to recoup. Therefore, whatever an individual gets from an elected representative need not be the yardstick for assessment.

I also believe that our national financials ought to be restructured. The system of government that brings 36 States to the center at the end of every month to share money is not sustainable. Whatever we decide to do with the States; whatever we decide that the federating units shall be called;regions or States, all partners in the federation must have capacity to develop internal resources with which they can develop at their own pace. It really does not make sense for the federal government to fix minimum wage for state where the monthly take home from the federation account is not able to offset the State’s wage bill; neither does it make sense that the sharing of proceeds of Value Added Tax on alcoholic beverages, for instance, shouldhugely benefit State that had outlawed sale and consumption of such beverages. I strongly suggest that States should fix wages that they can pay given resources available to them. That, to my mind, is one reasonable way to solve the problem of unpaid wages and pensions in the States. When we have done that, we will then find greater sense in making the center less attractive by restructuring our resource allocation systems such that the federating units will have more. Doing so will shift development focus to the federating units. The current focus on the federal government is more because everyone perceives it to hold more development funds than the States. A restructured system will make all of us here focus more on what is happening in our States and hold our Governors and State lawmakers more accountable to us than we currently hold the FG.

Such a situation will spur collaboration among the States in pursuance of economic development and integration. For instance, nothing stops the States in the Southeast from collaborating to build railway lines, or monorail, to connect all state capitals in the region and boost economic activities that will drive development of the region. Such collaboration could also extend to the South-South region for mutual benefits. States in other regions could also collaborate to pursue developments that are of mutual benefits to them. In doing this, states are now forced to look back at their diversity to get, integrate backwards and make use, of the best because regions will be in development competition. This is the sort of thing that restructuring will achieve. It is not already happening because our current system of government enthrones a leadership recruitment system that does not allow for the best from our diversity.

Today, we are faced with the challenge of deforestation which has been blamed for the high rate migration of cattle to places where the pasture is green. This movement has created security challenges for our country leading to violent clashes between herders and farmers. But, the solution lies in restructuring both our mindsets and our animal husbandry policies. Ranching is an option that offers us numerous advantages in the value chain. With ranching, a State like Nasarawa can create ranches where about N100m would be made every day from dairy products alone. We are not yet talking of other advantages. If we think this way, we would be able to see the opportunity that ranching offers us for healthier animals, research and development of more nutritious grass, creation of tannery factories, schools for communities that will form around the ranches. This also makes it possible for government to provide some other social services like health, transportation, potable water, veterinary services. We also stand to gain from the development of hygienic butcheries and many more. These are possible if only we restructure our animal husbandry system to embrace better options. I am convinced that the benefits we shall derive from the value chain that ranching creates can only come our way if se restructure our mindsets and belief systems to understand that we no longer live in the dark ages where our parents trekked from Obolo-Afor to Onitsha.

If we take the example of a country like the United States of America, we will see the advantages of restructuring. By unbundling their federation and creating opportunities for their people, the US created a situation where every state has something it is known for, for which it is a proud producer. For instance, if you are talking of the automobile industry in the United States, you look towards Michigan. If you are talking aircraft manufacture, you look towards Florida etc. We can achieve the same in the Southeast with proper planning. We can restructure our systems to create an integrated structure where the Southeast can drive its rapid development from three points –heavy industries in the Nnewi/Onitsha axis, light industries in Aba/Owerri axis and agro-allied hub in Abakaliki axis. These can be linked with dedicated rail-lines and expressways along which shall be estates and business districts. This is something that we can achieve if we agree.

**Projections**

In the Elements of the Philosophy of Right, German Philosopher, George Hegel, argued that the “State is the final culmination of the embodiment of freedom or right”. Hegel states that an individual’s "supreme duty is to be a member of the State". I think Hegel sums up our aspirations. We all want to be members of a state, in this case, Nigeria. But our aspirations are such that we all want to be members of a better State which is managed in the best of professional traditions. I do not think anyone of us here expects a State where there is no corruption; we rather would prefer a State where the good outweighs the corrupt; a State where the systems are functional; a State where public utilities are not luxuries. In this regard, our advance toward the next general elections must take into cognizance the need to restructure our polity and make it work effectively for the people. This is where the people, me and you, who desire to live as members of this State should begin to demand from their political leaders, strong commitment towards restructuring. This should now be the battle the people must undertake to create the sort of society that they desire. We must now demand that from our politicians as condition for being voted. For as Chief John Nnia Nwodo, President of Ohanaeze Ndigbo said during a visit of Southern Leaders to the National Assembly recently, “all the problems we are having in our country emanate from our constitution”. He also argued that “our constitution is not ripe for a diverse people with diverse religion, diverse culture, and diverse ethnicity”. Ladies and gentlemen, Lions and Lionesses, that constitution, ought to be revisited for the appreciation of our national diversity.

In the past, some political parties promised restructuring and even had it in their manifesto. But the fear of the unknown forced them to drop them. However, we cannot continue to live in fear of the unknown. Even the leviathan can, and should, be confronted. Nigerians must henceforth demand, and hold those they elect, accountable for the progress made, or not made, towards restructuring the country in a way that delivers the best services to them.

My fears however is that if we fail to do this, we shall still operate a system where leadership is for the fittest and mightiest. If we allow that to remain, we would gradually walk back into the Hobbesian state of nature where life is “brutish, nasty and short”. None of us want to bequeath such a country to our children. We look forward to handing over a country where, like Hegel said, “citizens are happy even to sacrifice their lives for the state”. This must be a state where their rights are respected and defended and where they fulfill their obligations because they have found love within the borders.

Failure to restructure will mean annihilation. Let us not become beings that live for nothing. Not restructuring will be akin to pressing down a spring. The spring will remain down so long as you stay down with it. If you let your hands slip, it springs up with such a force that may even blind you. If we fail to restructure therefore, we may have inadvertently worked for the eclipse of Nigeria by the next millennium. Like they say, a stitch in time saves nine.

**Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Lions and Lionesses, I am sorry for keeping you on your seats this long. I appreciate your patience. Like I said at the beginning, I am not a professor or a lecturer. I am just a businessman who sees in politics an opportunity to share my talents for the development of human capital and society. I just hope that the scholars here will be kind in assessing my presentation. I also hope that we shall expand this discourse till we begin to see that there is nothing wrong in re-working an unworkable system because it will make no sense to take our cars to the workshop when they malfunction, or to fix the roofs on our homes when they leak but refuse to fix our governmental system when it fails to achieve the visions of our founding fathers. As we go forward, we should be able to imbibe the dictum of Hegelian philosophy in understanding that as society evolves, everything reaches its antithesis and therefore, gives birth to new thinking. Perhaps, we have reached that point where the diverse people of this country must stand as one to rescue their country and make it work.

Making Nigeria work in this regard includes also restructuring our mindsets and respect for the diverse ethnicities in the federation; and appreciation of their religious and cultural differences. In making such appreciations, we find the need to unbundle and free ourselves to achieve greatness. After all, we all want Nigeria to be greater.

Thank you for listening.

Obiora Okonkwo Ph.D

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**Brief On Dr. Okonkwo**

Obiora Okonkwo holds a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Political Science, with distinction, from the Russian Academy of Science, Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Moscow. He earned a Master of Science Degree in Economics, also with distinction, from the Russian Peoples Friendship University in Moscow. He made first class in economics from the Russian Peoples Friendship University in Moscow.

His thesis on *The Role of Nigeria Civil Society in Transition to Civil Rule* earned him his doctorate in 1999 and became a reference study at the Russian Academy of Science, Institute of World Economy and International Relations. His Master’s Degree thesis was on *Corporate Strategic Planning and Methods*. It was published in Moscow in 1994. He published *Engaging the Nigerian Diaspora for National Development* in New York, USA in 2005, with another work titled *Turning the Nigerian Brain Drain into Brain Gain*, which was published in Accra, Ghana in 2007. In 2013, he published yet another work titled *Citizen Election and Expectation: The Role of Religious Groups in Politics.*

An entrepreneur of repute, Okonkwo is the Chairman of The Dome Entertainment Center, Nigeria’s iconic entertainment and hospitality hub, among several other businesses in Nigeria and overseas with over 600 persons on his employ. He also sits on the board of several other blue chip companies. Okonkwo is widely travelled and honoured including the Knight of the Order of King Leopold, bestowed on him by the Kingdom of Belgium, *Ugegbe* Igbo, *DikeoraIdemili* and *Inwele Ogidi Inwele* amongst others.