

# Ethnic and cultural diversity in Nigeria: A panacea for national development or decapitation?

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**ABSTRACT:** Divisive tendencies are not uncommon in many heterogeneous societies. While the factors responsible for the tendencies may be as diverse as they can be, one common denominator is that if such tendencies are not well managed, they may produce unintended consequences for any society, which in most cases lingers beyond imagination. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state with diverse cultural practices and affiliations. The dichotomous leaning of these elements of ethnicity and culture have the dual capabilities to enhance society's well-being or cause irreparable damage to the entity. Whichever outcome becomes mainly prevalent depends on how well-managed these issues are. Having witnessed too many unpalatable consequences elicited by the dual concepts of ethnicity and culture, this research sought to explore the possibility of attaining other outcomes that may not have negative consequences. This qualitative research is anchored on interviews with scholars across purposely selected academic institutions to elicit perspectives to determine if something can be done to tame the tide of many untoward incidences that have plagued Nigeria due to its diverse ethnicity and cultural pluralities. The outcome of the study is indicative that the outcomes of these dual phenomena can be rechannelled to produce desirable significance by deliberately institutionalizing some pillars that can become the backbone of society. These pillars or institutions will harness the upsides of ethnicity and culture by creating alignment capable of producing synergetic outcomes for the betterment of society. Neglecting such pillars will only mean we continue on the ignominious paths.

**Keywords:** Cultural, diversity, ethnicity, Nigeria, society, development.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a typical example of countries desperately searching for solutions to its ethnic and cultural diversity. It is a multi-colored political entity, multi-religious, multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual, than most African countries. This diversity is a significant factor in the country's political and economic realities. In earlier discussions on the subject, it is advocated that it can be managed (Adediran *et al.*, 2021). Nigeria is said to have over 250 ethnic groups. Ojukwu and Onifade (2010) remarked that ethnic groups in Nigeria connect 400 languages of the Niger-Congo, Nilo -Sahara and Afro - Asiatic Phyla. There are over 500 dialects situated in Nigeria alone. Nigeria, the country with the highest ethnic

and cultural diversity in Africa, has national political and economic development among its major challenges, for which it seeks solutions. It is a country that has typical characteristics of the nature of African issues that bedevilled it.

Though managing ethnic and cultural diversity for political and economic development in Africa is a dilemma (Oluwadele, 2022) that concerns scholars in the continent; however, there are limited studies that interrogated the area (Edewor *et al.*, 2014) for a possible and working strategy. Hitherto, Africa's economic and political development is a concern not only for the continent's leaders and its people but also an issue that affects other

continents such as Europe, Asia, and North America. For instance, ethnic, cultural, political, economic, and religious conflicts in Africa affect Europe as we see the immigration crisis and terrorism in European nations caused by depressed Africans crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Nigeria has its lion's share of ethnic and cultural diversity problems that seems to defer solution. Furthermore, if these problems are not managed, the quest for political and economic development in the country will always be frustrated by ethnic and cultural jingoism. Therefore, this study proposes to investigate how Africa can manage its ethnic and cultural diversity for effective political and economic development through the prism of Nigeria as a case study. What are the things that Nigerians should do to manage ethnic and cultural diversity for national identity and development?

### Conceptual clarifications

The concept of ethnicity, highly researched by scholars, is deeply related to the universal practice of alienation and identity branding, whereas branding has always characterized both intra-global and intra-national relations, and where also, opportunities, rights, and privileges are functions of who you are and where you are from as separated from others. According to Osaghae (1995) (as cited by Edewor *et al.*, 2014, p.2), ethnicity is "the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation".

In his study, Irobi (2014) traced the origin of ethnicity as an attempt to classify people not according to their current nationality but according to commonalities in their cultural and social background. Yosuf (2016) sees an Ethnic group as "a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language". Ukpo (1977) corroborates Thomson's position as he calls an "ethnic group" a "group of people having a common language and cultural values". Ambe-Uva, (2010) perceptive work observed that ethnicity is the deliberate and conscious tracing of one's identity to a particular ethnic group and allowing such feeling to determine the way one relates with people and things; ethnicity creates the brackets of 'we' 'us' 'they' 'ours,' 'theirs' feeling. Ethnicity makes it difficult for different ethnic groups to agree on issues because individuals usually look at anything from the prism of their idiosyncrasy or culture.

There is a unified understanding of culture around the globe, unlike globalization. Culture is seen as a way of life. Fatile and Adejuwon (2013) noted that culture is the unifying force in the diverse Nigerian society. This may be true as Sá Lúcia and Aixel's (2013) definition of culture considers the unification of Africa and Nigerian society. They observe that culture constitutes "the totality of people's way of life, including the ways they live, eat,

dress, traditional norms, the way they are born, the way they bury the dead' and the fabric for social interaction (Sá Lúcia and Aixel, 2013). Culture is the identity of individuals and groups that constitute a given society. This is to say that each society ought to have its own distinct cultural identity.

Daramola (2013) noted that cultural diversity presupposes a society of various ethnic, linguistic, social, customs, and religious differences. It demands a positive approach to tolerance. Such ethnic diversity obliges recognition, tolerance, and respect of the modes of behaviour and customs of each ethnic group. Cultural diversity poses a major challenge to nation-building. Nation-building implies constructing or structuring a national identity using the state's power. Nation-building aims to unify people within the state to remain politically stable and viable through fostering social harmony, economic growth, military conscription, and national content mass schooling (Dunmoye, 2012).

As UNECA (2011) Reported, many of the primordial indicators or symbols of a given identity group overlap with those of other groups, as linguistic and religious communities often extend far beyond the kinship or ethnic entity. Race, religion, ethnicity, kinship, and clan identities also do not necessarily constitute homogeneous groups since such groups may practice different religions, operate under different modes of production with different institutional systems, and belong to different social classes (UNECA, 2011). However, ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious identities are not confined to the jurisdiction of a given state. For example, the Fulani people are spread over some 19 countries from North Africa to Sub-Saharan areas; the Hausa are found in five countries (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Ghana, and Central African Republic); the Luo live in Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, while the Somalis are fragmented into four of the Greater Horn countries.

### The farmers/herders conflict as ethno-cultural fallout in Nigeria

The problem of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria has been a challenge to all and sundry. Conflicts always cause many distractions. Communities have been ravaged, farm resources destroyed, cattle rustling and killing, human lives destroyed, and strong enmity ensued among the affected individuals and communities. Undoubtedly, this is a serious challenge to the development of such communities. To corroborate the above assertion, Abugu and Onuba (2015) observed that herders' and farmers' conflicts had destroyed many resources, affecting the Nigerian economy. They capture the scenario this way by saying the conflicts undermine the potentials of the Nigerian nation, occasioned chiefly by climate change resulting from the depletion of natural and material resources.

Development reverse will take effect when conflicts

degenerate to the level of life and property destruction. Farmers' herders' conflict in Nigeria has implications for rural development, no doubt; thus, Adisa (2012) said that the herders-farmers conflict hinders the economic, social, political, and psychological lives of rural dwellers in Nigeria. Most of the food eaten in our cities is produced in the rural areas. When these rural farms are used as cattle food sources, the rural community and the urban centers will be affected. Furthermore, farmer-herders conflict has remained Nigeria's most preponderant resource-use conflict (Adisa, 2012).

The cause of these conflicts is not far from the fact that farmers and herders compete to utilize arable agricultural areas. The changing climatic condition worsens the case. Abugu and Onuba (2015) noted that between 2000 and 2015, conflicts and confrontations were reported between the Fulanis and the indigenes of the areas they migrated to in search of grazing land lacking in some parts of the North also, that the mass media is inundated with reported cases of clashes between the Fulani's from the North and the inhabitants of the Plateau, Kogi and Benue in the middle belt region of the country and some parts of the Eastern region like Enugu and the Western region Ekiti and Oyo.

The issue of resource control is the focus of the conflicts between herders-farmers. Emphasizing this, Marietu and Olarewaju (2009) opined that conflicts are most responsible for the unsustainable utilization of land and water resources as the trampling by the hooves of herds of cattle compacts the soil of farmland, destroying farm crops by the herders, places restraint on effective utilization of arable farmland among other destruction of available resources.

That is, it has been understood that these conflicts have their roots in the land tenure system; settlers and indigenes contest over land and misplaced development strategies of the government (Marietu and Olarewaju, 2009). Adisa (2012), citing Haan (2002), noted that 'destruction of crops by cattle and other property like irrigation equipment and infrastructure by the pastoralists themselves are the main direct causes for conflicts cited by the farmers, whereas burning of rangelands and farmlands and blockage of stock routes and water points by crop encroachment are important to direct reasons cited by the pastoralists'.

Ingawa *et al.* (1999), cited in Adisa (2012), reported that the key underlying causes of herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria are: changing resource access rights, whereby the individual tenure-ship of arable farmers is obstructing traditional access rights to communal grazing and water resources. This is particularly severe on the traditional trek routes, which become favourite cropping sites because of their better soil fertility resulting from the concentration of animal manure from the trekking herds in these areas.

Within the Fadama areas, this is exacerbated by the fragmented nature of the crop plots, which makes prevention of animals straying in the crop plots difficult; Inadequacy of grazing resources, as increasing crop

cultivation (and increasing commercialization of the crop-residues) and poor management of the existing grazing reserves have resulted in a significant reduction in available livestock feed resources, in particular in the Northern States. Moreover, the high-value crops introduced by NFD (tomatoes and onions) produce almost no crop residues for livestock feeding.

Finally, the regulation that twenty percent of the Fadama would need to be set aside for grazing (National Agricultural Policy, 1988) has not been adhered to; and decline in internal discipline and social cohesion, as the adherence to the traditional rules regarding grazing periods, and the authority of the traditional rulers is breaking down. This is exacerbated by increased rent-seeking of the formal and traditional authorities in managing resource access.

Adisa (2012, p.102) noted that "whatever the causes of farmers-herders conflicts are, it is evident that the conflicts have been of great negative effects". These range from economic effects (such as loss of income/resources/yield) to physical (such as home/farm destruction, bodily injury or death of family member) and socio-psychological effects such as emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction". Instead of the communities experiencing development due to their economic activities, the conflicts are causing underdevelopment. So, the conflict between communities and herders is a bane to the development aspiration of Nigeria.

### **Effect of ethnic and cultural differences on economic development**

The submission of Fatile and Adejuwon (2013) is that ethnic diversity has been an obstacle to Africa's overall political and economic development. He stressed further that ethnicity is the most definitive cause of the social crisis, injustice, inequality, religio-political instability, fears, and tension across the polity. Be that as it may, the poser is that if the feeling of national identity is threatened by cultural diversity, what can a nation-state like Nigeria do? This "national question" dominated Nigerian politics and literature even before independence in 1960.

How successive Nigerian political leaders can manage the ethnic and cultural diversity for national integration for economic and national development (Edewor *et al.*, 2014, p.1) is a serious bone of contention in the country. As Adelabu (2015) documented, other important identity markers are largely neglected in the literature: modes of production and institutional systems of governance. The modes of production that prevail in the African continent range from fairly advanced capitalism, symbolized by modern banking systems and stock markets, to subsistence peasantry and pastoral systems (Edewor *et al.*, 2014, p.1).

Pastoral communities in rural areas and business communities in urban areas, no doubt, represent different

identities with different institutional systems and cultural values even when they belong to the same ethnic or religious groups (Onwumah, 2014). Such fragmentation of the modes of production, like ethnic and religious diversity, creates different economic, political, and cultural spaces within countries and ethnic and religious identities. The diversity of modes of production also perpetuates diverse institutional systems. Institutional fragmentation manifests in the adherence of rural populations, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the population in most African countries, primarily to traditional (informal) institutions (UNECA, 2011), such as customary law of land ownership and conflict resolution practices. The post-colonial state, by contrast, operates based on modern (formal) institutions of governance, which are primarily imported and often are at odds with African traditional cultural values and socioeconomic realities.

However, in recent times, Africa, once branded as the "Dark Continent," is now considered the fastest-growing continent in the world (World Bank Report, 2016). In a world severely hit by the global crisis, Africa has remained resilient and shown tremendous promise for improvement. Though some challenges face the continent, macroeconomic indications show that Africa is full of opportunities (Odo, 2015).

The early 1960s was a fresh start for Africa as some countries gained political freedom from colonial rule. This saw the people of Africa take charge of their economy to provide good governance and manage resources efficiently for growth. All African nations have been pursuing economic growth to increase the capacity to produce goods and services, which will positively impact national income and improve employment, resulting in higher living standards.

The average real growth rate in the world for the past 53 years (1962-2014) stood around 3.8, while Africa's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rate was recorded as 3.9 for the same year period (World Economics: Global Growth tracker, 2016). Out of about 18 nations in West Africa, about 8 (Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia) grew at a growth rate above 5% in 2013. Except for Uganda, all the other East African nations grew above 4.5% in 2013, with Tanzania's economy growing exceptionally at 7.2% (World Bank, 2016). The economic growth story was different in the Northern zone of Africa in 2013 due to the political instability in most Arab nations. Morocco was the only growth outlet of about 4.7%; the other countries in North Africa recorded 2-3% growth in 2013. South Africa, Africa's most industrialized country, recorded economic growth of about 2.21%, while Botswana led the sub-region in terms of growth rate with about 9.3% in 2013 (World Bank, 2016).

It is pretty confident that African states are gradually embracing democratic governance even as it is primarily seen to be improving its economic growth on the global stage (Sá Lúcia and Aixela, 2013). However, Adetiba and Rahim (2012) found that much still needs to be done for

Africa's political and economic development to be at par with its counterpart in Asia.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In answering the research question of what Nigerians should do to manage ethnic and cultural diversity for national identity and development, the research method used interviews. The study population comprised experts from the University of Abuja and Ahmadu Bello University. Thus, the researcher decided to sample only the academia in history, political science, economics, and international relations departments. It is believed that they have valuable information regarding the subject of study. The available population for this study is twenty-five (25). Then, the researcher decided on a date and mode of the interview (phone and online interviews), thus employing convenience and snowball sampling techniques. For this study, experts in academia were interviewed using unstructured questions to elicit reliable facts. This researcher conducted in-person phone and online interviews from the university campus, at local cafes, and at participants' convenience. For phone interviews, the researcher arranged a specific time for the interview. Before recording the interview, the interviewer obtained permission from the interviewee to ensure confidentiality.

For the sample size, Neuman (2007) recommends that between 16 and 20 informants are ideal for in-depth interviews. Hence, 25 constituted the sample size for this study. The data analysis method involves audio-recording all interviews with permission from the interviewees. The interviews were transcribed for analysis. The interviews were transcribed and coded into themes using the thematic approach. This approach provided answers to the research questions raised by the researcher.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are presented under the following headings; factors encouraging cultural and ethnic diversity among Nigerians and ways to manage cultural and ethnic diversity in Nigeria.

### Factors encouraging cultural and ethnic diversity among Nigerians

In Nigeria, cultural and ethnic diversity is influenced by distinctive dynamics. Such factors are present within the sociocultural, political, and economic discourse. In this study, language barrier, partisan politics, marginalization, economic deprivation, religious bigotry, indigenization policy, and illiteracy as important factors as they impact the cultural and ethnic division Nigerians are battling.

### ***Language barrier***

In Africa, the multiplicity of spoken languages in social, political, or economic spheres has been a significant challenge that fosters ethnic and cultural division, as informants all attested. A Professor of History noted that "the intrusion of foreign languages such as English, French, Arabic, German or Portuguese have awakened the consciousness of diversity in African languages without a common identified language as a symbol of common African identity does a humongous harm to the development of Africa as a continent, socially, economically and politically." He noted that Nigeria is a typical example of African nations with multi-ethnic groups, which have been a severe contention to national unity

For example, English language interfered with indigenous languages of the Nigerian people not for national harmony but for the protection of the economic interest of the colonizers, the multinational co-operations and other few groups. Since the naming of Nigeria was done without any indigenous input in itself is a sign of marginalization of the indigenous languages. This ugly situation attracts dire implications as shown in Ndhlovu's (2008, p.143) assertion: ...when languages are marginalized and remain invisible in the development matrix, it is the accumulated wisdoms that die - wisdoms about politics, about philosophy, about ideology, about living on the planet earth and successfully doing so. Every ethnolinguistic polity is unique and has a different history from any other. How they interacted with the environment makes each African community a unique people with a unique language, a unique wisdom, a unique ideas and unique knowledge systems, which have the capacity to transform the socio-economic fortunes of the world for the better.

### ***Partisan politics***

A doctorate attests that "Nigeria is a country of over 300 ethnic groups with people of diverse sociocultural affiliations which have a strong bearing in its political-economic reality". Postgraduates know that "virtually every decision taken in Nigeria is seen from the prism of the ethno-cultural divide. As such, in Nigeria, partisan democracy makes one Informant observe that "political decision in Nigeria is faced with challenges centered on issues related to ethnicity, pressure from diverse sociocultural groups, government, and corruption". One informant in the humanities discipline noted that the press is always inclined toward the politics of the day. "Ethnicity has bedevilled the Nigerian political sphere". "Politicians are tribally, regionally and religious or sectional bias in their reports of national issues".

Osaghae (2001) wrote that: ...the pervasiveness of ethnic politics in the country is taken to be symptomatic of aggravated crisis of legitimacy that has engulfed the state,

and is explained in terms of the proven efficacy of the ethnic strategy, the weakness of alternative identities and political units, the prevailing milieu of lawlessness that has enveloped the country's political landscape, and the inability of the state to act as an effective agency of distributive justice. In essence therefore power struggle is at the heart of ethnicity and ethnic politics in the Nigerian state and instrumentality of its propagation is the platform of the political parties.

### ***Marginalization***

A linguist at the University of Abuja has aptly noted, "Uniting either as a region, ethnic nationality or religious group, the north, east, west and south southerners have adopted this method of seeking redress to perceived injustice", which institutionalized marginalization. Since the return of democratic governance in 1999, the Nigerian state has faced several nation-building challenges arising from separatist agitations, militancy, and ethno-religious conflagrations from several groups within the country. Three informants attributed these acrimonies to perceived marginalization.

An informant, a political scientist, noted that ethnic question has an overbearing influence on the construction of political identity and power in Africa. Also, political ethnicity's influence is so pervasive and overwhelming that despite not being the primary contradiction of society, it has irresistibly become a fundamental contradiction. This has become true of ethnicity regardless of the theoretical prism adopted to understand the ethnic phenomenon as captured by one informant.

Most informants conclude that the Nigerian state's crises are typically associated with problems of class, religion, politics, corruption, ethnicity, tribalism, inadequate education, poor infrastructure, and massive unemployment. The crux now is that citizen alienation is rife nationwide, to the extent that every ethnic jigsaw component of Nigeria feels sufficiently aggrieved, marginalized and, therefore, seeks fairness via restructuring. The deliberate disempowerment of a group of people in a federation politically, socially and militarily, by another group or groups which during the relevant time frame wield power and control the allocation of material and financial resources at the centre of the federation (The Nsukka Analyst, 1994).

### ***Economic deprivation***

All the informants allude to the fact that most Nigerians are poor and lack economic empowerment; as such, resorting to biting ethnic jingoism to whither sympathy. An economist at the University noted that the politicization of ethnicity in multi-ethnic like Nigeria, therefore, has to be understood ultimately in the context of intra-class struggles

for hegemony within a highly fractionalized ruling class, even at the detriment of people experiencing poverty.

Showing her frustration with the Nigerian system, one informant reiterated that "the tendency for political and social actors to draw from the emotional appeal of ethnicity, rather economic divisions makes it part and parcel of the prevailing system of seeking power and authority, and a strategy of attaining material and psychological survival". Being part and parcel of the technology of power of the African ruling elite, ethno-religious identity cannot simply be dismissed as a form of false consciousness in which the ruling elite manipulates the masses for their own narrow political and economic gains, as echoed by three informants (Doctoral student assertion).

### ***Religious bigotry***

Religion has a strong influence on Nigerians. Respondents agreed that religion is a variable that contributes to the country's polarization. Two participants agreed that Christianity and Islam, the country's two major faith, are a decider in ethnicity direction.

The Historian lamented: "To say that Nigeria is not divided along religious, political, economic and social fault-lines is an understatement". These fault lines always resonate when national issues such as national censuses or general elections are done. One participant said that the fault lines are now in the subconscious of Nigeria because ethnicity, religiosity, or partisanship continually defines Nigerian's dealings with one another in politics, education, or economic relations. According to Ugwueye (2009), "Nigeria is a deeply religious country" (p. 258). It is obvious that Nigeria as a nation has three major religions namely: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. Among these three, there has been intolerance which is a product of religious bigotry especially between the adherents of Christianity and adherents of Islam. Churches and mosques have been burnt down in the country.

### ***Poor institutional performance***

The institution saddled with the responsibility of promoting national orientation appears to be docile, with little or no impact made in recent times. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) is the principal institution of government in Nigeria that is charged with the responsibility. "To consistently raise awareness, provide timely and credible feedback; positively change attitudes, values, and behaviours; accurately and adequately inform; and sufficiently mobilize citizens to act in ways that promote peace, harmony; and national development" has not been living to expectation. This has contributed to the country's setback in terms of poor orientation. The entire political, economic and social systems in Africa have been severely

ravaged by the corruption scourge making it the most corrupt continent on planet earth. In some cases in Africa, political rulers have become as rich as or even richer than the entire state they govern through corruption. "Corruption has worsened and weakened institutions, such as the legislative, executive and the judicial institutions where rule of law and adherence to formal rules are not rigorously observed, where political patronage is standard practice, where the independence and professionalism of the public sector has been eroded and where civil society lacks the means to bring public pressure to bear" (Lawal, 2007).

### **Ways to manage cultural and ethnic diversity in Nigeria**

Multi-ethnic states must consider involving every ethnic group in decision-making for political sustainability and effective ethnic development. It is on this premised that this study seeks to find ways in which cultural and ethnic diversity in Nigeria can be managed. Participants were able to state various ways the country can manage its multi-diversity for the benefit of all citizens. These measures are: protecting cultural rights, including religious and language rights of minorities; promotion of inclusive narratives and socialization mechanisms; the institutionalization of federal character; institutionalization of democratic tenets, justice, and fairness in formal and informal institutions; establishment of the inter-religious council, the establishment of the inter-ethnic council, respect and tolerance of cultural differences, inter-governmental organizations and develop and adopt a legal framework for the role of traditional and religious authorities.

### ***Protecting the cultural, religious, and language rights of minorities***

In a country of over 200 ethnic groups and numerous religious faiths, it is common to see all these groups advocating for true representation. This reality played out among the participants in this study as virtually all respondents showed their ethnic sentiment while responding to the question. On this premised, a doctorate participant noted that cultural, ethnic, and language recognition narratives play a major role in poisoning or mending identity relations among heterogeneous people. A professor of international studies reiterates that "it is important Nigerian governments use their educational systems and mass media to promote minorities' right inclusive narratives". That "such effort, though, needs to be accompanied by real commitment and effort on the part of governments to address grievances of both the majorities and the minorities". He suggested that "in the absence of concrete effort, however, narratives would

likely be a source of cynicism". Therefore, protecting minorities' culture, religion, and language for them to surrender their loyalty to the state, according to one participant, can go a long way in managing cultural and ethnic diversity in any multicultural society.

The Professor of Political Science echoed that minority groups in Nigeria have long been accusing "the three major ethnic groups: Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba, of marginalization and negligence despite their economic contributions". For instance, "Niger Delta is a region with over forty (40) ethnic groups determine Nigeria's earnings from the oil sector to national revenue which stood at 89.1% as of 2008. In 2014, the National Bureau of Statistics also reported that the oil and gas sector contribution in the third quarter of 2015 amounted to ₦1.944 trillion. These positive economic improvements are made possible by huge oil and gas deposits in the region. The paradox is that marginalization and negligence by successive governments have been attributed to the recent militancy and kidnapping in the zone".

#### ***Promotion of inclusive narratives and socialization mechanisms***

"A multicultural society such as Nigeria needs all-inclusive narratives which play a major role in poisoning or mending identity relations among different groups". This was the position of the Humanities scholar interviewed in this study. Also, a young participant pointed out that "it is important that governments use their educational systems and mass media to promote inclusive narratives". Advocating that such effort, however, needs to be accompanied by real commitment and effort on the part of governments and all stakeholders to address grievances. However, narratives would likely be a source of suspicion without substantial effort".

#### ***Institutionalization of federal character***

The Nigerian principles of Federal Character were instituted and enshrined in the 1999 constitution to ensure social harmony among tribal and ethnic groups, states, and geopolitical zones. According to the Political scientist, this principle existed in the 1979 constitution with a problem lack of application in the authority's decisions. The former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, once said that merit should not be sacrificed on the altar of federal character principles. The Doctorate participant advised that "operations of federal character principles should be fair enough to ensure equity and fair play, merit and competence, without losing the real essence of establishing the principle". Most respondents agreed that federal character is an instrument that, if applied judiciously, will help manage ethnic and cultural differences in Nigeria".

#### ***Institutionalization of democratic tenets***

Most study participants acknowledged that developing democratic institutions is essential for cultural, ethnic, and diversity management. The professor of international studies attested that African countries that recorded progress in democratizing their political systems, such as South Africa, Ghana, Botswana, Benin, and Nigeria, have made notable progress in diversity management.

The Linguistic scholar recommends that liberal democracy is essential for ethnic and cultural diversity management given Africa's low levels of nation\state-building and the fragmentation of institutional systems makes it mandatory for building democratic institutions in the continent. One participant posits that adopting consensus-based decision-making systems on crucial issues guarantees economic diversification and the development of civil society and creates social identities, which build bridges among primordial identities, political parties in much of Nigeria are likely to be expressions of cultural, ethnic, or religious identities".

#### ***Justice and fairness in formal and informal institutions***

Thus, the ethnic, religious, and communal groups that feel marginalized by the major ethnic groups are forced to adopt constitutional and extra-constitutional means to challenge the hegemony of the major ethnic groups. The leading cause of violent identity conflict in Nigeria is that most minority groups have remained permanent minorities. In contrast, the majority groups are the permanent majority, a trend that has serious implications for inter-ethnic and religious relations among the diverse ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria. In this way, the incentives for cooperation, consensus, and compromise have been undermined, posing an enormous challenge for peace-building as diverse ethnic groups are forced to co-exist in an environment of mutual mistrust, apathy, and suspicion "(Verbal conversation by three participants).

#### ***Establishment of an inter-religious council***

The sensitive nature of religion in Nigeria makes the country experience numerous religious-motivated crises over time. As a participant put it, "Religious intolerance has caused the country many harms". To foster "understanding among different religious groups, stakeholders have advocated for inter-religious council".

The Historian recalled that "The Plateau State that experienced the incessant religious crisis in recent time established an Inter-religious Council in 2008 to improve trust and communications between the two main religious groups in the state". "I could remember that its terms of reference charge the council with the responsibility of

fostering and promoting dialogue aimed at addressing the grievances of various sectors of society. On the religious front, appreciable progress was made in engaging religious and community leaders" (Professor of History reflections).

### **Establishment of an inter-ethnic council**

About four Participants have seen the need for the government and concerned stakeholders to establish an inter-ethnic council to provide platforms that different ethnic groups will use to foster communication and promote dialogue".

### **Conclusion**

In Nigeria, cultural and ethnic diversity is influenced by distinctive dynamics. Such factors are present within the sociocultural, political, and economic discourse. The language barrier, partisan politics, marginalization, economic deprivation, religious bigotry, the campaign of calumny, poverty, indigenization policy, and illiteracy are considerable factors that impact cultural and ethnic division. The nation-building task for national development can be daunting, especially in deeply polarized countries along ethnic and religious fault lines. This study has demonstrated that ethnic and religious identities do not ferment or produce violent conflicts. Instead, beneath conflicts, often always regarded as ethno-religious, are questions of disproportionate access to power, scarce resources, and opportunities. Moreover, the issues that generate the fiercest contestations are considered fundamental to the survival and reproduction of the state, over which competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, do-or-die approaches. These include control of state power, resource allocation, and land.

Multi-ethnic states need to think of involving every ethnic group in the decision-making process for political sustainability as well as effective ethnic development. It is on this premise that this study seeks to find ways in which cultural and ethnic diversity in Nigeria can be managed. This study found various ways the country can manage its multi-diversity for the benefit of all citizens. These measures are: protecting cultural rights, including religious and language rights of minorities; promotion of inclusive narratives and socialization mechanisms; the institutionalization of federal character; institutionalization of democratic tenets, justice, and fairness in formal and informal institutions; localizing and strengthening the structures of the inter-religious council, the establishment of the inter-ethnic council, strengthening the operation of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), respect and tolerance of cultural differences, localization of government policies through the use of indigenous languages to aid understanding and promote inclusion, inter-governmental organizations and develop and adopt a

legal framework for the role of traditional and religious authorities.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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