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**Confronting the Challenges Facing the Nigerian
Nation State: Using Sports as Agent of Unification**

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Abstract

This paper explains the concept of nation-state and sports. It critically examines some of the challenges characterizing Nigerian nation state such as ethnicity, corruption, politics of godfatherisms, tribalism, language differences, and religious crises among others. It emphasizes the use of sports for creating of friendship across different tribal groupings and inculcation of appropriate values such as patriotism, honesty, discipline love which help in achievement and national ideals and goals. The paper concludes that the state and federal government investment in sports will not only comment national unity but will also reduce social vices such as drug abuse, armed robbery, trafficking in human persons etc.

Introduction

The Nigerian nation state has been a chequered one. It has not

been so rosy for the country since the pre-independence and post independence of its existence. The country has faced series of challenges that even threatened its unity. The country has not been opportune to have good leaders; leadership remains one of the problems militating against the unity of the diverse entity that make up Nigeria. Politics of ostracism, godfatherism and ethnicity are extolled at the detriment of politics of ideology. The electoral process favours selection instead of election and where the educational industry is bereft of active and genuine raw materials, one cannot be worried and skeptical about the effects of these on our dear nation, Nigeria. With the above scenarios, one cannot but conclude that the Nigerian project of nation state may only be a mirage. Our founding fathers had the vision of building a nation state where discipline, patriotism and altruism will reign despite her differences in tribes, language and creeds.

However, government investment in sports will no doubt help in confronting the challenges characterizing the Nigerian nation-state; sports promote inter-tribal marriages which create friendship and unity in diversity. Sports also promote learning of other languages. Sports festivals enable people to learn and speak other languages which further comment social cohesion and unity of the country.

Conceptual Framework

Nation-State

A nation state is commonly called a state or country.

According to Okafor (2013), a nation state occurs when once a diverse people within a geographical territory learn to identify with one another. A nation state is also created when a nation or group of nations wish to govern itself and therefore join together as one entity. The nation state is represented by many symbols such as flags, national anthems or animals (eagles, bears, dragons). These are objects of patriotic loyalty, and most people view it as the highest form of political authority.

Sports

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary 7th edition, sports are activities you do for pleasure and that need physical effort and skill, usually done in a special area and according to fixed rules. Sports include wrestling, footballing, boxing, swimming etc.

Challenges Characterizing Nigerian Nation-State

The following are some of the challenges characterizing Nigerian Nation-state:

(i) Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different groups who have identifiable boundaries, language and culture. Ethnicity as a force in Nigeria politics originated from the colonial rule policies of the British, who through their divide and rule policy, encouraged the use of different applications of colonial policies on the traditional institutions and structures of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The dangers inherent in these segregation policies made various ethnic groups to show *their* primary loyalties more to their ethnic/kinship groups than to the centre of nation as a whole. According to Okafor (2013), ethnicity is one of the factors that have caused almost serious embarrassment to Nigeria nation state. all issues in Nigeria are based on ethnic consideration. For instance, the formation of political parties in Nigeria has been ethnically motivated, thus we had political parties like Northern People Congress (NPC), Lagos Youth Movement, Action Group (Ae), for the Yoruba, Northern Element Progressive Union etc. It has been rare, except from small political elites for Nigerians to think of themselves first and foremost and Nigerians, rather than as Hausa, Yoruba, Tiv, Igbo and so forth.

(ii) Language Variation

The multiplicity of languages and dialects spoken all over the country also militate against Nigeria- nation state. Language in

other nations is used as a tool for unity, but in Nigeria, it is the basis for discrimination, segregation, separation and deprivation. The elites must however accept the blame as stated by Nnoli (1978) for creating separative tendencies in the masses they were supposed to integrate into a united country, it was their parallel incitements that led to the communal associations of language groups like the Egba Omo Oduduwa (1948), Ibibis welfare union (1928), Igbo state union (1963) and Jamiyyer Mutanem Arewa (1957). These tribal and linguistic associations worked towards disintegration rather than build the Nigerian nation state.

(iii) **Religious Fundamentalism and Fanaticism**

Religious fundamentalism particularly among some Islamic sectarian groups has contributed to violent religious uprising in some parts of the country, especially in some Northern states. Towards Mohammed Maitasiene and his sectarian group unleashed havoc on Kano and its inhabitants. He and his disciples appeared to have attacked both Muslims and non Muslims who did not share their beliefs. Okwueze (1995), observed that Nigeria IS one of the countries where religion has wrecked much havoc on advancement, unity and prosperity of her citizens and the development of the nation as a whole. He noted that between 1980 and 1995, not less than fourteen convulsive religious conflicts have occurred in the country. In each of these religious conflicts, many lives and property were lost.

(iv) **Corruption**

One of the greatest threats to Nigerian nation state is the problem of corruption. As a social vice, it has spread so much in Nigerian society that many people especially scholars feel that corruption is synonymous with Nigeria. Corruption has become so widespread that it is clearly seen in different forms at all facet of the society, village, community, local government, state as well as the federal government. In the government sector, corruption ranges from the wrong use of government property, the abuse of public office for private gains, diversion of public funds to private use as well as

receiving bribes from contractors before contracts are awarded. Okafor (2013) observed that the period since independence has witnessed political and economic backwardness as a result of corruption among public officials in alliance with individuals from the private sector. Huge amount of scarce resources earmarked for development projects are siphoned and converted to private use. Contracts are unilaterally awarded by certain officials in the government with little or no regards for the necessity of such projects. These while elephant projects do a lot of harm to the economic life of a nation.

According to Njoku (2005), corrupt charges was the reason why the former minister of education, Professor Febian Osuji was disgraced out of office, making nonsense of the air of arrogance which he exuded as a minister of education for nearly two years before his dismissal.

(v) **Structural Imbalance**

This has been a sorrowful state created by the colonial masters for political and economic manipulation and exploitation of the country's resources. The departing colonial masters had created an excessively unstable and unbalanced political structure whereby the Northern region is twice as big as the east and west put together. Regional boundaries were arbitrarily drawn and in some cases not made to correspond with existing ethnic boundaries. A case in point is the Yoruba who were so divided that some live in Benin Republic. Till date, this structural imbalance has proved difficult to correct and is responsible for incessant boundary clashes and politics of ethnic rivalry in the country.

(vi) **Political Violence and Instability**

In Nigeria, transition from one civilian government to another IS often characterized by violence owing to many factors, chief among them is rigging. **It** is an undeniably sad commentary to observe that in our checkered political history, one practice which we seem to have perfected is the art of rigging elections. We either

rig our way to power or rig to retain powers. Elections are often marred by violence either because losers see it as a way of pretesting their loss, or because 'winners' see it as the only means through which they could seal their 'victory'. Rigging was the major factor that accounted for the (landslide or moonslide) victories of 1983 elections which led to the collapse of the second republic.

The Effects of Challenges Confronting Nigeria's Nations State

The challenges of corrupt practices in public and private sectors here created a bad image for Nigeria before the international community. The external image of the country and foreign investments in Nigeria are seriously undermined. Social and economic progress is also undermined in an atmosphere of insecurity and breakdown of law and order caused by frequent religious related conflicts especially in the Northern parts of Nigeria.

The poverty level has also increased. The loss of lives and property as a result of ethnic and religious conflicts has rendered many families homeless and jobless. This no doubt had increased the crime rate in the society. Armed robbery, kidnapping, child trafficking among other crimes have continued to threatening the existence of Nigerian society (Njoku 2005).

Another effect of challenges confronting Nigeria includes; insecurity, misrule, instability, bribery and corruption, drug abuse and other problems in the society. This is followed by hatred, rancor and bitterness nursed by members of the various ethnic groups against each other.

Confronting the challenges characterizing Nigerian Nation-State: Using Sports as Agents of Unification

Sports promote learning of diverse languages which further promotes cohesiveness in the country. Organizing sports festivals

at the state or national level enable people to learn and speak other Nigerian languages which has implication of unifying the diverse entity that makes up Nigerian- nation state. Language as a cohesive instrument influences almost every facet of group behaviour such as conformity, social influence, solidarity, motivation, satisfaction, performance and interaction.

Sports also promote inter-tribal marriages which creates friendship and unity among different religious and ethnic groupings in the country. Many great sports men and women have married outside their tribal origins, and this has helped greatly in cementing Nigeria's national unity.

Through sporting activities in the school, students are socialized to be effective citizens. Sports inculcate desired attitudes, values, knowledge and skills which will lead to the creation of a disciplined citizenry in Nigeria. A disciplined citizen will identify with those ingredients that unify a country such as patriotism, nationalism, self-reliance, loyalty and honesty, dedication to duty, among others. **It** will not be difficult to mobilize, manipulate, train or develop such citizens towards helping to achieve national goals and ideals.

Conclusion

Nigeria - nation state has been a chequered one. The country has face series of challenges that have threatened its unity. For at no time in the history of this country, since the outbreak of the civil war in 1967, has the security of lives and properties, and the stability of the nation been threatened as we have it now. There are also massive corruption in both private and public sectors of the economy, dilapidation of public infrastructure including facilities for education and health care, massive unemployment, insurgency and terrorism, which have made many parts of the country unsafe. However, the federal and state governments investments in sports will no doubt help in confronting these challenges characterizing Nigerian nation state, Sports inculcates

love, patriotism, co-operation and loyalty. Apart from promoting inter-tribal marriage and friendship across tribal groupings, it reduces social problems such as drug abuse, unemployment, poverty, armed robbery and other social vices.

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