Co-Existence In Nigerian Society: Implication For Counselling

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ABSTRACT
Nigeria as a multi-ethnic nation is divided along language, culture and religious lines, and this is the greatest threat to her peaceful co-existence. Nigerian governments, past and present have made serious efforts by propagating laudable programmes and policies geared towards our co-existence. This paper in line with this development takes a look at some conceptual issues, a critical examination, and analysis of the efforts of government in ensuring our coexistence, forces working for and against our co-existence. Suggestions were are made on how Nigeria can achieve national integration through the instrument of counselling. This paper believes that achieving national integration is contingent on proper implementation of counselling programmes geared towards inculcating national consciousness and national unity from the cradle of our education system. The paper concludes that to claim the victory for an integrated Nigeria an urgent step must be taken by government, policy makers/implementers and counsellors to take the centre stage in propagating the gospel of national integration through the development and implementation of programmes geared towards national consciousness and unity beginning from the pre-primary level, for lasting and sustained coexistence.

Keywords: Coexistence, Nigeria, Counselling, National Integration

INTRODUCTION
Nigeria as a country is determined to co-exist as a nation, in spite of the varied tongues, tribes, religions, culture and others. We have the Hausas, Yorubas and the Igbos as the major tribes in Nigeria. Over 250 languages are spoken across the country, and the people in this County finds it difficult to understand each other. In spite of these differences, Nigerians are expected to live together as one. As a people, it is expected of them to identify first with Nigeria as a nation before the ethnic group he/she belongs. In other words Nigerians are expected to be attached to Nigeria before the ethnic group one belongs in order to foster National Integration. National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different ethnic groups and religions and speak different languages, we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. Since independence in Nigeria in 1960, national integration has been a top priority of successive governments in Nigeria. Enegwea & Umoden 1993, Alapiki, 2005, Ekeh and Osaghae, 1989, as cited in Ibaba (2014:5) says, “Possibly, the greatest challenge facing Nigeria today is the threat to national unity, as centrifugal tensions, resource control, self-determination, ethnicity based identity, politics and religious cleavages have enveloped national consciousness”.

It is clear that the outcome of integration policies and programmes in Nigeria have fallen far below expectation, primordial ethnic loyalties are still deep seated amongst Nigerians, (Ibaba, n.d). Edewor, Aluko & Folarin (2014) argued that national integration in the Nigerian context has been an attempt to forge “unity in diversity”, seeking to wish away socio – cultural difference and imposing uniformity in spite of complex cultural diversity. They believe that, this has created more conflict and posed obstacles to unity, peaceful co-existence, progress and stable development. Despite all these differences, Nigeria as a political entity, is governed under the same constitution, we have to co-exist with each other peacefully, respect the culture, language and religion of our fellow Nigerians in other to promote unity in diversity. The unity we are talking about in Nigeria does not mean the kind of oneness that comes from racial and cultural similarity, rather unity in diversity. An important historical event in which this unity was displayed was the freedom movement when all the Nigerians united against the British colonial rule which was actualized on October (1st) first 1960. Our great fathers like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe from the South East, Herbert Macaulay and Chief Obafemi Awolowo from the West, and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Belewa from the North, amongst others. They saw themselves as Nigerian first in spite of the differences in tribe and tongue. This present generation should ensure the oneness of this great nation, by keeping the dream of our founding fathers in having a big, strong and united one Nigeria. This paper explores the use of counselling as a strategy for integration. Integration is a process that is anchored on values, and this can be achieved through counselling.

Conceptual Issues
Duverger as cited in Ojo (2009) defines national integration” as a process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon an order its members regard as equitably harmonious”. Wikipedia (2015) conceives coexistence “as a state of two or more things existing together, usually in a temporal or special sense, with or without mutual interaction”.

Counselling is a universal service for all people, irrespective of race, colour, creed and language. Most often it is misconstrued as a service for schools or children. This belief is erroneous as it is meant for diverse individuals and groups in diverse settings on diverse issues, (Kennedy 2008). Shertzer and Stone as cited in Nwachuku, ( 2007) defines counselling as an intervention process that facilitates meaningful understanding of self and environment and results in the establishment and/or clarification of goals and values for future behaviour. Olusakin (2011) conceives counselling as involving professional activities that utilize interpersonal relationship to enable people develop understanding about themselves, and to make changes in their lives.

Nigeria as a Nation
Nigeria is derived from the word “Niger” which is the name of the river that appears to be the biggest and most important in Nigeria. Nigeria fell under British rule in 1861 with the British occupation of Lagos. Lagos was made a crown colony and was directly administered from London. The Niger Coast protectorate was formed in 1893 and this marked the formation of real government by the British. (Ukegbu, Meziobi, Ajileye, Abdulrahman & Anyaoha, 2010)

In 1914, the northern and southern protectorates were joined together through a process called “Amalgamation” and given the name “Nigeria” by a British Journalist called Flora shaw, who latter became Baron Frederick Lugard’s wife, a British colonial administrator. He latter became the first Governor General. He established the Nigerian council to discuss the affairs of Nigeria. The council was the first body that brought Nigerians from different parts together to discuss the welfare of Nigeria. This council ignited the spirit of oneness among Nigerians (Ukegbu, Meziobi, Ajileye, Abdulrahman, & Anyaoha, 2012).

Thereafter, several constitutions emerged out of the desire for self- determination, thus Nigeria became free from her colonial masters by gaining independence on October, 1st 1960. She became a member of common wealth of nations and had a privilege of joining the United Nations. Nigeria as a self- governing state was faced with the overwhelming task of unifying over 250 ethnic and linguistic groups, ( United States department of country notes: Nigeria, 2015).
It should be noted that before the coming of the British colonial masters there was no entity called Nigeria. Nigeria was a stateless society because every ethnic group was self determined. The Emirs ruled the North, The Oba’s and Alafines the West, The Obi’s the East, the Amanyanaapu’s the Ijaws, the Obongs ruled the Efiks, and Ibibio people, and so on before the emergence of the entity called Nigeria.

Co-existence in a Divided Society
Modern day Nigeria has been the site of numerous kingdoms and tribal states for millennia. Since independence Nigeria has existed as one big indivisible nation referred to as “the giant of Africa”. Nigerian governments past and present have made serious efforts to propagate policies and programmes that are geared towards (our co-existence) national integration. Despite such well-intended and unity-oriented programmes and policies, Nigeria’s unity has continued to be plagued and threatened by embedded socio-cultural, religious, ethnic and political Dichotomies. (Onifade & Imhonopi, 2013). Unless efforts are made to checkmate these divisive tendencies towards national integration, the long expected and loudly proclaimed oneness and indivisibility of Nigeria will remain a utopia.

Ifeanacho & Nwagu (2009) observes that, Nigeria’s efforts at achieving national integration have remained largely unrealistic. In their words, the history of democratization in Africa in general and Nigeria, in particular, has remained the history of national disintegration. Thus the integration crisis facing Nigeria is manifest in the minority question, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, ethnic politics, indigene-settler, dialectic, resource control, youth restiveness and militancy and the clamour for a (sovereign) national conference or conversation about the terms of the nation’s continued unification.

Ojo, (2009) contends that Nigeria is a deeply divided and plural society with a unique problem not experienced by any state in the world past or present. The problem is that of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal force on the central issue of the nation bound in freedom, peace and unity where justice reigns.

Emelonye & Buergenthal (2011) notes that poverty and ineffective governance in Nigeria today have further sharpened ethnic divisions leading to misunderstanding between ethnic and religious groups who see themselves as rivals that must be. Radio Biafra, in the east, Niger Delta militia in the South/South, odua people’s congress from the south west, the Arewa peoples congress in the north etc are all creations of ethnic and religious loyalty. The implication of these hydra headed conflicts is that national integration suffers; there is increasing insecurity of citizens and property in the country, foreign investment is deterred and economic development is stymied. A conclusion that can be made from the foregoing is that national integration is made possible when ethnicities within a political entity achieve integration by consensus, social structure, and function in the society which brings about social order.

One of the greatest challenges to Nigeria’s national integration is the lack of consensus, and consensus can not be reached without dialogue. The ethnicities that make up the modern Nigeria state must come to the round table of negotiation to discuss the future and destiny of the country, how they want to be governed, how resources need to be shared, and many more, (Onifade & Imhonopi (2013). Babawale (1991) postulated that “the presence of unity in Nigeria is artificial” Awolowo as cited by Onifade & Imhonopi, (2013) says that “Nigeria is not a nation, but a mere geographical expression”. Events unfolding in recent times should remind Nigerians that Nigeria should not be under illusion that Nigeria is one and intra-tribal wars here and there, religious killings, political agitations etc. All are pointers that it is not well with Nigeria.

Existing policies towards National Integration in Literature
Bandyopadlyay & Green (2009) in their apt treaties on national integration by Africa and other countries to promote integration have identified the various nation-building policies put in place by governments of these nations, especially upon assuming independence: According to them some of these policies included:

- Changing state names like Gold coast to Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo to Zaire, Dahomey to Benin etc.
- Changing capital cities names and locations, example from Lagos to Abuja as with the case of Nigeria.
- Changing national currencies example from pounds and shillings to Naira and Kobo (case of Nigeria).
- Conscription and national service
- Religious and linguistic homogenization
- Republican and centralization policies
- Establishing national parties and land nationalization among others.

These policies, ranging from the serious to the indecorous, piloted many countries in Africa, including Nigeria in the pursuit of their nation-building agenda. Nigeria is a collection of unwilling and variegated partners, efforts have been put in place starting from the colonial era to create systems, institutions, and programmes of government aimed at promoting national integration (Onifade & Imholoppi, 2013).

The works of Ojo (2009), Bulama (n.d) Akpan, (1990) and Ugoh & Ukpere (2012), cited some of these programmes as follows:

Firstly, the colonial administration in Nigeria in 1954 used the instrumentality of the Lyttleton constitution introduced Federalism into Nigeria as an integrative mechanism. They believed that the colonialists must have been swayed by the opinion that such a system of government was necessary to preserve both integration and stability in a deeply divided society like Nigeria.

Secondly, the creation of states and the land use decree were put in place to strengthen Nigeria’s unity. In order to strengthen the Federal Government, the regions were sacrificed resulting in the creation of 12 states in 1967, the creation of states curtailed the domineering tendencies of the major ethnic groups and secured some measure of autonomy for the minority groups. Again the land use decree on its part vest all lands in a state in the Governor of the state that holds the land in trust for the use and common benefits of all Nigerians. The rational being that the Governor can allocate land to any applicant irrespective of his or her state or origin.

The National Youth Service Corps created by Decree No.24 of May 22, 1973 was conceived as another policy that can help unite the country. Nascent Educated Youths were scattered in different parts of the country other than their places of origin living and serving in some developmental capacities, understand the culture, the language, and general life style of their host communities.

Federal character principle initiated by the government is another nation-building policy. The aim was to achieve the fair and effective representation of the various components of the Federation in the country’s position of power, status and influence (Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012).

The movement of the Federal Capital Territory from Lagos to Abuja was seen as an integration policy of government to further unite Nigerians. As Bulama (n.d) observed, tribal-related problems formed part of the reasons that led to the choice of Abuja as the new Federal Capital Territory. He said the underlying tribal considerations were vividly enunciated in the Report of the committee on the location of the Federal Capital Territory. The report stated inter alia that, there is no doubt that Nigeria is a federation, consisting of a large number of ethnic and language groups with differing culture and traditions. Now Lagos is within an area traditionally belonging to one of the major ethnic groups, namely, the Yorubas … In our view, the circumstances of Nigeria demand that the capital be not situated within a city with strong connection with one of the major ethnic groups but a capital city which will belong to every other Nigerian, where every Nigerian will be rest assured that he has an opportunity to live in parity with every other Nigerian.

Another effort was the introduction of the revenue sharing formula which aimed at addressing the violence taking place in the oil rich delta, Nigeria’s golden goose and was a response to quell the agitation for resource control. Beyond increased revenue allocation the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established to initiate development strides for the region. Akpan (1990) considered the unifying National Policy on Tertiary Education as another factor initiated to foster national integration. Quoting the National policy on Education, Akpan asserted that for universities to serve as effective instruments for cementing national unity amongst others, the following should be done (I) The quality of instruction in Nigerian universities would be improved with a view to further enhancing objectivity and tolerance (II) Admission of students and recruitment of staff into universities and other institutions of higher learning would be on a broad national basis. (iii) And widespread
ignorance among Nigerian groups about each other and about themselves would be remolded by instituting a compulsory first year course in the social organization, customs, culture and history of the nation and its people. The award of degrees is to be contingent upon passing this course. To make the universities an instrument of integration, more needs to be done to address the challenges. Other measures taken by successive governments over the years to meet the yearning for national integration in Nigeria have been,

1. The introduction of the principle of national integration by the 1979 constitution which was a deliberate effort to tackle the problem facing the practice of a true federalism. The constitutional approach to national integration recognizes the diverse and plural nature of the Nigerian society.

The constitution is therefore directed towards combating what has been described as the "parochialism of ignorance that breeds suspicion and distrust among various ethnic groups.

2. Establishment of unity schools run by the federal government tends to provide unity in diversity.

3. Introduction of a uniform local government system in Nigeria is yet another measure.

Oyeyemi (2002) rightly observed that, Nigeria is a multicultural society, a conglomerate of nations with different peoples and culture, a basket of different religions and world views, and a country with the diverse expectations of people. As a recipe, he recommended the need to recognize that none of the ethnic groups big or small shares a uniform dream about Nigeria. This is because the ethnic groups’ worldviews are completely different, such as, their expectation from their leaders, their notion of government, their moral standards, their perceptions and understanding of religion, their ideas of how to live and regulate their lives, and their goals, and missions as ethnic nationalities etc. He admitted that although these choices are not wrong in themselves, ethnic groups must be allowed to make their different choices, being different people with different cultures, dreams, hopes, and aspirations.

**Forces Working Against National Integration**

There are many forces that come in the way of our national integration. Judging from current happenings, and opinions of scholars cited earlier in the work, such as, Ojo (2009), Akpan , (1990) Onifade & Imhonopi, (2013); they feel that often people have very strong feelings about their own religion, and language, and oppose those of others. Such feelings lead to clashes between different groups, and damage our unity. Some of these forces includes;

**Regionalism:** The British had encouraged regionalism because a division of the country into regions made it easier for them to control our country. Unfortunately, even with the passage of time, these regional feelings have not ended. More than fifty-five years after independence, regional feelings still exist. If we give more importance to our regions, rather than our country, we cannot contribute to it’s progress, integration and development.

**State Creation:** States were created to foster national integration but from the look of things, it poses a great threat to our unity. People of one state support each other and oppose the progress and development of people belonging to other states. Appointments in Jobs, admissions in educational institutions are often on the basis of state of origin considerations. This leads to feelings of resentment, and hostility that threaten the integration of the country.

**Thirst for power, selfishness, and accumulation of wealth by our political elites:** Many political leaders exploit ethnicity for personal advantages. As they competed for power, prestige and associated benefits, in a bid to secure the support of members of their ethnic groups, accentuate ethnic differences, and demonize members of other ethnic groups. The brutal killings of youth corps members in the north following the declaration of the results of the presidential elections in 2011 speaks volumes of the naked thirst for power, and political position which brings out the beast in political leaders.

**Corruption:** The issues that cause disaffection among ethnic nationalities in the country such as poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and its attendant limited opportunities, unemployment, marginalization etc are all products of corruption. Nigeria should begin to look to the East (Asia) where capital or severe punishment is meted out on corrupt state officials.

**Skewed Federal system:** This as it is being practiced in Nigeria today is another challenge for national integration Imhonopi & Urim (2012) argued that Federalism as it is presently practiced in Nigeria suffers
because of lack of fiscal federalism, over concentration of power at the centre, laid back on non-viable states, absence of state police among others.

**The fear of losing control by the ruling class:** This is another issue standing in the path of national integration in Nigeria. Ifeanacho & Nwagwu (2009) contends that the ruling class in Nigeria inherited a state structure and has left it without any form of modification up till now. The clamour for a national conversation to address the present political configuration called Nigeria has fallen on a deaf ear until 2014. President Jonathan led government organized a constitutional conference its outcome has not been felt by Nigerians.

**Lack of political will:** To do the right thing by the political leadership has remained one reason the country has continued to flounder in the sea of confusion and tottering the precipice of ethnic division.

**Weak institutions:** Institutions are kept weak to feather the political and economic fortunes of the ruling class. In Nigeria it is criminal to be honest and honest to be criminal.

**Lastly lack of fairness:** justice and equity in the country with regard to resources allocation and distribution, power sharing, enjoyment of fundamental human rights and punishment of criminals who hide under political umbrellas or bunkers created by the ruling classes takes the country backwards with regard to national cohesion.

**Forces Promoting National Integration**

(1) **The constitution** – Our constitution is the most important force that promotes national integration. Our founding father were aware that there were threats to our unity from various forces mentioned above, consequently certain safeguards were placed in our constitution, certain ideals and principles like Democracy, secularism, social equality that are guaranteed under our fundamental rights.

(2) **Our National symbols** like the National flag, the coat of arms, the National Anthem, the National pledge and others help, to remind us that we are all Nigerians. For these reason we stress on the importance of showing proper respect to these symbols. These acts as strong unifying forces both in times of celebration and adversity.

(3) **National Days** like the independent day, 1st October and Democracy Day, 29th May are celebrated by all Nigerians in all parts of the country, regardless of language, religion or culture. They remind us of our common nationality.

(4) **Other forces promoting national integration** includes; sports, football competitions, communication system, interdependence in consumption of products from various parts of the country etc.

Nigeria is determined to stay together as one big family. All policies and programmes put in place to foster national unity, should be pursued and implemented sincerely to achieve the long sorted unity.

**Implication for Counselling**

In view of the foregoing discussion on the threats to the coexistence of a divided society like Nigeria, the following is a summary of identified counselling implication to reinforce our coexistence. The overall philosophy of Nigeria as spelt out in the national policy of Education (2004) in section 1 nos a & b is to,

(a) **Live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation**

(b) **Promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.**

Education is the instrument ear marked to achieve this and guidance and counselling is one of the educational services specified in section 11 no (101) article (j) of the NPE (2004) to promote the attainment of this philosophy. In line with this, educational policy in modern society should give importance to effective counselling at all levels of the nation’s educational system. Awujo, Kennedy & Akor (2012) believes that since counsellors are custodians of values, they should be made to work hand in hand with policy makers/implementers in order to give direction to the guidance services that will inculcate national consciousness and national unity, to promote coexistence in the divided Nigerian society. It is the researchers view that counselling services well planned and intended for national unity...
will help individuals within the society to develop values like, integrity, honesty, transparency, national consciousness, unity and so on from the cradle of our education system. This is so because values imbibed at childhood cannot be easily thrown over board, so counselling should be given serious attention from the pre-primary and primary school levels through the tertiary level.

In Nigeria so much attention is given to counselling at the secondary school level. In the writers view, counselling should start at the pre-primary school level to achieve the desired goals. A popular saying goes thus “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Proverbs, 22:6). It is the researchers opinion that the antagonistic, suspicious and ethnic consciousness exhibited among individuals in the divided society was imbibed from their homes in course of their growth process. They can be re-educated, informed and re-orientated from the nascent level of education through the instrument of counselling. Faulty or defective values, attitudes, orientation, beliefs etc account for the failure of our quest for national integration.

RECOMMENDATION

(1) Government should work in harmony with the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) by mandating this body to develop a suitable counselling programme that will promote national consciousness and national unity at all levels of our educational system.

(2) Qualified counsellors should be employed at all levels of education to implement such programmes so as to give it what it takes.

(3) Programmes on national integration should be regularly organized through the mass media by professional counsellors in each state of the federation in conjunction with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) sponsored by the government at the national, state and local government levels. Counsellors in course of counselling for national integration should emphasize the need for coexistence and magnify its advantages.

(4) Finally, counsellors under the umbrella body of the counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should come up with programmes for quick implementation as a matter of urgency to get Government’s attention, programmes that can promote our coexistence should be the key consideration.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria as a collection of unwilling and variegated partners is determined to stay together as one big family. All policies and programmes put in place to foster national integration and unity should be pursued and implemented with every sincerity to achieve the long sorted unity to coexistence in a divided society. it is therefore hoped that the issues raised here would be helpful in achieving our integration hence the writers are calling on government, policy makers and counsellors to take a quick measure in ensuring that counselling starts in earnest at the nascent level of our educational system to bring about a lasting and sustained co-existence in a divided society like Nigeria.

REFERENCES


