

Revisiting the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) (2005) and the National Question in Nigeria

Marietu Tenuche
Faculty of Social Sciences
Kogi State University
Anyigba, Nigeria. 272001
email: drtenuche@yahoo.com

(Received: 27-7-11/ Accepted: 6-9-11)

Abstract

The post election violence that wrecked some parts of the country after the April General elections in 2011, the increasing incidence of bombing and the restiveness of the Boko Haram sect in some parts of the country including the Federal Capital has resonated the calls for the convening of a National Conference to address issues that may determine the viability of the entity called Nigeria. Central to the convening of a National conference is the issue of the modality for the recruitment of members. It has been argued that elected representatives of the people at the Federal, State and Local level should have the mandate to address any issue pertaining to the Nigerian State. Given the flawed nature of elections in Nigeria, others have argued that the composition should be enlarged to allow for a larger section that may not have been captured by the political arena. The argument of this paper is that recruitment for any purpose is critical to the outcome of any exercise as recruitment is done in any management exercise to strategically place people in specific positions to attain set goals and objectives. In other words the outcome of any exercise is determined by the goal set by the organizers. The paper concluded that the NPRC held in 2005 could not achieve the desired objectives as the goals of the organizers was not necessarily to radically change the “Nigerian Project” as it exists but to reform it. For any future attempt to host a national conference, the critical issue of representation at the conference must be addressed in order to have a conference membership that is determined to effect structural changes radical enough to address the notty issues that pose great challenges to the Nigerian Federation.

Keywords: National Question, Sovereign National Conference, Political Reform Conference, Federalism, Recruitment Process, Management, Representation

Introduction

The Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo eventually acceded to the calls for a national conference when on 21st February, 2005 he inaugurated what he called the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) under the Chairmanship of Justice Niki Tobi (Rtd). The demands for the Convocation of a sovereign national conference have been part and parcel of the agenda of democracy movements across the country especially during the days of military absolutism. Specifically, the call had begun to gather momentum under the Babangida regime (1985-1993). It however reached a crescendo following the annulment of the 12th June 1993 presidential election (see, Agbaje, etal, 2004; Ojo, 2000). The orchestrated attempt by the last General Sani

Abacha to succeed himself also added bite to the struggle (Okpe, 2003:32). It was perhaps this development that warranted the deeply entrenched contempt with which General Abacha's 1994/95 conference was treated.

Given the foregoing background, it was therefore not surprising to see the high upsurge in the emergence of many more forces, especially of identity, calling for the convocation of the national conference when Nigeria transitioned to democracy in May 1999. This is because, given the expected opening of the public space for democratic discussion, deliberation, disagreement, and consensus as a result of the political liberalization of the public sphere, room was created "for the expression of bottled-up angers and frustration, which successive military regimes unduly suppressed through the executive suffocation and construction of the public space" (see. Omotola, 2005; Adebani, 2003). Despite the fact that various nationalists had different issues to be tabled at the conference, a common denominator of the call was unanimity of opinions on the type of conference to be convened- a Sovereign National Conference (SNC), whereby the decisions of the conference will have a force of law and binding on the state and society as well as their agents. Not quite unexpectedly the idea of SNC did not go down well with the managers of the state, particularly the Presidency and the National Assembly. For them, the convocation of the SNC amounts to creating a parallel centre of power to those of duly elected representatives of the people. More fundamentally, the comparative experience of SNC across the globe especially in Benin Republic has not been very palatable to the conveners (see, Nzouanke, 1993; Heibrunn, 1993; Omitogun and Onigu- Otite, 1996). In Benin for example, the sovereignty accorded the national conference empowered it such that at the end, the convener, President Mathieu Kerekou, was totally stripped of his powers (Omitogun and Onigu-Otite, 1996:25-26).

But as the tempo of the call heightened in Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo eventually saw the need for a form of forum for national dialogue, hence the inauguration of the NPRC. Justifying the NPRC, President Obasanjo declared while inaugurating it on 21st February 2005 that:

"Our history as a nation shows very clearly that we have been through some difficult times. We have missed great opportunities. Our historical experience at constitutional making and political reform shows that we may have some structural defects that REQUIRE ADJUSTMENT so as not to constrain the deepening, widening and consolidation of democratic values and practices" (Obasanjo, 2005. Emphasis Mine).

The above suggests that the President was not prepared for any fundamental changes in the state and society but mere "adjustments". One may therefore submit that the composition of the NPRC was carefully designed to ensure "adjustment" in areas considered to be contentious so as to placate and silence the advocates of SNC particularly the progressive forces.

Nevertheless, following months of deliberations, at times under tumultuous atmosphere especially toward the last days of the conference, the NPRC formally submitted its report to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at a dinner held in Abuja on Sunday, 24 July 2005. In his remarks at the ceremony, President Olusegun Obasanjo noted that the NPRC was different as it was the first and only national conference held under a democratic regime. The irony of this claim is that the composition of the NPRC violates well-known democratic ideals and principles. At least, popular representation through free and fair election in a way that promotes freedom, equity and justice is one of the pillars of democracy. The NPRC however negated those ideals as membership was by appointment and not all the procedures at the conference were guided by these democratic principles. The decision to appoint/ nominate members of the NPRC, as this paper will show, has implications for the articulation and implementation of public policies, activities and programmes that may emanate there from. This is because the recruitment process assumes a vital step in the policy making and execution process. This is the area of interest to this paper.

Essentially, the paper seeks to understand government's position on the contentious issues in Nigerian Federation (see, Amuwo, et al, 1998; Onwudiwe and Suberu, 2005) and critically evaluate how this has affected its modality for the recruitment exercise. This is important because recruitment is done in any management exercise to place people in specific positions to attain set goals and objectives. This study raises some questions: given the composition of the NPRC, has it the capability to decisively address the national question in Nigeria? What actually constitute these questions? What are the implications of this composition for the actions of the NPRC? These and related issues constitute the core of our engagement in this paper.

Setting the Framework

The talk of the national question is influential in Nigeria, as in elsewhere, Onyeoziri (2002:10) avers that the national question “afflicts many political systems, hardly has a final solution, is complex or multi-dimensional in nature, and is historically contingent”. Despite this generalization, the national question may vary in its form and character among nations and within a nation. To fully grapple with the national question would therefore require a contextual analysis that emphasizes the particularities of the question in a given policy. At a general level, the national question connotes “the totality of issues that can take heavy tolls on national rebirth, integration and development” (Saliu and Omotola, 2006). Within the Nigerian context, however, the national question has been defined as “the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have some rights and privileges, access to power and an equitable share of national resources” (Ajayi, 1992 in Saliu and Omotola). In a related vein, Albert (2001:272) defines the national question in Nigeria as primarily concerned with group rights, self determination, truth, Justice, fairness and respect for others”. For Oyovbaire (1989; 385 in Saliu and Omotola), the national question pertains to “the concrete problem of social existence arising from assertive competition among persons who possess multi-ethnic or multi-communal and regional consciousness, with which was created in its foundation by the turn of the 19th Century, and of its articulation since that time, by and under colonial domination” (Saliu and Omotola, 2006).

What the following conceptualization of the national question in Nigeria suggest is that, for us to be able to decipher and grapple very decisively with the national question in Nigeria there is need for some historical insights on the evolution and development of Nigeria. It is within such historical insights that we can locate the deepening crisis of the Nigerian state and society particularly the crisis and condition of the federal framework and democracy in Nigeria (see, Amuwo, etal, 1998; Gana, 2003; Onwudiwe and Suberu, 2005).

It is a well-known fact that Nigeria was a colonial creation. Before the advent of colonialism, the various groups that constituted Nigeria today had operated different political and administrative systems suitable for them (see Omotola, 2004). It was these various groups, which scholars have put at over 400 that colonialism forcefully brought together under British Control but administered through divide and rule policy. As such, while Lagos was run as a crown colony via direct rule, the northern part was administered as a protectorate via indirect rule. This was in order to maximize the benefits of colonial adventure and perhaps lay precarious foundation for nation building. As it turned out, the amalgamation of 1914 evidenced this as it was much more real on paper than in practice. Years after the amalgamation, the north and south continued with their separate administration (Omotola, 2004:243).

The chain of conferences and constitutions that evolved under colonial administration, though largely borne out of the precarious balance of the polity, was however incapable of redressing the problem. Rather, it complicated it. For instance, the elective principle introduced by the Clifford constitution was restricted to Lagos and Calabar on the basis of limited franchise. The regionalism introduced by the Richard constitution of 1946, remains till today, the very foundation of the mainstreaming of identity politics into national life. The adoption of a perverted federal system by the Lyttleton constitution of 1954, given its violation of J.S. Mill’s law of federal stability that requires that no part of the federating units be larger than other sides combined together, and the eclectic attempt by the post-colonial state to redress the imbalance, has also been a major source of contradiction (see, Nwosu, etal, 1998). As such, at independence in 1960, the political economy of the country was already well distorted and therefore not strong enough to receive shocks (see, Osaghae, 1998). Under the first republic, (1960-1966), the organization of the state was done in such a way that regional governments were empowered both in terms of power sharing and resources allocation, culminating in reasonable degree of autonomy for the regions. For instance, by the 1963 republican constitution of Nigeria, each region was entitled to 50percent of their natural resources. However, by section 142 of that constitution, each region was expected to contribute to the costs of administration in a consolidation revenue fund proportionate to the share of duties received by it in a financial year (cf Daily sun, June 18, 2005.5). This was to be drastically altered as a result of the civil war that engulfed the country between 1967and1970. During this period, Nigeria tended towards a unitary system

despite its publicly avowed commitment to federalism. As part of the measures to weaken the secessionist Biafra, new states were created and the principle of derivation introduced to revenue allocation and was assigned 5 percent. Today, derivation attracts 13 percent as provided by the 1999 constitution. The constitution apportions ownership of all natural resources to the Federal Government via its section 44 (13).

Over the years, this development has been a major source of tension in Nigeria. There has been a persistent call for an upward review of the relative weight assigned to derivation especially from the oil producing states in Niger Delta. This is particularly so since oil remains the major source of revenue generation and foreign exchange earning for the country (see Obi, 1998). Besides, the massive destruction of farmland and rivers due to oil exploration and exploitation in the area has been another justification for the demand, which has in recent times graduated to the struggle for resource control.

Unfortunately, the response of the government to these agitations has been through propaganda, indifferences and the use of force (see, Ovwasa, 1999). In most cases, the government preferred the violent option as epitomized by the response to the Ogoni uprising, and the infamous Odi massacre. These years of neglect and deprivation have led to a massive emergence and proliferation of ethnic militias. Notable among them are the Egbesu boys; Chikiko movement, Niger Delta Volunteer people force (NDVPPF) led by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo Asari; and the Ateke Tom Niger Delta Vigilante Group (NDVG). With the recommendation of the 17 percent by the NPRC as the new derivation formula, these groups have threatened war unless they are given power to control their resources.

But for the non- oil producing states specifically the Northern states, the demand of the Niger Delta was unnecessarily, too high. According to Sam Aluko, the revenue used to explore oil in Niger Delta in the first instance came from other regions of the country, second, agriculture still contribute a higher percentage of 41% to the GDP of the country as against the 1.4 from oil. The issue of resources control is therefore considered as unjustified.

Beyond revenue allocation, there is also the dimension of power sharing among the various groups that make up the federation. Nigerian has over the years operated a form of centralized federalism where the central government has overwhelming control of power and resources, thereby placing other tiers of government at the mercy and as appendages of the central government (see, Onwudiwe and Suberu, 2005). The 1999 constitution shows that 68 items are on the exclusive list, while the concurrent list has only 10 broad items, which are further split into 30. But in the event of a clash between the federal and state government on any of such issues, the federal position takes precedent. The implication of this, as Festus Keyamo has observed, is that the federal government can legislate on 98 areas to the detriment of the state (cf, Sun, 19 June, 2005:11).

The issue of vertical revenue allocation among the three tiers of government has been another crises spot. While the relative weight assigned to each tier varies under different regimes, one obvious fact is that the federal government has always been over patronized. As at today, the Federal Government takes 56 percent, States 24 percent and Local Government 20 percent. In fact, the new proposal under consideration by the National Assembly still upholds federal dominance as it gives 53.69% to it, 31.10% to States and 15.21% to Local Governments. It then follows that while the Federal Government loses about 2.3 percent, States gain about 6 percent while Local Government lose about 5%. This leaves at the disposal of the Federal Government enormous financial resources mostly used for unproductive activities such as servicing an over bloated and lazy bureaucracy at the centre. As Keyamo pointed out, about 85% of the budget in the last three years went into recurrent expenditure. In specific terms, N500 billion of the N848 billion budget for the year 2002 was approved for recurrent expenditure. About N540.25 billion and N539 billion were set aside for the recurrent expenditure in the budget for 2003 and 2004 respectively.

The implications of the foregoing on Nigeria's political development are glaring. Most important here is the unhealthy rivalry and competition for power at the centre so as to have access to the federal wealth by the various groups in the country. This partly explains the rise in the spate of secessionist threats, proliferation of ethnic militias and ethno-religious conflicts (see, CFCR, 2002:30). Indeed, the concern among the elite and politicians is "who lost powers, who won powers, and who want power back". This has been well played out in Nigeria especially since independence. But in the struggle, the northern part of the country is alleged to have gained considerably at the expense of the other parts (see Ayoade, 1998). It was the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election by General

Babangida and the attendant impasse that precipitated the power shift agenda. Today, the northerners are clamoring for a return of “their” power, having relinquished, it for 8 years. For the South South, it is their turn to produce the president of Nigeria, as the hen that lays the golden egg of the country. The South East too felt that as the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria, they should automatically produce the president, the two larger groups (Hausa and Yoruba) having had their turns.

The foregoing analysis attests to the fact that the Nigerian Federalism is really a project in crisis (Osaghea, 2005; Olukoshi and Ogbu, 1996). These deepening crises and contradictions, as illustrated above, underscore the call and justification for a SNC. After initial resistance, the presidency finally succumbed to pressures from the challenges posed by increasing spate of national insecurity, ethnic militants and secessionist threats by setting up a NPRC to pacify these groups and address some of the bases of agitation. The NPRC threw up a number of issues that have implications for public policy formulation and execution and the national question it sought to address. Of central concern to us here is the composition of the NPRC, which constitutes the pivot of the next section of the paper.

The Composition of the NPRC

The views of the Nigerian government on the National question as well as how to effectively manage it were articulated in President Obasanjo’s inaugural address to the NPRC on 21st February 2005 (see, Obasanjo, 2005). The national question in Nigeria, according to President Obasanjo, revolves around some basically contentious issues, which he identified to include the issues of national identity, freedom and liberty, social justice, rights and obligations, electoral reforms that ensure credibility and respectability of elections, relations between tiers of government; performance of government and how to ensure truly democratic governance for all. These issues, according to the President, pose a serious challenge of constitutionalism and constitutional reform; the opportunity to bring all stake holders together to discuss the preferred path for the nation; the challenge of building new, accountable, responsible and focused leadership, and how to build, operate and sustain real political parties. Accordingly, the President sums up the central challenge as “how to strengthen the social contract between the custodians of state power and the governed” (Obasanjo, 2005:8).

The foregoing premises perhaps played a decisive role in the composition of the NPRC, the procedures used during deliberations and the outcome of the conference. However, the submission of the President suggests that the government is not unmindful of the position of different groups as they relate to the call for a restructuring of Nigeria federalism, equity among various nationalities, and more importantly the increasing pressure on the government to deliver on its promises and social responsibilities to the citizens. The official view is that government’s economic reforms have began to yield positive results and according to the President, “if we stay on course and remain resolute, we are all bound to reap the benefits of our sacrifices and investment in the reform agenda.”

But for the gains of the economic reforms to be sustainable, the government saw the need for a political reform agenda. Such an exercise is generally seen as capable of providing a conducive political environment for the consolidation of the gains from economic reforms, hence the NPRC. The NPRC is not the same as sovereign National Conference (SNC) popularly advocated for by the people. The bases for the rejection of SNC were well articulated by the President. For one, Nigeria does not exhibit the features of a collapsed state that requires a SNC. In such a state, the structures of states have effectively collapsed, amidst a deep-seated legitimacy crisis. Two, in the few African State where a SNC was convened, it did not result in the institution of democracy (Obasanjo, 2005:14). Given these realities, it may therefore sound absurd to convene a SNC in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the President considers the call for a conference of ethnic nationalities as uncalled for. According to him, the idea is “rather unrealistic, inequitable and unworkable” as it may not necessarily guarantee the fear of marginalization expressed by minority groups. The resilience of identity crisis in Nigeria, according to the President, was due to the negative manipulation of identity by “ethnic entrepreneurs” for selfish ends. The President also rejects the use of class analysis in the explication of the crisis of the Nigeria State. Rather, classes and strong adherence to ideas, methods, language of the past that have been transcended all over the world have combined to retard Nigerian’s march towards unity and development.

Given the foregoing, the President considers certain issues as given in Nigeria and must therefore not to be compromised. These issues include: The oneness of Nigeria; Federalism and federal system of

government; Presidentialism; Multi-religiosity; federal character, popular participation; the fundamental objective and directive principles of state policy; and separation of powers. The NPRC was therefore charged to device workable means of strengthening these issues, as they constitute the core of democratic governance.

One basic fact that emanates from the above is that it confirms our fear that the government is not prepared for any form of radical departure from the status quo. This could better be gleaned from the president's inaugural speech to the NPRC, which repeatedly emphasized the need for redressing "structural defects that required adjustment" (Obasanjo, 2005:5-6). In fact, the NPRC was "to assist the constitutionally established legitimate structures of government the executive, legislature and judiciary – to grow, become more dynamic, more accountable and more capable of delivering service to the people".

Without any doubt, the structure and institution of government in Nigeria suffer some deficit. This has resulted in a seeming alienation of some constituencies, coups and counter-coups, weak political parties, poor leadership, corruption and the inability of the state to meet the basic needs of the people perhaps, It was this that informs government's position on the need to strengthen the structure of governance, redefine and reform these institutions without necessarily pulling them down.

The desire by the government to retain structures and system largely explain the nature of the composition of the NPRC by the government. While the NPRC certainly drew its members from all constituencies on the basis of diverse interests and groups, members were however strictly drawn by selection/nomination. In all, there were 400 delegates. Including those that turned down their nomination-Wole Soyinka, Anthony Enahoro, Yufus Bala Usman (see Table 1)

Table 1: Delegates by Criteria for Selection

Criteria For Selection	No of Delegate	Platform for Selection/Nomination
1. Respectable Elder statesmen	37	FG
2. Retired military personnel	3	FG
3. Retired police personnel	2	FG
4. Retired S.S.S. Personnel	2	FG
5. Retired Diplomats	2	FG
6. Retired civil/servants	2	FG
7. State Representatives	216	State Govts.
8. FCT Representative	2	FCT
9. Traditional rulers	6	FG
10. Academicians	6	FG
11. Labour Representatives	6	FG
12. Trade Union congress	2	FG
13. Nig. Employer Consultative Association (NECA)	6	FG
14. Nig. Youth Organization (NYO)	6	FG
15. Women Group	6	FG
16. Manufacturer Ass. Of Nig (MAN)	6	FG
17. NACCIMA	6	FG
18. Political parties	16	FG
19. Others	2	FG
20. Civil Societies	6	FG
21. Religious Leaders	12	FG
22. N.A.N.S	2	FG
23. Nig. Guild of Editors	1	
24. N.U.J Nig. Union of Journalist (NUJ)	1	
25. Newspaper Proprietors	2	FG

Association of Nigeria		
26. Physically challenged people	3	FG
27. Nigerians in Diaspora	5	FG
28. Social- cultural groups		
i. Afenifere	1	
ii. Ohanaeze	2	
iii. A.C.F	4	
iv. Middle belt forum	2	FG
v. Ijaw National congress	1	
vi. Igbimo Agba Yoruba	1	
29. Special cases	5	FG
Total	400	

Source: Adapted from FRN, 2005a.

The appointment of delegates, as against election, lends credence to our claim that the government was not prepared for any radical departure from the prevailing order. It would seem that the government was only interested in assembling a loyal group that would defend government's position at the NPRC, in some cases using some ambiguous criteria such as "others" and special cases". This could be a deliberate design to alienate the masses. Little wonder that disadvantaged/less privileged groups like women, the physically challenged, labour movement, civil societies were underrepresented. These groups represent only 5.2 percent of delegates. The President referred to his selected Committee of Elder Statesmen as "men with experience, age and hopefully maturity and wisdom" For these virtues, much was expected from this latter group especially to define the form and course of the conference in the right direction. In a similar vein, socio- cultural groups with strong attachment to ethnic identities were not adequately represented. These groups constitutes 2.75% of delegates to the NPRC. However, states constituted a major platform from which delegates were selected. In the appointment exercise, state governors nominated about 54 percent of the delegates. There are chances that contradictions inherent within states, which threw up the governors would be maintained, not minding the fact that state nomination was expected to reflect the "state" character. In Kogi State, for example, while members were nominated from the three senatorial districts, the Kogi East Senatorial district from where the governor came from dominated the scene. Besides, the agenda of Kogi state representatives would likely be nothing more than that of the government, which appointed them. This trend was noticeable in almost all the states of the federation. In Borno State, for instance, governor Ali Modu Sherif was accused of partiality in the nomination of candidates. In the South Western geo- political zones, the governors were accused of haven ignored the agenda of the Yoruba people in pursuit of party (PDP) agenda under which they came to power.

Even among civil society organizations, interest and professional groups, there were accusations that those nominated were not representatives of the groups. This was largely predicated upon the fact that no consultation was made with the leadership of such bodies, except in some few cases. Yet, the composition of membership at the NPRC reflected the elitist structure of governance in Nigeria, to the neglect of the masses/majority.

The composition of membership of the NPRC no doubt has implications for the form and character of the conference. One, given their clout, some nominees they were able to take advantage of that to emerge as chairmen and vice chairmen of various committees (see table 2)

Table 2: Committee Chairmen and their Deputies by Membership Representation and Social Standing

Name of Committees	Chairmen & Deputies	Membership Representation	Social Standing
1. Economy	Adedeji Adebayo	Elder Statesmen Ogun NACCIMA	Former Director ADP

	Nyako Murtala	Adamawa	Chief of NAVAL Staff RTD
2. Human Rights and Social Security	Ogunshola Albert. F	Kwara State	Professor
	Alkali, Mohammed Nur	Brono State	Professor
3. National Security	Adewusi Sunday Asiwaju	Oyo State	FMR Inspector General of Polic
	Kazir Alwali Jaji	Yobe State	FMR COAS
4. Social Infrastructure for National Dev.	Adamu Nagib Hussaini (HRH) Jigawa	State	Traditional Ruler
	Odeyemi John Agbola NASSIMA	NACCIMA	
5. Models and Structure of Govt.1	Akinjide Richard Oyo State	State	FRM Minister RTD MAJ GEN
	Haruna Ibrahim ACF	ACF	
6. Power Sharing REFORMS	Ezeife CHukwemeka Anambra	State	FRM Gov. and FRM Special Adviser

7. Rev. Allocation and Fiscal Federalism	Afe Babalola Ekiti	Elder state man	Legal Luminary RTD
	Mamiman Abdulahi FCT	State	MAJ. GEN
8. Legislature	Ajegbo Michael Anambra	State	FRM MINISTER
	Barda Saidu Kastina		FRM Gov.
9. Executive	Okunnu Lateef Olufemi Lagos	State	FRM MINISTER
	DIkko Umaru Kaduna	State	”
10. Traditional Institutions and culture Reforms	Zaiyanu Abdullahi- Kebbi	N.W	Traditional Ruler
	Olagbegi Olateru- Ondo	S.W	“
11. Public Services	Alakija Tejumade Osun	State	
	Damcida Ibrahim Borno	State	
12. Judiciary and Legal Reforms	Ajibola Bola- Ogun	State	FRM Minister

	Abdullahi Ibrahim- Kogi	State	FRM Minister
13. Models Political parties and Electoral Process	WAYAS Joseph CR Ganduje AbdulRahim Kano	State Elder state man	FRM Senate President
14. Environment and Natural resources Reforms	Alfred Nnameka Achebe Tilley- Gydo Jack- Benue	Traditional Ruler S.E State	Traditional Ruler
15. Civil Society Labour, TU and National Media Refoms	Olutate Omotoyo Ondo Yakubu Zakari- Nassarawa	State Elder state man	
16. Local Govt. Reform	Kwande yahaya Plateau Iredia Sam Edo	State State	
17. Foreign Policy Int. Dev. Policy reform	MBU M.J- Cross River Adamu Hassan- Adamawa	State Elder state man	FMR Minister FMR Minister
18. Constituting a New Sustainable Democratic Order in Nigeria	Useni Jeremiah Timbu Plateau Okiri Ahmed R. Timi	ANPP Muslim Leader	FRM Minister
19. Anti- Corruption Reform	Oputa Chukwudifu- Imo Jidda baba Ahmed- Borno	State State	Legal Luminary

Source: Adapted from National Political Reform Conference (FRN,2005a).

The table above reveals that those that emerged as committee Chairmen were those who have been major beneficiaries of the system. Indeed they have always been part and parcel of the tiny minority that has always dominated the structure of governance in Nigerian or their cronies. Consequently, it sounds to reason that these elites may largely share the same or similar views and vision of the President, which is that of maintaining and strengthening the existing structures and system of governance. For example, there was a move to remove Gen. Jeremiah Useni (Rtd) and his deputy ALhaji O.R.T. Okiri on the committee on Constituting a New Sustainable Democratic Order in Nigeria. The grouse against the two delegates, as articulated by Idris Miliki Abdul and Yinka Ibidunni delegates from Kogi state and civil society respectively, was that “the Army Chief is trying to teleguide discussions over recommendation for antidote against coup plotting and what sort of punishment should be meted out to coupists” (cf This Day Vol.11, No. 3637). The Elder’s Committee that took the final decisions on the 11 issues that could not gain consensus at the plenary appeared to have worked in favour of the federal government. This also suggests a cordial relationship between the composition of the NPRC and the final decision of the conference.

The committee of Elders was made up of state leaders and nominees from each geo-political zone. This composition ensured that only government nominees took part in the decisions that were most crucial to the conference and by extension the national question to the exclusion of other interests and groups. Also, the committee on the Economy fully endorsed the privatization policy of the Obasanjo regime- specifically, the privatization of strategic industries like the mining sector, steel, oil and gas sectors, despite the disruptions such has caused the economy (FRN,2005b).

Also worthy of note is that this pattern of composition also ensured that dominance of the elites in the deliberations that took place at the NPRC. This may explain the fact that delegates were able to reach

consensus on almost all issues. The likely implication of this is the fact that at the end of the day, one should not expect any radical departure from the prevailing order.

Nevertheless, the conference actually revealed the depth of the national question in Nigeria in the form of what Justice Niki Tobi, the conference Chairman, referred to as “controversial and contentious” issues. These include, among others; Resources control; funding of local government; Tenure of office of the President; Electronic Voting; State creation; Immunity for the President, Vice President, Governors and Deputy Governors; State Police etc.

Another dimension of this has to do with the reinforcement of forces of identity at the NPRC. This is exemplified by the fact that the major position of each group was predicated on ethnic identity. For example, while the south sought for resource control as the “owners” of oil, the South East canvassed for rotational presidency, and the southwest argued forcefully for regional autonomy that would among others enable each state to operate its own Police. The North however opposed resources control but canvassed for rotation of the presidency between the north and the south.

Whereas NPRC was able to reach consensus on 287 issues, leaving a negligible two issues unresolved- single term and resources control- pointing to the direction of the adequacy of the composition, this may however be pretentious. First, the issue of resource control crisis remains at the heart/primacy of the national question in Nigeria. The inability of the NPRC to lay it to rest once and for all via general consensus implies that the national question remains unresolved. Second, there is a growing concern, as envisaged abinitio, about the level of legitimacy of the conference report. This has become the case following the growing suspicion over President Obasanjo’s “third term” bid. The impression was that perhaps one of the hidden agenda for the convocation of the NPRC was to achieve this desire. It was agreed then that unless urgent steps were taken by the government to clarify that speculation, the NPRC particularly its outcome would end up exacerbating, rather than resolving the national question in Nigeria. The deficit of legitimacy surrounding it may not be unconnected with the composition of its membership through selection as opposed to election; and the subsequent use of the composition to preserve and strengthen the prevailing order and serve the entrenched interest of the ruling elite. This development certainly poses some implication for public policy, research and further action

Implications for the National Question

The preceding analysis suggests that the nature of the composition of the NPRC bellies its potentials to address the national question in a very fundamental way. The preference for nomination of members at the expense of democratic principles remains its most noticeable Achilles’ hill. This is because that made the NPRC not only to be elitist, but also unrepresentative of popular interests. In the circumstance, the NPRC seems detached from the interest it was supposedly constituted to represent. The implications of this are obvious. One, the mode of conducting business at the conference radiated some undemocratic traits. This could not have been different in order for the NPRC to actualize the dreams of its “Master”. Two, it became difficult for the NPRC to devise an alternative path of redemption for Nigeria, having been tactically preempted to toe a particular line of action. As such, the NPRC could not thoroughly settle the most critical issues that constitutes the national question in Nigeria, that is power sharing and resource control. This reflects the depth of the crisis of Nigeria federalism.

At the level of public policy making, the NPRC raises more questions than answers. For instance, what prospects and problems are likely to confront any public policy that emanates from its outcome/report? What role can such public policy be expected to play in bringing about the desired result, that of fundamentally fixing and redressing the national question in Nigeria? The tendencies are that such policies, like the composition of the NPRC, may circumvent democratic principles of policy making in a democratic setting (see, Olaniyi, 1999). It would seem that the process of policy implementation falters in such a situation and to that extent highly incapacitated to meet its targets. This may indeed pose serious obstacles to the democratization process. This explains why there is need for a thoroughly and well – crafted design to manage the outcome of the NPRC especially in the development of alternative policy options for managing the national question in Nigeria.

At the level of civil society, there is a growing need for renewed activism. Of particular importance here is the challenge this poses for scholars. While a mass of knowledge has been accumulated on the national question in Nigeria, not much attention has been paid to the linkage between it and the national conference. Is it not appropriate to begin to conceptualize the national conference as an integral part of the national question in Nigeria? What are some of the research implications emanating from the composition of the NPRC. While this forum (Conference) has prophetically chosen the right theme and offered a good starting point, the discourse should as a matter of necessity be elevated to the front seat of scholarly debate. This is necessary to galvanise other segments of the civil society into action through popular education, sensitization and mobilization.

In the final analysis, what the composition of the NPRC reveals in bold relief seems to be that while the national question in Nigeria is not new (see, Akinyemi 2003; Osaghae et al 2001), it has become much more deeply entrenched. Indeed, its strongholds, trends and manifestations are much more profound and consequential on the process of nation building. The inability of the NPRC to reach consensus on the standard bearer of the national question in Nigeria, that is power sharing and resources control, attests to this. This underscores the dire need for other workable adjustment mechanisms built upon democratic principle, and capable of guaranteeing the cherished values and interest of all stake holders in the Nigerian state. Constitutional design that assures these certainly offer a good starting point. There is however need for value reorientation among the political actors and the governed.

Conclusion

The national question in Nigeria has remained at the heart of the deeping crisis of the Nigerian state. The character of the Nigerian state and that of its predatory elite have largely occasioned this situation. This also underscores the failure of policy initiatives that have so far been designed to address it. The NPRC represents the latest in the search for alternative policy options for the management of the national question in Nigeria. Not quite unexpectedly, the NPRC has not been able to address the problem in any fundamental way. This development, as argued in the paper, may not be unconnected with the pattern of the composition of the NPRC. As we have noted earlier, the composition of its membership was undemocratic and unrepresented of popular interests and demands. It would seem evident that the state is not prepared for any radical shift in the present character and structure of the state, hence the need for the selection of loyal clients to legitimize the view a of the government. However, the NPRC has brought to the fore once again the depth of the national question, the challenges it poses for the state and the futility of any lip-service attempt to resolve it. One inevitable conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis is that if the national conference option would ever be useful for the resolution of the national question in Nigeria, it has to be predicated upon democratic principles beginning from the composition of members through its activities to outcome.

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