



Advancing Nigerian Federalism for Nation-Building: Exploring the Significance of National Cohesion

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Abstract

National integration is a constitutional aspiration in Nigeria, and various structures, including federalism, have been developed and deployed to give concrete expressions to this ideal. Nevertheless, the problem inter-ethnic antagonism has remained a recurrent mantra in the national life of Nigeria. This paper examines the Nigerian federalism and its role in fostering national cohesion and enabling nation-building. Through an analysis of historical, political, and socio-economic factors, this study sheds light on how federalism, when appropriately structured and managed, can be a potent tool for nation-building in Nigeria. Accordingly, the study examines potential strategies and policy recommendations for advancing Nigerian federalism to better serve the overarching goal of a more united, prosperous, and harmonious nation. Finally, the study provides insights for policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders committed to enhancing the Nigerian federal system in pursuit of national cohesion and nation-building.

Keywords: Federalism, Nation-Building, National Cohesion, Integration, Ethnic Nationalities, Nigeria.

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"It seems clear that the level of national cohesion in this country [Nigeria] is very low and has to be much higher. This is important because without forging much greater cohesion at all levels, we cannot use even one-tenth of one percent of all our resources to improve the miserable living conditions of our people. Without much national cohesion we cannot build the social, economic and political foundations on which to promote and defend our dignity and independence and indeed our survival as one country." – Yusufu Bala Usman (1979).

Introduction

National integration is an undying constitutional aspiration in Nigeria, and various structures, including federalist structure, have been developed and deployed to give concrete expressions to this ideal. Nevertheless, the problem inter-ethnic antagonism has remained a recurrent mantra in the national life of Nigeria. Indeed, the nation, with a rich array of cultures, histories, and ethnicities, has grappled with the contradictions of federalism that it embraced as a solution (Bello-Imam, 1987).

Federalism in Nigeria has been a defining feature of the country's governance structure since its independence (Babalola and Onapajo, 2019). It is a system of government in which power and authority are constitutionally shared between a central, federal government and individual states or regions (Smith, 2021). The idea behind federalism in Nigeria was to accommodate its incredible diversity, with over 250 distinct ethnic groups, each with its own languages, cultures, and traditions (Grimes, 1992). The distribution of power and resources through federalism aimed to provide a sense of self-governance to these regions and promote inclusivity. However, the effectiveness of Nigeria's

federal system in fostering national cohesion has been a subject of debate and examination (Oni and Faluyi, 2018).

National cohesion refers to the social and political unity in a nation. In the context of Nigeria, it pertains to the ability of diverse ethnic and cultural groups to coexist harmoniously and work collectively towards shared goals (Salisu, 2002b). Achieving national cohesion is a formidable challenge in a country with such incredible diversity, where differences can sometimes lead to conflict and fragmentation. The lack of national cohesion can have far-reaching consequences, including political instability, economic disparities, and social tension (Babalola, 2019). Usman (1979), quoted at the head of this paper, underscores the critical need for greater cohesion, emphasising that without it, the nation struggles to tap into its full potential and improve the living conditions of its people.

Nation-building involves the active efforts to create a sense of shared identity and purpose among a country's citizens (Salisu, 2011). It is about shaping a common vision for the future and establishing the necessary foundations for progress. In Nigeria, successful nation-building is intrinsically linked with federalism and national cohesion (Ogbeide, 2021). The distribution of power, resources, and opportunities must be balanced to ensure that all regions and groups feel invested in the nation's future. Effective nation-building hinges on policies and strategies that bridge divides, foster inclusivity, and promote the values and ideals that bind a nation together based on commonly cherished principle of national citizenship (Salisu, 2002a).

In this paper, I explore the interaction among federalism, national cohesion, and nation-building in Nigeria to uncover strategies and policy recommendations that can strengthen Nigeria's federal structure, promote greater national cohesion, and fortify the foundations of a more united, prosperous, and



harmonious nation. The significance of this endeavour extends beyond political theory; it has tangible implications for the nation's well-being, development, and future survival as a cohesive and dignified entity. In an era marked by political transitions and societal transformations (Jelin, 2019), this study offers an exploration of an issue critical to the future stability and prosperity of Nigeria.

The Nigerian Federalism

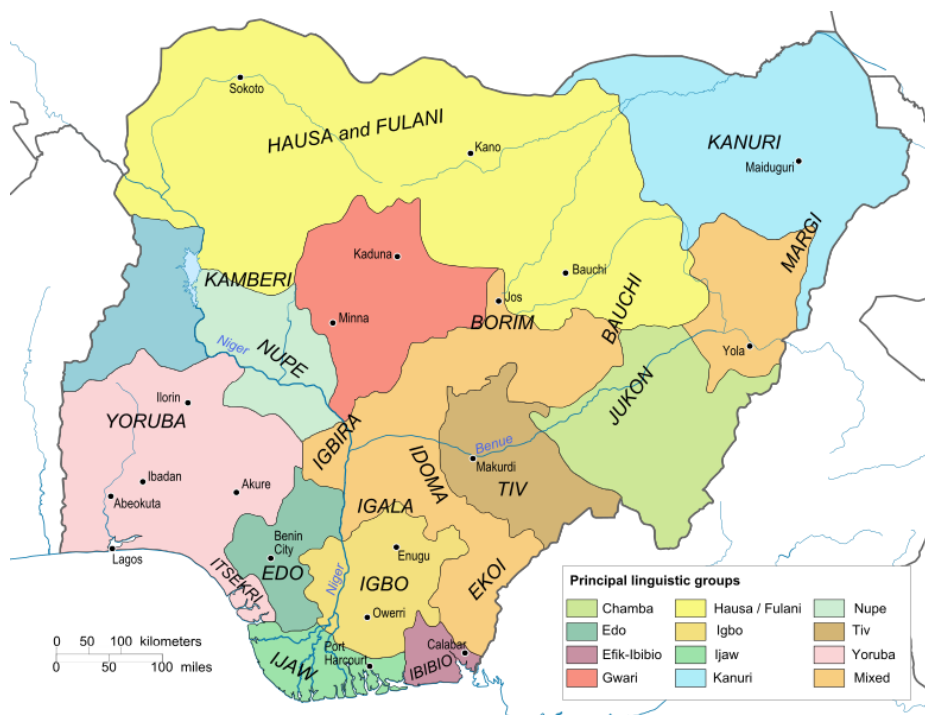
Nigeria is a diverse and culturally rich nation with a complex ethnographic distribution, comprising a multitude of ethnic groups. With over 250 distinct ethnic groups and 520 living languages (Grimes, 1992) (for an early, remarkable ethnographic map of Northern Provinces of Nigeria, see [Prothero, 1962] in Appendix), it is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. The three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Igbo in the southeast. Also, there are numerous smaller ethnic groups, each with its own unique languages, traditions, and cultural practices, contributing to the country's vibrant tapestry of diversity (See Figure 1). This diverse ethnic landscape has played a significant role in shaping Nigeria's history, politics, and social dynamics, as well as presenting both opportunities and challenges for the nation's unity and development.

During the colonial period, Nigeria was administratively divided into distinct regions, each governed by separate colonial policies (Falola and Heaton, 2008). The Northern, Western, and Eastern regions operated with varying degrees of autonomy and governance structures (Falola and Heaton, 2008). For instance, the Northern region had a system of indirect rule that maintained traditional authorities, while the Western region embraced more modern administrative structures (Falola and Heaton, 2008). This disparate approach to governance laid the groundwork for regional diversity in post-independence Nigeria. One pivotal moment in Nigeria's path to federalism was the introduction of the 1946 Richards Constitution (Budi, 2019). This constitution marked a significant step towards federalism by granting considerable powers to the regional governments

(Suberu, 2001). It allowed for the establishment of regional houses of assembly and granted authority over crucial areas such as education, health, and agriculture (Suberu, 2001). This period saw the consolidation of regional identities and aspirations, setting the stage for Nigeria's transition to independence.

Independence in 1960 brought the formalisation of Nigerian federalism with the promulgation of the 1960 Independence Constitution (Falola and Heaton, 2008). This constitution enshrined the federal system within Nigeria's governance framework (Falola and Heaton, 2008). It maintained the three existing regions but increased their autonomy, with each region having control over its affairs to a significant extent (Falola and Heaton, 2008). However, the challenge of balancing regional autonomy with national unity loomed large. The 1963 Constitution introduced a significant shift by replacing the three regions with a federal structure of regions and states (Suberu, 2013). This move decentralised power further and paved the way for the creation of more states in the subsequent years (Suberu, 2013). The regional and state governments gained control over various aspects of governance, including education, agriculture, and infrastructure.

The secessionist Civil War of 1967-1970, triggered by regional tensions and the declaration of an independent state called Biafra, was a pivotal moment in Nigerian history (Michael *et al.*, 2020). This conflict underscored the fragility of Nigerian unity and the tensions between regional autonomy and national cohesion (Michael *et al.*, 2020). It was a stark reminder of the challenges posed by ethnic diversity within the federal framework. Post-war Nigeria embarked on a journey of reconciliation and nation-building. The 1979 Constitution introduced a presidential system, replacing the parliamentary system, and aimed to address some of the regional imbalances and power dynamics (Suberu, 2001). The 1999 Constitution, which is the current constitution in force, reaffirmed Nigeria's federal character and established a multi-tiered system consisting of federal, state, and local governments (Falola, 2021). However, the recurrent incursion of the military into governance and the perennial inert-ethnic strife seems to score federalism low as an integrationist mechanism (Umoh and Adeyi, 2018).



Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Nigeria_linguistical_map_1979.svg

Figure 1. Ethnographic Map of Some Major Ethnic Groups in Nigeria



Federalism and Nation-Building

Federalism entails a division of powers between a central government and subnational entities (Smith, 2021). It serves as a mechanism to manage diversity within a nation by granting varying degrees of autonomy to subnational units. Nigeria's federal system, like others around the world, is designed to balance the interests of its diverse regions and ethnic groups. Understanding the nuances of federalism, such as cooperative federalism, where the central and regional governments collaborate, and competitive federalism, where regions compete for resources and development, is crucial (Egwim, 2020). One historical example of federalism in Nigeria is the 1946 Richards Constitution, which introduced a regional form of government and marked a transition towards federalism (Michael *et al.*, 2020). This move allowed different regions to have substantial control over various aspects of governance, reflecting the cooperative federalism model. However, it also laid the groundwork for regional disparities and competition, which became prominent in later years (Suberu, 2013).

Nation-building, on the other hand, is the process through which diverse groups within a country forge a common identity and sense of belonging (Burke and Harrod, 2021). In a heterogeneous nation like Nigeria, with over 250 ethnic groups and multiple languages, nation-building takes on added complexity. It involves creating a shared national identity that transcends ethnic, religious, and regional divisions. Nation-building fosters unity, social cohesion, and a collective commitment to the nation's well-being (Umoh and Adeyi, 2018). Efforts to promote nation-building in Nigeria are exemplified by initiatives like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), established in 1973, requiring graduates to serve in states other than their own, thereby fostering cross-cultural interactions and a sense of national belonging (Aremu, 2018).

In the Nigerian context, the challenge of nation-building is evident. The country's ethnic and regional diversity has been a source of both strength and tension. Effective nation-building requires the promotion of a national identity that incorporates the various ethnic and regional identities in Nigeria. Achieving this delicate balance is essential for social cohesion and the stability of the federal system. To this end, *fiscal federalism* plays a pivotal role in nation-building. The concept deals with the allocation of financial resources and responsibilities between the central and regional governments. In Nigeria, the allocation of oil revenues and control over resources has been a contentious issue, affecting both federalism and nation-building (Nyekwere, 2020). The manner in which revenue is distributed can either promote economic development and unity or exacerbate regional disparities and tensions (Egwim, 2020). One historical example of fiscal federalism in Nigeria is the introduction of the 13% derivation principle, which allocates a portion of oil revenue to oil-producing states as a way to address regional imbalances and promote economic development (Egwim, 2020). While elites from the oil-producing states of South-South Nigeria clamoured for increase in the derivation percent, other states demurred seeing such demand as infringements on their rights to share in the nation's natural wealth (Egwim, 2020). The debates and tensions around this principle persist, reflecting the challenges of achieving fiscal equity and national cohesion (Egwim, 2020).

The interplay between federalism and nation-building is an enduring theme in the quest for political stability, inclusivity, and social cohesion in Nigeria. Federalism provides the framework for accommodating the country's diversity, while the process of nation-building seeks to create a shared identity and purpose among the citizens who increasingly harp on their differences rather than commonalities. Thus, the effectiveness of federalism in facilitating nation-building is thereby greatly diminished. Recognising this complexity is crucial as Nigeria strives to maintain unity in diversity, sustainable development,

and building a stronger, more cohesive nation that respect the dignity and aspirations of all its citizens.

Federalism and National Cohesion

A substantial body of research has explored the relationship between federalism and the pursuit of national cohesion in Nigeria. Early scholarship, including the works of Wheare (1953) and Afigbo (1991), looked into the historical roots of Nigerian federalism, tracing its origins to colonial legacies and regional influences. As the nation approached independence and grappled with ethnic tensions, research shifted towards understanding how federalism intersected with ethnic politics (Lijphart, 1975; Mohammed and Pindiga, 2021; Sklar, 1963). The promulgation of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution marked a shift in the discourse, with scholars like Amah (2017), Okpanachi and Garba (2010) and Suberu (2008) scrutinising its provisions and implications for power and resource distributions. LeVan (2015) offered a comprehensive analysis of Nigeria's post-military democratic transition, shedding light on the role of federal institutions in managing ethnic and regional tensions. Ahmed and Dantata (2016) examined the theoretical underpinnings of federalism and its implications for national cohesion. Recent research has broadened its focus to encompass contemporary issues such as governance (Chioke, 2021; Okpevra, 2020), fiscal decentralisation (Gumede *et al.*, 2019; Taiwo, 2020), and political stability (Kabari, 2021; Obot, 2019). (Obot, 2019). This extensive and evolving body of research underscores the enduring relevance and complexity of the relationship between federalism and the imperative of national cohesion in Nigeria.

Nigeria adopted federalism as a governance mode to accommodate its extraordinary diversity and to facilitate the peaceful coexistence of the country's various ethnic, cultural, and regional communities (Afigbo, 1991). It aimed to distribute power, resources, and autonomy across states, promoting a sense of self-governance while remaining a part of a united, strong and prosperous nation (Kabari, 2021). However, achieving national cohesion (defined as the country functioning harmoniously and transcending ethnic and cultural faultlines) is a herculean challenge. Historically, ethnic and regional tensions, disparities in resource allocation, and power struggles have tested the nation's unity (Omeni, 2021). As Usman (1979) observed, the level of national cohesion has often been inadequate for the country's progress and the improved well-being of its citizens.

The Nigerian federal structure, with its devolution of power to states, can both promote and hinder national cohesion. On one hand, it allows regions to manage their affairs and cultural identities to a certain extent (Ojo, 2021; Onapajo and Babalola, 2021). On the other hand, it can accentuate regional disparities and create tensions if not managed effectively (Obi-Obiora and Asiazobo, 2019). Moreover, the quest for national cohesion extends beyond the political framework; it encompasses social, economic, and cultural dimensions. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to revisit the federal system, addressing imbalances, and exploring innovative ways to foster greater national cohesion (Lalude, 2020). This includes considering resource allocation, political representation, inclusive policies to bridge divides, education and the promotion of a shared national identity (Lalude, 2020).

In essence, the journey towards achieving national cohesion in Nigeria is an ongoing endeavour, and federalism plays a central role in this process. Finding the right balance between regional autonomy and national unity remains a critical challenge. The experiences of Nigeria in this regard offer valuable insights not only to the country itself but also to other diverse nations seeking to navigate the complex terrain of federalism and national cohesion. The story of Nigeria serves as



a case study and a reminder that fostering unity amid diversity is a continuous and evolving national project.

Factors Shaping National Cohesion for Nation-Building

Several factors including historical, leadership, ethnic, religious, and economic coalesced to shape the trajectory and depth of national cohesion among the teeming competing ethnic groups in Nigeria. Firstly, historical factors have profoundly shaped national cohesion in Nigeria. The colonial legacy of divide-and-rule policies created ethnic and regional fault lines that persist today (Suberu, 2013). The amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 laid the foundation for post-independence challenges related to identity and unity (Falola and Heaton, 2008). The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) serves as a stark historical example of the extreme tensions and fragmentation that can result from these divisions (Daly, 2020; Isah and Isyaku, 2019). Post-independence governments attempted to address disparities in resource allocation and regional development as part of their nation-building efforts (Falola and Heaton, 2008). These historical events underscore the complexities of Nigeria's history and its ongoing impact on national cohesion.

Secondly, leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering national cohesion in Nigeria (Suberu, 2013). Historical examples include leaders like Ahmadu Bello and Obafemi Awolowo, who advocated for equitable development across regions, and Nnamdi Azikiwe, who promoted the idea of a united Nigeria during the early post-independence era (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Conversely, leadership failures, such as the divisive rhetoric of some political figures or policies that exacerbate ethnic or regional tensions, have hindered national cohesion (El-Rufai, 2012). Thirdly, ethnic and religious dynamics are central to discussions of national cohesion in Nigeria (Suberu, 2013). The country's diversity includes numerous ethnic groups and religious beliefs, with Islam and Christianity being the predominant religions (Vinson, 2020). National cohesion efforts must address the need for religious freedom, cultural respect, and equal opportunities while mitigating the potential for divisiveness (Falola and Heaton, 2008).

Finally, economic disparities represent another critical dimension of national cohesion in Nigeria (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Historical examples, including debates over resource allocation, the Niger Delta conflict, and the impact of oil wealth on different regions, highlight the economic fault lines within the country (Vande, 2020). Disparities in wealth and development have fuelled grievances and perceptions of marginalisation (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Addressing these disparities requires not only equitable resource allocation but also policies that promote economic inclusivity and development across all regions (Babalola and Okafor, 2019). The federal government's establishment of agencies like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Presidential Amnesty Programme are examples of attempts to address economic disparities and promote social stability (Ahmed and Dantata, 2016). Ensuring economic stability and opportunities for all citizens is essential to fostering a cohesive nation, as economic disparities can lead to social unrest and disaffection (Babalola and Okafor, 2019).

Significance of National Cohesion in Nigerian Federalism

National cohesion stands as a key factor for promoting stability and peace in Nigeria. Nigeria's diversity can be a source of strength, but it also presents challenges. The recurrent ethnic and religious crises underscore the consequences of weak national cohesion leading to violence, loss of lives, and property

damage. However, a cohesive nation, one where citizens identify with a shared Nigerian identity alongside their ethnic and religious affiliations, is better equipped to prevent and manage such conflicts. National cohesion encourages dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation, making it a crucial factor in maintaining peace and stability within the Nigerian federation. It is also critical to national stability. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), driven by secessionist sentiments in the Eastern region, resulted in widespread conflict and suffering (Daly, 2020). Conversely, in the post-war period, efforts to heal and reconcile the nation, such as the "No Victor, No Vanquished" policy initiated by the Federal Government, exemplified the importance of fostering unity to ensure lasting peace (Nwao-kocha, 2020). It was a crucial step towards rebuilding a sense of national identity and cohesion among Nigerians.

National cohesion is intricately linked to the principles of inclusivity and equal citizenship within Nigerian federalism (Salisu, 2002b). In a cohesive nation, all citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or regional background, feel equally included and valued (Jedwab and Kincaid, 2018; Osaghae, 1999). Historically, disparities in resource allocation and opportunities have fuelled feelings of marginalisation, leading to tensions and conflicts (Castillo, 2014). To foster national cohesion, policies and initiatives must bridge these disparities and ensure that every citizen enjoys equal access to rights, opportunities, and services (Kuwabara, 2011). Achieving inclusivity and equal citizenship is vital not only for social justice but also for strengthening the bonds that hold the Nigerian federation together. The significance of national cohesion in promoting inclusivity and equal citizenship is evident in initiatives like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), introduced in 1973 (Aremu, 2018). The NYSC programme was designed to bridge ethnic and regional divides by sending young graduates to serve in states different from their own. It aimed to promote interaction, understanding, and a sense of shared citizenship among Nigeria's youth. While not without challenges, the NYSC programme illustrates the deliberate efforts to foster inclusivity and equal citizenship by breaking down ethnic and regional barriers.

National cohesion directly impacts the effectiveness of governance and policy implementation within Nigerian federalism (Babalola and Onapajo, 2019). A united and cohesive citizenry is more likely to support government initiatives and cooperate in the implementation of policies (LeVan, 2015). Conversely, divisions and conflicts can hinder the smooth execution of government programmes. Historical examples, such as protests or strikes driven by regional or ethnic grievances, underscore the challenges of governance in a fragmented society (Suberu, 2013). National cohesion, by fostering a sense of shared purpose and collective responsibility, contributes to better governance outcomes. It enhances transparency, accountability, and citizens' trust in the government, which are essential elements of effective governance (Jedwab and Kincaid, 2018). A cohesive nation is better positioned to work collaboratively towards common goals, ensuring that policies are implemented for the benefit of all. For instance, the election of a civilian government and the peaceful transition of power were evidence of growing political maturity and national cohesion (Omamuyovwi, 2020). Despite political differences and regional interests, Nigerians have demonstrated remarkable commitment to democratic governance and the rule of law through exercising their civic responsibilities. This response to political change has been essential in sustaining democratic institutions and the effective implementation of policies for national cohesion.

On international dimension, the significance of national cohesion extends to Nigeria's global standing and diplomatic prowess (Gwar *et al.*, 2022). A cohesive nation is inherently better positioned to engage with the international community,



negotiate treaties and agreements, and present a unified front on global matters. Conversely, internal divisions and conflicts can tarnish Nigeria's image on the international stage. National cohesion amplifies Nigeria's capacity to assume a leadership role regionally and globally, contributing to regional stability and development (Oladimeji, 2021). It also bolsters Nigeria's diplomatic endeavours, empowering it to champion its interests and articulate African perspectives more persuasively on the international platform. A notable illustration lies in Nigeria's pivotal role in resolving conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s, which earned the nation international acclaim for its peacekeeping endeavours (Osakwe and Audu, 2017). Its aptitude for mediating and contributing to regional stability was fortified by its status as a relatively stable and cohesive nation.

Finally, national cohesion is instrumental in fostering a sense of national pride and identity among Nigerians (Efebeh, 2020). A cohesive nation provides citizens with a shared narrative and a sense of belonging to a larger community (Solt, 2008). Historical milestones, such as the celebrations marking Nigeria's attainment of independence in 1960 and the vibrant cultural festivities exemplified by the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), serve as vivid illustrations of when national pride and identity become most palpable. These occasions serve as unifying platforms, enabling Nigerians to unite in the celebration of their shared history and collective aspirations (Tume, 2021a, 2021b). This robust national identity not only binds citizens together but also ignites a collective passion for progress and development. It reinforces the notion that Nigerians, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds, are united in their quest for a brighter future. National pride and identity stand as integral threads within the social fabric that binds the Nigerian federation together, motivating citizens to collaborate towards common objectives and shared prosperity.

Policy Recommendations

Promoting Civic Education and National Awareness

Promoting civic education and national awareness is a crucial policy recommendation to enhance national cohesion within Nigerian federalism (Ada *et al.*, 2019). Civic education programmes can be designed to educate citizens about the principles of democracy, citizenship rights and responsibilities, and the importance of a united and diverse nation. By fostering a deeper understanding of Nigeria's history, diversity, and shared identity, citizens can develop a stronger sense of belonging and pride in their nation. Additionally, initiatives such as National Unity Day or cultural exchange programmes between regions can help bridge ethnic and regional divides, encouraging mutual respect and appreciation. Civic education should be integrated into the curriculum at all levels of education, ensuring that future generations grow up with a strong commitment to national unity and cohesion. In Nigeria, an initiative could include the establishment of National Civic Education Centres in each state, where citizens of all ages can participate in workshops, seminars, and interactive exhibits to learn about Nigeria's history, constitution, and the importance of national unity.

Encouraging Interethnic and Interreligious Dialogue

Encouraging interethnic and interreligious dialogue is essential to foster understanding and tolerance among Nigeria's diverse population (Suberu, 2013). Policy initiatives should facilitate structured dialogues between ethnic and religious groups, providing safe spaces for open discussions and conflict resolution. Historical instances of successful interethnic collaboration, such as the Yoruba-Hausa alliances in pre-colonial Nigeria or the religious tolerance exhibited in cities like Kaduna, can serve as inspiration and examples for such initiatives. Moreover, promoting cultural exchange programmes,

interfaith forums, and joint community projects can create opportunities for Nigerians from different backgrounds to interact, build trust, and appreciate their shared heritage. The success of interethnic and interreligious dialogue can be seen in initiatives like Gacaca courts, a community-driven reconciliation mechanism established to rebuild Rwanda's fractured society after the July 4th, 1994 (Ouafaa, 2021). In Nigeria, similar dialogue programmes can be developed, involving community leaders, religious leaders, and youth representatives from diverse backgrounds. Initiatives like the annual "National Peace Summit" or local-level "Interfaith Councils" can serve as platforms for constructive conversations, cultural exchanges, and conflict resolution, helping to bridge divides and promote unity.

Strengthening Social Safety Nets

Strengthening social safety nets is a policy recommendation aimed at mitigating the impact of economic and social shocks on vulnerable populations (Falola, 2021). Programmes such as conditional cash transfers or food assistance schemes can provide a safety net for those facing economic hardships, reducing the risk of discontent and social unrest. The experience of countries like Brazil with its Bolsa Família programme which provides cash transfers to low-income families (Paiva *et al.*, 2019), or India's *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (MGNREGA) (Rayappa and Bavaiah, 2021), illustrates the positive impact of targeted social safety net programmes. For instance, Nigeria should expand the reach of such programmes like the N-Power to reach more economically vulnerable groups (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2021). It is hoped that such success stories can inspire further commitment from Nigeria to pursue more policies aimed at reducing economic disparities, enhancing social cohesion, and ensuring that citizens have a safety net to fall back on in times of need.

Transparency and Accountability in Governance

Transparency and accountability in governance are fundamental for building trust and confidence in the government (Salisu, 2011). Policies should focus on strengthening institutions, promoting transparency in decision-making, and holding public officials accountable for their actions. The establishment of anti-corruption agencies, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), demonstrates Nigeria's commitment to combating corruption (Oluyitan, 2017). These agencies should be further empowered and insulated from political interference to ensure that justice is served without bias. Transparent and accountable governance fosters a sense of fairness and equality among citizens, contributing to national cohesion. Nigeria can take inspiration from countries like Botswana, known for its low corruption levels and good governance practices (Lekubu, 2019). Further, institutions like the EFCC and the ICPC should be strengthened to ensure they operate independently and effectively. The whistleblower protection policy (Gholami and Salihu, 2019) and the bill that has not yet been made law (Eme and Oji, 2021) should be attended to so that citizens can be encouraged to report corruption without fear of retribution, promoting transparency and trust in government.

Conclusion

This paper explores the significance of national cohesion in advancing Nigerian federalism and underscores its pivotal role in the nation's journey towards a more united and prosperous future. As Nigeria grapples with the complexities of its diverse society and federal system, the policy recommendations outlined in this study - promoting civic education, reducing socioeconomic disparities, encouraging



interethnic and interreligious dialogue, strengthening social safety nets, and enhancing transparency and accountability in governance - provide a comprehensive framework for fostering unity, inclusivity, and stability within the federation. Drawing inspiration from both domestic and international examples, these recommendations offer a pathway to address historical challenges and bridge existing divides. By embracing these measures, Nigeria can navigate the intricate terrain of federalism while strengthening the bonds that tie its diverse population together, ultimately paving the way for a more harmonious and prosperous nation-building journey.

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