

# TOWARDS REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT: NORTHERN NIGERIA'S CHALLENGE OF TRANSFORMATION.

By

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'If the word integration means anything, this what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brethren to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it'  
(James Arthur Baldwin)

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Operational Definitions

- *Integration* – the act of combining parts (or individuals) into a whole or group - racial, social, economic, political integration.
- *Development* is a multidimensional process of change which affects political, social and economic growth and sustainability. It directly and positively changes the quality of life and welfare of the people.
- *Transformation*- refers to structural and value changes in a new direction – the direction which would, hopefully, positively change the quality of life of the people.

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## Questions:-

- Why is there the need for Regional Integration?
- What are the objectives of the Regional Integration?
- What are the challenges?
- Are there prospects for regional transformation?
- What steps are necessary for these?

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### Suggestions

- The old North had an integrated economic and socio-political structure, which was disaggregated by the 1967 act of creation of states.
- Since 1967, the old North had become a loose aggregation of sub national units, many of which have exorted the autonomy of the states.
- The North also showed deep socio-political cleavages as evidenced by violent ethno-religious and other forms of communal violence- which have virtually destroyed any remaining integrative strands of the old North;
- For Northern regional integration for socio-political and economic development, many challenges must be tackled; new structures of relationships established; while a conscious effort must be made to honestly tackle basic problems of transformation in the North;
- The North cannot develop in isolation, nor can it afford to be the sick region of Nigeria. It must take advantage of a number of opportunities open to it.

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### THE NORTHERN REGION

- Originated from the old Northern Group of Provinces, and later formalized by the Richards constitution of 1948.
- Ahmadu Bello- tried to weld the North into a whole region in the context of ethno regional politics of the terminal colonial period.
- The 1967 creation of states –saw the emergence of 6 states from the North, later 19 states (1996).

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### IMPACT AND EVOLUTION

- Years of military rule and lid on politics of cognition and identity,
- Assertion of autonomy by new states
- Disintegration of formal Northern institutions, such as the Marketing Brands and the emergence of New Nigeria Development Company (NNDC)
- Aggressive and violent religious contestations, the sharia conundrum
- Aggressively defensive and defensively aggressive ethnicity
- The rise of hostile products of the Almajiri system.
- The Boko haram challenge and pervasive insecurity.

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### OBJECTIVE SITUATION NOW

#### The North

1. Is lagging well behind other regions or political zones in **Western Education**; Northern governments care little about this widening gap which can become socially explosive.
2. Has **High level of illiteracy** and its attendant **high level of unemployment**;
3. Has **High availability of youth for violence**, as Cannon – Fodders;
4. Has **pervasive poverty**, amidst the ‘growing’ Nigerian economy;
5. Shows **Lack of any integrative effort or will** (even by Northern governors and political leaders) to take advantage of the complementarity of economy and old integrative structures of the North;

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6. Has pervasive greed, individualism, opportunism and blatantly primitive and selfish brand of corruption, which does not promote development;
7. Has people who engage in lip service and hypocrisy especially, among leaders and followers;
8. Lack of genuine commitment to the North the definition of which shifts according to circumstances, opportunities and perceived advantages or deprivations.
9. Gross exhibitions of high level of insecurity which attenuates any meaningful development efforts.

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### WAY FORWARD

#### 1. INTEGRATIVE NETWORK

**NOTE:** That there can be no Northern Economic integration, in isolation. Currently, Northern economic development is highly integrated into the Nigerian economy.

This means

- a. That doors to other Nigerian zonal economic groups must remain open for meaningful interactions.
- b. Subnational states should continue to be the fulcrum of the Northern economic group;

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- However, issue or problem focused partnerships, should be encouraged, e.g. states with desertification, erosion, and flooding, may decide to cooperate in order to tackle the specific shared problem.
- A central secretariat for this economic integration is necessary, with professional skills etc.
- Each state government, the federal government and the private sector should contribute to the fund for this secretariat;
- A *Board of Trustees*, with a representative, (i.e, a person of integrity) from each state should be nominated by each state. There should be four members of the private sector appointed at the first meeting of the Trustees, to the membership of the Board.
- The main objectives of this initiative should be to mobilize the people for development in order to transform their lives. The Board shall therefore have the following functions:

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- Advise state governors on development issues;
- Coordinate efforts by various states in this transformation programme;
- Assist in opening doors or new opportunities for national and international investment;
- Carryout advocacy in essential areas which would mobilise the people and enlighten the public.
- Must not see itself as a supra-state political machine- must therefore be politically neutral or apolitical; and
- Should take such necessary activities, from time to time, as would lead to the achievement of its objectives.

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## CHALLENGES

Given the challenges above, it is necessary that government and various agencies deal with some issues, without which, a Northern integrative effort would have achieved little;

- a. **Education** – as a passport to the modern sector – must engage the special attention of northern governors and leaders. We need an **Education Emergency fund**. Without human capital, there can be no development.
- b. **Drastic reduction of unemployment:** angry unemployed youth can make the system ungovernable, the society insecure and the future unsure.

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- c. **Infrastructure** – power, roads, railways and others are essential for development. Herein lies the need to liaise and collaborate with the federal government.
- d. **Resolution of conflicts:** there is currently distrust among ethnic, geoethnic and religious groups, given the experiences of these past years. It is therefore imperative to:
  - **Resolve the Boko Haram** violence and the dispensation of misery to innocent Nigerian families and individuals.

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- Sort out the indigene/settler issue
- Develop an enumenical society in which all religious groups can co-exist peacefully.
- Ensure the equitable distribution of public statuses and scarce but allocatable resources, among Nigerians;
- Tackle head on, with honesty, the monster of corruption- which has destroyed the wonderful chances this country has had to develop.

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## CONCLUSION

Let me congratulate the organizers of this summit for their foresight. A prosperous Northern socio-economic zone, means a prosperous Nigeria. A socio-economically sick North, detracts from the progress of the country, and draws other subnational regions back. In addition, it creates an explosive condition for political instability future.

This is the first step. It is my hope that many more efforts at mobilization of the people for this cause would continue. With determination, and God's blessings, there is little we cannot overcome.

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As Calvin Coolidge observed:

Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people without talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts; persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan 'press on' has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.

(Calvin Coolidge)

So let us press on. May God help us in this endeavour.  
Amen.

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