

# A THEORETICAL REVIEW OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AS IMPEDIMENT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This paper is a theoretical review of ethnic identity as an impediment to sustainable development in Nigeria. Ethnic identity has continued to create wide spread division among Nigerians, bringing about instability and insecurity to lives and property. The menace has impeded the efforts toward achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper adopted the Social Identity Theory developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 as the theoretical framework. The methodology utilized in this paper is essentially documentary review of literature and statistical data analysis of ethnic identity as an impediment towards achieving sustainable development. The paper argues that with the return of democracy in 1999, the country reinforced the trend with series of violence which affect sustainable development. This created division, anxiety and fear among Nigerians resulting in ethnic killings, which hindered Nigeria's march toward sustainable development. The trend has affected sustainable development as every state of the nation is bugged by ethnic identity crisis. The trend is compounded by the so-called federal character principle or quota system. The paper concludes that Nigeria cannot achieve sustainable development with the current problem of ethnic identities and recommends the abolition of the idea of identity construction that has led to ethnic identities and hindered the achievement of sustainable development. The paper also recommends that the national assembly should repeal the Act establishing the Federal Character Principle or Quota System in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Ethnic identity; Ethnic killings; Federal Character principle; Sustainable development; Quota system.

## **Introduction**

The globalization of the world has increased the movement of people, information network and ideas, which have inextricably created new challenges in the new international security environment. Given these dynamics therefore, security is not an end in itself, but a critical means to the realization of national interests and aspirations. Various parts of Africa have experienced dangerous scenes of insecurity between communities, ethnic identity and religious groups. The role of ethnicity as a mobilizing agent is among the most important questions of this century as conflicts linked to ethnicity identities have led to significant loss of life and injuries in many countries (Onwuasoigwe 2023). It has become a major element in impoverishment, undermining human security and sustainable development.

In Africa, there have been series of ethnic identity conflicts since the mid-1960s as the continent has been engulfed in protracted and prolonged ethnic identity related and political conflicts in countries such as, Algeria, Burundi, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger Republic, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senega, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe (Aver 2020). Studies have revealed that about 45% of the world's violent conflicts are traceable to Africa with several armed groups fighting against government forces or against each other (United Nations, n.d). The pattern of these conflicts in Africa is unique and lacks semblance. Ethnic identity conflicts result in deaths, insecurity and destruction of property. Over two million people have died on account of ethnic crisis which is seen as an inherent characteristic of the African society (Orhero 2020).

The amalgamation of Nigeria by the British in 1914 brought different ethnic groups under one geopolitical entity called Nigeria. The major problem brought by this artificial creation is how to put an end to the crises of ethnic relations which it has engendered. The amalgamation was done to serve the interest of Britain without the consent of the diverse ethnic groups characterized by distinctive languages, cultures, education and religions (Ajeli, 2021). With the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed a series of conflict related to ethnic identity. The country is now struggling with the challenge of managing this ethnic identity. The ethnic identity problem has engendered perennial and intractable ethno-religious conflicts which create persistent political instability, obstruct national consensus and sustainable development in Nigeria (Dunmoye 2012).

The spate of the recent ethnic identity crisis in Nigeria has prompted policy makers, academicians, non-governmental organizations, and other concerned citizens to continuously ask

questions on the genesis of the problem foisted on Nigeria by ethnic identity. The country literally is on the brink of collapse due to the problem of ethnic identity this has posed a great security challenge. Today, ethnic identity has brought lots of division among Nigerians rather than uniting them. This crisis is further reinforced by the challenge of uneven and equitable sustainable development in various parts the country. The problem of ethnic identity, had led to the military coup and counter coups, subsequently leading to the Nigeria civil war between 1967 and 1970. The war introduced polity of diminishing state of accountability, ethical values, and corrupt practices. Since the purpose of the amalgamation was to protect British economic interests and to facilitate exploitation of the nation's resources, the Nigerian politicians who took over power from the British continued from where they stopped, thereby making the state an instrument to perpetuate corrupt practices, leading to underdevelopment.

The implication of this is the disappearance of democratic values, enthronement of political decadence and retarded development. The divisions occasioned by ethnic crisis further impacted on the level of education, thereby exacerbating fear of dominion in the post-colonial era. The division has continued to threaten to the nation's stability, even as corruption and insecurity of lives and property provided the needed justifications for the fourth military intervention in the nation's politics.

Thus, the indigene-settler divide just like ethnic identity has become easy tools for the political elite to defend their class interest. Umezina (2012), posits that the real problem associated with ethnic identity, rears its ugly head when it comes into contact with other ethnic identities. Thus, the desire to over-power and the fear of being over-powered by other ethnic groups reigns supreme. This scenario if not properly handled, inevitably results to hostilities and conflicts among ethnic groups. One of the consequences of ethnic identity is frequent crises in Nigeria which impact negatively on the country's development.

The most notable ethnic identity crises in Nigeria are the Maitatsine religious crises in parts of Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s, the 1992 Zangon-Kataf crisis in Kaduna, the 1981 Kaduna Polytechnic religious riots, and the 1981-1985 University of Ibadan Cross versus Crescent crises (Ogu & Areji 2022). Perhaps one of the crises that has had the most reverberating effect since the end of the Civil War has been the Kaduna crisis of the early 2000s (Krause, n.d). Pained by the losses, reprisal attacks occurred in some Eastern states such as Enugu, Aba and Onitsha. In Jos, Plateau State, the ethnic identity crises between the predominantly Christian Berom, Anaguta and Afizere regarded as indigenes and mainly Muslim Hausa-Fulani considered as settlers which started decades back, blossomed into dangerous dimensions since 2001

(Krause, n.d). It is also on record that the Tiv-Jukun crisis, in Taraba State is another important point of ethnic identity in Nigeria (Ishyaka et al, 2023).

Best (2005), who explored the crises arising from the indigene-settler divide, argued that the majority ethnic groups, that are more mobile, are inclined to overshadow the minority ethnic groups in their own lands, citing, the cases of the Tiv, who are a majority group in North-Central Nigeria, over the Jukun in Wukari and the Hausa/Fulani over the Kataf in Zangon- Kataf in Kaduna State. The issue revolving around the indigene-settler matter, exemplify the intricacies and contradictions inherent in inter-group relations in the country. Nigeria like other African countries, has been blamed for its inability to develop a way to accommodate the various ethnic identities that make up the country. This explains why the lackluster attitude of Nigerians in settling the ethnic identity that fueled rather than extinguished crises that are similar to the Tiv-Jukun. Ethnic identities have therefore gained more ascendancy than national identity. This negative development risks jeopardizing Nigeria's quest for sustainable development (Alubo, 2004). These centrifugal identities built around religion, ethnic groupings, 'indigeneity', 'settlement', 'nativity', 'migrants', 'non-indigenes' 'southerner', 'northerner' among others, have collectively sharpened the dividing lines among Nigerians thus making sustainable development a more convoluted task (Alubo, 2004). It is against the foregoing that this paper undertakes a theoretical review of ethnic identity and the bane of sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

This section clarifies some basic concepts used in the paper

#### **Ethnic Identity**

Within the context of this paper ethnic identity refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership. **Ethnic identity** refers to a commitment to particular **ethnic groups**. Ethnic identity is separate from one's personal identity as an individual, although the two may reciprocally influence each other. Ethnic identity is a personal, self-categorizing concept in which an individual identifies with an ethnic group and its cultural identity, beliefs, values, and origins. Ethnic identity is a very important component of individual identity. However, it also has larger societal implications. It constitutes a key element of major social and political dynamics of people.

## **Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development refers to development that meets the desires or needs of the people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is an organizing principle that aims to meet human development goals while enabling natural systems to provide necessary natural resources and ecosystem services to human beings. It is a situation where the desired result is a society where living conditions and resources meet human needs without undermining the planetary integrity and equilibrium of the natural system. Sustainable development tries to strike a balance between economic development, environmental protection, and the social well-being of all mankind.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory originated from the British social psychologists, Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. Social identity begins with the premise that individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity. The creation of group identities involves both the categorization of one's in-group with regard to an out-group and the tendency to view one's own group with a positive bias vis-à-vis the out-group. The result is an identification with a collective, depersonalized identity based on group membership and imbued with positive aspects (Turner, et al., 1987).

The theory posits that group membership helps people to instill meaning in social situations. Defining who they are and determining how they relate to others. The theory aimed at connecting cognitive processes and behavioral motivations. Initially, its main focus was on intergroup conflict and intergroup relations which more broadly hides sustainable development. For that reason, the theory was originally referred to as the social identity theory of intergroup relations. Henry Tajfel and John Turner elaborated on the theory by specifying how people interpret their own position in different social contexts and how that affects their perceptions of others (stereotyping), as well as their own behaviour in groups (social influence).

According to the theory group members may experience different kinds of identity threats leading to conflict that hinders sustainable development. Social identity is the major threat that occurs when the perceived competence of the group is devalued. Members of the group may also experience various forms of social identity threats, which take place in various ways such as when the moral behaviour of their group is called into question thereby resulting into conflicts. The latter form of threat is sometimes experienced even by group members who in no way be held personally accountable for their actions.

Social identity threat may also be experienced when a particular group is not sufficiently acknowledged as a separate entity with unique characteristics. Such group-distinctiveness threat is experienced when different groups of people are included in larger, more inclusive groups, nations, or organizations, such as members of linguistic minorities who strive for political autonomy in their domain. The threat occurs when individuals are treated as group members at times when they would prefer not to be, threatened in such manner. Acceptance threat occurs when individuals fail to gain acceptance and inclusion in the groups they considered themselves as members, such as happened in and around Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna States. To cope with identity threat, group members will respond differently depending on the degree to which they identify with the group.

The strength of the theory lies in its recognition that ethnic identity often leads to increasing crises, which in turn is a bane of sustainable development in Nigeria. Ethnic identity crisis hinders effective sustainable development in many parts of Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

The methodology utilized in this paper is essentially documentary review of literature and statistical data analysis of ethnic identity as an impediment to sustainable development in Nigeria. Secondary data were obtained from relevant agencies such as police, courts and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs). The inclusion criteria for this study are materials and statistics derived from these sources from 2010-2024, while exclusion criteria include materials and statistical analysis concerning ethnic identity below 2010.

## **Discussion**

### **Factors Responsible for Ethnic Identity in Nigeria**

There are several factors responsible for ethnic identity in Nigeria. Nigeria's history is laced with many challenges arising from unresolved national questions such as ethnic domination intimidation, marginalisation, ethno-religious crisis, unfair revenue allocation formula, ethnic militancy, corruption and terrorism amongst others. Those factors have resulted in incessant ethnic conflicts between one ethnic group or the other especially in Kaduna, Plateau, and Osun States among others, since the return of democratic government in 1999 (Awofeso, 2017). Several communities have been attacked in the south-east, south-south, south-west, northeast and north-west as a result of ethnic identity. Those attacked were perpetuated through the activities of Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) in the south-south, Movement for the Actualization of the

Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the recent Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the south-east; the Odua People's Congress (OPC) in the south-west; the Middle Belt Federation (MBF), Boko Haram (BH) in the north-east and banditry in the North-west amongst others (Adibe, 2017; Okeke, Nduba & Akam, 2019; Lugard, Zecharia, & Ngufwan, n.d). All these attacks are as result of ethnic identity. These agitations are mostly resulting from the weak nature of Nigeria.

For instance, in many states there are unusual structures which were created by the former colonial administration without regard for the existing political and ethnic divisions within their boundaries. Thus, these legal and political institutions tend to be ineffective to control ethnic identity. Ethnic identity led to military mobilization, which leads to general resistance of all ethnic groups within the state. Ethnic identity brings about conflict particularly in states where some ethnic groups are inadequately represented in elective and political appointments. The exclusionary ideology and philosophy of the current political dispensation serve as a source of ethnic conflict in many states in Nigeria (Aver, 2020).

The lack of stable and harmonious intergroup relations in Nigeria directly contributes to ethnic identity conflicts. These conflicts often arise when different ethnic groups assert their claims, especially when these claims are in conflict with one another. When these groups have the resources and organizational capacity, they may take action to assert their interests, often resulting in suppression and discrimination based on ethnicity. Political leaders and elites play a significant role in exacerbating ethnic tensions, as their tactics during the political process can trigger violent conflict along ethnic lines. This violence, in turn, hampers Nigeria's sustainable development. Additionally, the spread of hate speech and the manipulation of mass media have become tools used to intensify existing ethnic divisions and discord.

Economic challenges are a significant factor contributing to secessionist agitations and ethnic conflict in Nigeria. The stagnation, slowdowns, and eventual breakdowns in the economy have created destabilization, increasing tensions and competition among different ethnic groups. Discriminatory economic systems have led to inequities in access to resources, such as land and opportunities for economic advancement. This has generated resentment and tensions as various groups vie for better living standards. Rapid economic changes and development have intensified these conflicts, often fueling migration to urban areas. This urban migration, in turn, creates social disorder and disrupts existing structures, leading to a "survival of the fittest" mentality among ethnic groups, which undermines sustainable development in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the unequal distribution of the country's resources—referred to as the "national cake" - has deepened divisions between the northern and southern regions, and even within ethnic groups. This uneven allocation of resources has been a source of tension for years, with no widely accepted or satisfying formula for distribution. Political manipulation of resource allocation has made the issue more controversial and difficult to resolve.

Cultural factors also play a crucial role in ethnic conflict. Negative perceptions, stereotyping, and grievances related to cultural discrimination—such as religious practices, limited educational opportunities, and restrictions on the use of minority languages—have fueled ethnic tensions. Additionally, the weakening of traditional conflict resolution methods has created further opportunities for ethnic strife in contemporary Nigerian society

### **Positive Implications of Ethnic Identity**

According to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), as amended, Chapter II, Section 15(3b) states that Nigerians are obligated to ensure full citizenship rights for everyone residing in any part of the country. Citizenship, as defined in the Constitution, is a product of political struggle among various social forces and groups. As such, it is used by the state as a resource for identity mobilization (Mukhtar et al., 2019: 1024).

The absence of a tradition of respect for human and civil rights manifest itself in the creation of ethnic identity dichotomy that makes the Nigerian a foreigner once he is in the midst of Nigerians of other ethnic and/or religious affiliations.

This situation has created a crisis of identity, objectified ethnic identity conflicts, and devalued the collective aspirations of the nation, particularly where benefits and privileges are distributed disproportionately (Inyokwe, 2012). For example, countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Somalia have all experienced serious conflicts as a result of the disproportionate distribution of political benefits and privileges among ethnic groups.

However, ethnic identity exists within the broader context of nationhood. A nation exists for the survival of its people, and it is by the people that the nation survives (Inyokwe, 2012). A nation is an abstract entity without its people, and its empirical expression is revealed through the presence of both its citizens and government. Ethnic identity establishes clear criteria for membership, granting certain privileges, rights, and benefits that are not extended to outsiders. As such, ethnic identity can act as a unifying force, especially when legislation is in place to protect these rights.

Ethnic identity is inherent in all forms of human existence, from personal and family to community levels. Within the framework of ethnic identity, individuals often see each other as

brothers and sisters, sharing common goals aimed at advancing human development. Onyibor (2016) maintains that the structure and organization of ethnic identity align with the society's way of life, and individuals cooperate to ensure the progress of their communities. The emphasis in modern times has shifted from identifying with a specific family, ethnic group, or religion, to identifying with the nation as a whole. People no longer see themselves solely as belonging to an ethnic group within the country but as citizens of the nation itself.

A positive implication of ethnic identity is the understanding that individual existence is inherently tied to the existence of others. For survival, people must pursue goals and projects that support the collective survival of all. Onyibor (2016) argues that at both the individual and ethnic levels, survival is only possible when people recognize each other as ends in themselves, not merely as obstacles to achieving survival goals. Each individual is important and necessary for the realization of the broader goal of survival and freedom from ethnic conflict.

Ethnic identity can also foster a sense of national identity, serving as a rallying point for socio-political and economic development. It is the result of political struggles among social forces and groups, and thus, it is used as a resource for identity mobilization within the nation (Isumonah, 2015). Ethnic identity is crucial because it provides an umbrella for political and social inclusion, often utilized by community and political leaders. It helps shape the patterns of citizenship, emerging from a society's socio-cultural divisions—such as north-south, Muslim-Christian, Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba—allowing people to understand where they come from and their place within the larger national framework.

### **Nature of Ethnic Identity in Nigeria**

Since gaining independence, Nigeria has struggled with the challenge of ethnic identity. This issue has deeply penetrated the fabric of Nigerian society, hindering the country's path toward sustainable development (Aver, 2020). In Nigeria, ethnic identity is often associated with conflict, manifesting in a lack of love, cordiality, mutual suspicion, distrust, fear, and a general absence of understanding among the country's diverse ethnic groups (Ogu & Areji, 2022). As a result, intolerance and bigotry have become prevalent, with various ethnic groups vying for superiority, demanding greater political participation, government appointments, resource control, and even self-determination (Ogu & Areji, 2022). These tensions frequently lead to the exclusion of certain ethnic groups from political processes, based on ethnic affiliations.

This division has been closely linked to conflicts, crises, wars, clashes, and other forms of violence, including killings. It has caused fear and division among Nigerians, resulting in ethnic cleansing and the marginalization or even disappearance of smaller ethnic groups. This

pattern of ethnic discord has prevented the country from achieving sustainable development, as the impact is felt in every state. A key factor contributing to this issue is the federal character principle, or the quota system (Aver, 2020). Ironically, this principle, intended to promote fairness, has instead reinforced ethnic divisions in Nigeria. It has also fueled conflicts along the indigene-settler divide, with groups jockeying for dominance, not necessarily due to the superiority of one group's population, but because of the political and economic advantages that come with ethnic affiliation.

The resurgence of ethnic nationalism in 1999, following Nigeria's return to democracy, further exacerbated these tensions. Previously marginalized ethnic identities began to emerge more prominently, with groups such as the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC), Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC), Igbo Peoples' Congress (IPC), and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) gaining influence. Over the past decade, these organizations have become powerful vehicles for ethnic mobilization, often at the expense of national cohesion and integration. The rise of these groups has deepened the citizenship crisis, as Nigerians increasingly identify with their ethnic or regional organizations before considering their national identity. As a result, ethnic identities have taken precedence over national identity, further eroding the sense of unity necessary for national progress.

### **Ethnic Identity as an Impediment to Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

Over the years, Nigeria has experienced a high rate of crises related to inter-ethnic conflicts, political violence, kidnapping, and unlawful killings, all rooted in ethnic identity (Olowo & Ibitoye, 2020). Statistics show that from 1999 to 2015, approximately 45 ethnic identity conflicts occurred in Nigeria, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives (Dada, 2016). These violent clashes often occur between different ethnic groups, or between Christians and Muslims. As noted in Colossians 3:13, the lack of tolerance and the failure to forgive have exacerbated these tensions. Ogundele et al. (2015) emphasize that it is difficult to forgive those responsible for destroying the lives of family breadwinners. This ongoing cycle of violence threatens to undermine Nigeria's efforts toward national integration (Alubo, 2011).

Centrifugal identities based on religion, ethnic groupings, indigeneity, settlership, nativity, migration status, and regional labels such as "southerner" or "northerner" have sharpened divisions within Nigeria, making it harder to achieve cohesive nationhood (Alubo, 2011). These identities have undoubtedly become a significant barrier to national integration (Davis & Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001). One troubling example of this is the way recruitment into the civil service and admissions to higher educational institutions are often influenced by ethnic

considerations. Many argue that basing political and administrative appointments on ethnic identity exacerbates divisions and creates problems (Tijani, 2005). Ethnic identity can limit citizens' access to political power, land, and economic opportunities, especially when residency rights are granted outside one's ancestral hometown (Inyokwe, 2012).

Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria have taken on more serious dimensions in recent years, significantly hindering sustainable development (Ofili & Omoro, 2017). These conflicts—such as those between the Fulani and the Igbo, Fulani and Yoruba, Tiv and Fulani, Ogoni and Andoni in Rivers State, and Urhobo and Itsekiri in Delta State—are often rooted in disputes over land ownership and territorial control (Ofili et al., 2017). The growing intensity of ethnic identity conflicts has heightened insecurity and fueled ethnic polarization, leading to destructive tendencies that threaten Nigeria's social fabric. These conflicts not only result in loss of lives and property but also severely undermine the nation's efforts at achieving sustainable development.

### **Ethnic Identity Crisis Management Strategies and International Development**

Diversity is an inherent part of human existence, and people are born into it, live with it, and grow through it. Ethnic identity reflects the thought processes or intuitions of individuals and communities. Efforts to prevent and manage ethnic identity conflicts in Africa have recently expanded beyond the involvement of governments and intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations (2023). Countries like Burundi and Rwanda have presented examples of how carefully managed ethnic identity and political conflict can be addressed effectively.

In these cases, numerous peace and reconciliation efforts were initiated by various organizations. For instance, the Burundi Policy Forum (BPF), established in January 1995, became a key platform for sharing information and coordinating strategies. This forum brought together representatives from numerous humanitarian, advocacy, and conflict resolution organizations, along with officials from international organizations and governments (United Nations, 2023). Key contributors included the U.S. Department of State, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), USAID, the CIA, the National Security Council (NSC), the Department of Defense, and the embassies of Burundi, Rwanda, Canada, and France, among others. International bodies such as the UN Department of Political Affairs, UNHCR, UNICEF, the ICRC, and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also played crucial roles.

These collective efforts helped foster peace processes and mitigate ethnic conflicts in Burundi. Their participation was pivotal in promoting positive outcomes for the fragile peace process and the long-term stability of the country (Amadiogwu et al., 2020). Instead of simply reacting to crises, these organizations focused on preventing major conflicts from escalating. For

example, Burundi hosted an international conference on national dialogue in Bujumbura from May 15-18, 1994, as a follow-up to a Geneva symposium on peace restoration and democratic processes in the country, which had taken place in December 1993 at the request of the Burundi government (Amadiogwu et al., 2020).

Historically, the management of ethnic identity conflicts in Africa has largely been the domain of official diplomacy. However, NGOs have played an increasingly vital role, shouldering much of the responsibility for peacemaking. For example, the Burundi Policy Forum and the efforts of the Minority Rights Group USA were instrumental in supporting the UN's handling of ethnic identity conflicts in Zaire. To resolve ethnic identity conflicts in Nigeria, efforts must focus on fostering patriotism, encouraging tolerance, advocating for peaceful coexistence, and promoting adherence to democratic principles, as was done in Burundi and Rwanda. Ethnic identity-based rhetoric that fuels conflict must be abolished, as it was in these countries. In Nigeria, most ethnic groups remain deeply divided and distant from one another, which makes it difficult to manage conflicts effectively. The deteriorating living conditions in the country have only deepened ethnic divisions, with many Nigerians identifying more strongly with narrow ethnic interests. The government's failure to manage these conflicts or improve conditions has undermined loyalty to the nation, and political actors who benefit from these divisions often exacerbate tensions for personal gain.

## **Conclusion**

The paper argues that Nigeria cannot achieve sustainable development without addressing the challenges posed by ethnic identities. Ethnic identity has undeniably become a significant obstacle to sustainable development in the country. This issue has taken on a dangerous dimension, with political leaders manipulating ethnic divisions for their own political gain. If ethnic identity is not properly managed, it could become a force that leads to the disintegration of the country. While ethnic identity cannot be completely eradicated, its impact can be minimized. It is essential for all ethnic groups in Nigeria to view themselves as part of a united national structure, rather than being divided along ethnic lines.

## **Recommendations**

- (i) The paper recommends that Nigerians move away from constructing identities based on ethnicity, as this will help the country achieve sustainable development.
- (ii) The paper also recommends that the National Assembly passes laws to abolish the federal character principle or quota system, as these mechanisms hinder sustainable development

- by promoting ethnic divisions. The federal character principle, originally introduced to address ethnic imbalances, has instead reinforced ethnic identities, which impede progress.
- (iii) Additionally, the federal government should hire qualified and effective educators to promote inter-ethnic dialogue, fostering unity and peaceful coexistence among Nigerians.
  - (iv) Nigerian leaders must reject ethnic identity politics by refraining from making statements or engaging in hate speech that deepen ethnic divisions. This will help reduce ethnic conflict and promote peace, which in turn supports sustainable development.
  - (v) Governments at all levels should adopt a neutral stance and avoid favoring any particular ethnic group. They must view themselves as leaders for all Nigerians, not just for their own ethnic constituents.
  - (vi) Democratic elections and political appointments should be based on merit, not influenced by regional or ethnic considerations.

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