

**COMMUNICATION FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION, POLITICAL  
MOBILIZATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: A COMPARATIVE  
ANALYSIS OF OBASANJO'S LETTERS TO JONATHAN AND BUHARI**

**Israel OGUCHE**

Department of Mass Communication,  
Kogi State University, Anyigba,  
Nigeria.

[oguche.israele@gmail.com](mailto:oguche.israele@gmail.com)

+2348069222599

**&**

**Akoh Abu IBRAHIM**

Department of Political Science,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria,  
Nigeria.

[ogijo2016@gmail.com](mailto:ogijo2016@gmail.com)

+2348063167222

**Abstract**

This study analyzed the contents of the letters written by former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo to former president Jonathan and current president Muhammadu Buhari, x-raying the consequences of their decisions and governance while in power. The central idea of this study focused on the national integration, interest and governance and political mobilization through communication, as it affects the process of governance in Nigeria. The key objectives include; examining the place of communication in national integration, ascertaining the role of political mobilization, finding out the role of communication in good governance and examining the implications of Obasanjo's letters on the two presidents' leadership styles. Conceptual and empirical literature were cited in the study, while democratic-participant theory propounded by McQuail was used to explain the study. In methodology, qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the latent and manifest contents of the two letters, in relation to national integration, political mobilization and good governance. After the analysis, it was found out that the two letters compared showed calls for national integration and political mobilization, since it galvanized support for the change of government in 2015 and calls for same in 2019. However, while that of Jonathan was a call for correction by Obasanjo, Buhari's was a total call for national coalition for political change. Based on this, it was recommended, among others, that national interest should be placed ahead of personal or party interest by leaders and good governance should go beyond ethnicity and regional interest. A combination of these and more will contribute to rapid growth and development in Nigeria.

**Keywords: Communication, national integration, political mobilization, good governance, national interest, politics.**

## Introduction

Communication is an indispensable part of the human race. Issues, conflicts, organizations, politics, governance and any other development issues are discussed through communication, as a transactionary concept and a unifier. In Nigeria, the political class utilize communication as tools for expression to the electorates vis a vis the people about their interests, ambition and goals towards actualizing their dreams. For all these roles played by communication, its place in credibility, accountability in governance cannot be overemphasized. For this reason, it becomes a tool for engendering national integration, political mobilization and good governance in a country. Political emancipation and mobilization are two intertwined and interwoven concepts which promote national integration, through communication as a transactionary tool.

As a nation, Nigeria has encountered numerous tribulations and crises through her turbulent years of post-independent initiatives and self-rule. Some of the recurrent problems and national issues were occasioned by the country's peculiar circumstances, while others emerged as part of the normal evolutionary and developmental processes. Nonetheless, the country has remained one indivisible nation with functional state and federal systems as well as the presence of fairly active news sources. As far as its economic system is concerned, the national economy is described as a mixed one that allows for a free enterprise, the use of market forces, and foreign exchange market.

Nation-building or national integration has long been seen as an important focus for postcolonial African governments. As some scholars noted, upon African decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s, social scientists were concerned about the need for what was then called "national integration" in societies with multiple ethnic, religious and racial cleavages (Chikelu, 2004). Entman (2016) has argued that this concern has been more recently resurrected by Chikelu (2004), Egbon (2012) and others who have advocated for national integration as a policy to promote state building in a continent now notorious for and rife with political instability and economic throwback.

Like India, a federal state with its pluralized ethnic, religious and cultural status, Nigeria is a deeply divided and plural society (Diamond, 2014). Many scholars have tried to put a figure to the number of ethnic groups within the polity at well over 250 (Graf, 2013). Diamond (2014) contends that "Nigeria has a unique problem not experienced by any state in the world past or present. The problem is that of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal forces on the central issue of the nation, bound in freedom, peace and unity where justice reigns."

Although the British colonialists and the Nigerian elite that succeeded them used ethnicity to perfect their political strategies and notch up some socio-economic and political gains, as Gabriel & Akindele (2015) observed, poverty and ineffective governance in Nigeria today have further sharpened ethnic divisions leading to misunderstanding between ethnic and religious groups who see themselves as rivals that must be surpassed by any means, thus

hampering national integration. They add that because the Nigerian state is beginning to lose legitimacy and authority, the fear of uncertainty has increased to the extent that citizens now resort to self-help, seeking security and solidarity in their own ethnic, religious or regional affiliation and identity. Thus, a new dimension to Nigeria's ethno-religious violence is the increasing recruitment and mobilization of ethnic and regional militias, vigilantes and other armed groups: the Oodua People's Congress in Yoruba land, the Arewa People's Congress in the north, the Bakassi Boys in the east, the Egbesu in the south, and the emergence of a supercilious army of terror merchants who represent contending interests to Nigeria's detriment. The implication of these hydra-headed conflicts is that national integration suffers, there is increasing insecurity of citizens and property in the country, foreign investment is deterred and economic development is stymied.

However, The World Bank (2009) report noted that Nigeria's recent development priorities were guided by a new orientation to economic recovery, self-reliance, and social justice, but the strategic framework established by the political leadership did not fully include all of the national institutions and stakeholders, especially the press (news sources). As a recent study of The World Bank (2009) emphasized, an essential focus of development communication in the African nations is the strategic use of news sources to disseminate critical information for the benefit of internal and external stakeholders. Over two decades ago, leading political scientists Charles (2005), and Entman (2016) described the mass media as powerful institutions and agents in contemporary societies, which should be involved more and more in creating, processing, managing, and diffusing knowledge and information in a country in search of establishing democratic values. Additionally, Diamond (2014) acknowledges that in the quest for sustainable political or economic development, the press has been credited with playing a central analytical role in serving as surrogate companions that explains events and issues for intellectual stimulation, public debate, and collective action.

As a result of information availability and sophisticated analytical frameworks, citizens in a developing nation become less resistant to or more acceptable of development news, policy reforms, and government actions and implementations (Osita, 2010). In a comprehensive report, The World Bank (2009) justifies the role and contributions of indigenous press in nation-building, ethnic integration, and national unity, stressing the utility of news sources in political socialization in emerging economies. Importantly, the press provides the level of political analysis which informs and empowers citizens in independent and collective decision-making and in feeling that they have a stake in national development agenda. Therefore, Nigeria's quest for sustainable development governance is achievable to the extent that the national press can provide constructive coverage of the overall scheme of democratic governance.

### **Problem Statement**

Most African countries, Nigeria inclusive are still on the part of struggle to attain the desired level of development and this is why they have been tagged third world or developing nations by the West. Some of the characteristics or features that are predominant in these so

called developing countries according to Osita (2010), include; Low level of capital accumulation, the dominance of agriculture and petty services, rapid population growth, exports dominated by primary commodities, unemployment, national income distribution, poverty weighted growth rate, lack of basic welfare needs, stages of development and structural change, industrialization and growth. In corroborating the above assertion, Asobie (2012), says ‘the structural and infrastructural problems, official corruption, unstable political and economic policies, growing insecurity, and unstable power supply are the major factors negating the course of development in third world countries.

The need for national integration in a diverse country such as Nigeria cannot be under-estimated. This is also necessary with political and governance style needed for sustainable development in Nigeria. There has been several interventions from present and past leaders of the country in galvanizing the citizenry for political awareness, mobilization as a way of achieving good governance. Many of such calls have fallen on deaf ears over the years, especially because of the increased corruption and lack of integrity in governance and allocation of the nation’s wealth which widens the gap between the rich and the poor constantly. Communication has been the main stay in propagating democratic ideals for national integration and cohesion, political mobilization for change in leadership and the need for good governance. This role by communication has placed it at vantage position to affect the leadership changes in recent past.

In 2013, former president Olusegun Obasanjo wrote a letter to the then president Goodluck Jonathan which he tagged, “Before it is too Late”. This letter marked the beginning of the coalition and mobilization against the Jonathan government which was toppled at the wake of the 2015 general elections. Similarly, Obasanjo wrote another letter to the current President Muhammadu Buhari tagged, “The Way Out: A Clarion Call for Coalition for Nigeria Movement”. The two letters were written to different serving presidents by the same person of Obasanjo who once ruled Nigeria as both Head of State and an executive President. Against this backdrop, this study compares the two letters and considers the role of communication in achieving national integration, political mobilization and good governance in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the study**

The aim of the study is to enhance orientation on national integration, political mobilization and good governance among Nigerians.

The specific objectives are;

1. To examine the place of communication in national integration from Obasanjo’s letters to both GEJ and PMB.
2. To ascertain the role of for political mobilization as contained in the Obasanjo’s letter to GEJ and PMB.
3. To find out the role of communication in good governance, as indicated in the letters to GEJ and PMB.

4. To examine the implications of Obasanjo's letters on the two presidents' leadership style.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Clarifications**

Integration, which literally means assembling parts into a whole, has been defined variously (Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010). The one employed depends on the observer's perception of what constitutes national integration and the strategy for achieving social stability and social progress. National integration refers to the process of bringing diverse cultural and social groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of a national unity (Adejoh, 2015). The term presumes the existence of an ethnically plural society in which each group is characterized by its own language, or other self-conscious cultural qualities, which generate the problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality, which overshadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. Adejoh (2015) defined integration as a progressive removal of antagonisms and reduction of cultural and regional decisions and differences in the process of creating a homogenous political unit.

From the foregoing, national integration refers to the process of building a just social unit which confers on every inhabitants within it a sense of belonging, a satisfactory level of participation in decision-making and development and a change to share from the resources of the society commensurate with decent and acceptable living. Sustainability of establishments and their objectives has become increasingly significant because of the growing impact of globalization and interdependence of businesses and markets (Kothari & Cooke, 2011). Communication networks have expanded tremendously and have enhanced the quality of life and the rapidity of business operations across nations. For example, early diffusion studies (Kothari & Cooke, 2011; Schramm, 1964; Rogers, 1973; UNESCO, 1970) synthesized a strong justification for the critical role of the press in a responsible democratic governance both in developed and in developing nations. The preceding studies substantiated the contributions of news sources in national development, and stressed why the mass media cannot be divorced from the implementation of development objectives and initiatives. Further, with the advent of new media technology in the twenty-first century, there has been a strong speculation that this advancement in communication network, especially the Internet, will be used to sustain public interest in politics and current affairs, and to increase participation of stakeholders in political strategies as well as foster their commitments to democratic values (Gyimah-Boadi, 2014).

National interest is a concept that is often inconsistent with the action of leaders. Therefore, it is difficult to give a precise definition of the term. In spite of that national interest is defined as the general long term and continuing purpose which the states, nation and the government see themselves as serving (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). The national interest of a state is rooted in the social consciousness and in the cultural identity of a people. In other words, the national interest of a state is a product of social values which the people have. In practice, the national interest of a country is synthesized and checked by political

leaders or policy makers. That is why national interest is defined as “what policy makers say it is”. The national interest of a country is the interest of its leaders. It may also be the interest of a group such as the rich and poor classes depending on which class is in power. It may as well be the interest of the ruler. In his address at the All Nigeria – Conference on Foreign policy NIPPS, Kuru on 7th April, 1986, President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) maintained that he would like to think of national interest as national security interest. The term national interest is characterized with inconsistency. Politicians do hide under the cover of national interest to project and protect their own individual, or group interests.

Furthermore, national interest refers to those values or interests which a nation so cherishes that she would rather go to war than compromise (Graf, 2013). Included here would be the overall well-being of the citizens, as well as the protection of the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity. As Osita Eze has argued, “The national interest is inextricably wedded to the leadership of a nation and apparently depends on the aggregate need disposition, ideology and perceptions of the role of incumbents”.

The democratic-participant media theory was propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1987. The theory came into existence as a response to the elitist nature of the press. The theory according to Folarin (1998), insist that the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and hegemony in media system be broken down so as to guarantee media access for all potential users and consumers. The democratic participant is important in empowering national development. The relevance of this theory lies in the general shift by most countries undergoing development towards participatory actions facilitated by participatory development communication. To participate effectively in the national development process the tenets of this theory, there is need for total participation in governance among the Nigerian people in order to achieve greater development for the country. This can be achieved through national consciousness, national interests, national integration, irrespective of diversity on ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. This advocating by the Obasanjo letters to both Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari calls for national cohesion towards achieving greater heights in governance and socio-economic development.

Researchers, political historians, and scholars have used such terms as the conglomerate society, unity in diversity, the vertical-horizontal mosaic, the multi-national state, and the geographical expression to represent some conceptual attempts to provide an appropriate identification for the country (Diamond, 2014; Melkote, 2011; Nwanko, 2012). As a country composed of millions of people who speak diverse languages, socialized in unique tribal and cultural backgrounds with distinct religious values and beliefs, the great hope and promise that Nigeria represents to the entire African continent, specifically to the sub-Saharan region, appear unrealistic and unattainable, and it remains a disturbing issue to Nigerian citizens and external stakeholders. Additionally, what remains a source of serious concern for most Nigerians and development researchers is the country's capacity to harness and manage her vast human and natural resources competently and productively in order to achieve sustainable development and modernization in the twenty-first century, which will benefit this generation of Nigerians and their posterity (Megwa, 2009; Okoro, 2009). While the country continues to experiment with democratization with varying results, much effort

still needs to be devoted to building a strong civil, equal, and economically vibrant nation. Evidently, more citizen participation in the democratic process is urgently needed as well as the creation of an enabling environment for equal representation of ethnic groups and the presence of independent communication channels or press for objective coverage and dissemination of information.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative content analysis method was used for this study. This is because the two letters are handy and can be analyzed based on the manifest and latent content as it relates to national integration, political mobilization and good governance. Data were analyzed using the texts in the letters and interpretation follows suit, in line with the objectives of the study. Each of the issues raised was content analyzed from the two letters to show the intentions of the writer in national interests.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

Data for this study were collected from the two letters written by Olusegun Obasanjo, former Nigerian president between 1999 and 2007. His letters were born on the wake of the need for good governance and credible leadership from each of the two presidents, whom he was seen as being instrumental in their emergence as the nation's presidents. First, he gave full support to Goodluck Jonathan after the latter took over following the death of his boss, Umar Musa Yar'adua in 2010. He then was supported by Obasanjo to contest and continue in office. This gave Jonathan the victory in 2011 ahead of the other contestants, including Muhammadu Buhari, the current president. However, the Obasanjo support and solidarity enjoyed by Jonathan turned sour when he (Obasanjo) felt the nation needed better hands and stood vehemently against the re-emergence of Jonathan in 2015 presidential elections. This he expressed by writing a letter to the president then, titled: "Before it is too late", calling on all and sundry to rise and vote against Jonathan whom he accused of taking Nigeria back to the Abacha era. His words: "I could sense a semblance between the situation that we are gradually getting into and the situation we fell into as a nation during the Abacha era." This and more points he raised against the then president Jonathan."

On the other hand, in 2018, four years after Obasanjo's letter to Jonathan, the same writer picked his pen again and wrote to the current President Muhammadu Buhari, who was accused of several issues against the nation's interests through the letter. Specifically, Obasanjo puts it this way:

The lice of poor performance in government – poverty, insecurity, poor economic management, nepotism, gross dereliction of duty, condonation of misdeed – if not outright encouragement of it, lack of progress and hope for the future, lack of national cohesion and poor management of internal political dynamics and widening inequality – are very much with us today.

In terms of length Jonathan letter contained more pages than that of Buhari but both dwell on the same issues of security, good governance, national cohesion, management of national resources, all-inclusiveness in government and above all, national interests. Titled: “The Way Out: A Clarion call for Coalition for Nigeria Movement”, the letter to PMB shows a clarion call to the president to be aware of the indices of failure of governance under his watch. The letters have common characteristics which include, non-personal inclinations, lack of shift of focus from the national goal, focus on federal structure and maintenance of existing status quo in a one geopolitical entity called Nigeria. By non-personal, it means the writer attached no personal interests in both letters but focused on the problems facing the country, while he delves into other issues of national importance. In this study, the two letters were compared in terms of national integration, national interest, good governance and the place of communication in achieving development objectives.

### **Communication and National Integration: Obasanjo’s letters to both GEJ and PMB**

For there to be any laudable sustainable development within a nation there must be communication targeted at giving the masses necessary information which will enable them to participate fully in the development process. Development is a continuous process, therefore whatever is put in place today should not hamper future progress and continuous development, hence the term sustainable development (Anaeto & Anaeto, 2010). Because of the transactional nature of communication, there is sharing of information through participation.

More than ever before, past and present leaders of Nigeria have consistently indicated a commitment to a sustainable national and political development, and have introduced various measures to support their development objectives, social policies, and economic agenda. But as The World Bank (2009) report strongly indicates, the country has not been able to achieve its seemingly ambitious national development programs because of misplaced focus on tribal and ethnic issues and politics, rather than focusing on an integrated national development that would unify the country towards a common national purpose. For example, development objective in the country shifted in recent times from rural areas where most of the country’s approximately 100,000 communities reside to urban communities. Indeed, the uneven distribution of national programs and building of infrastructures in different parts of the country accounts for the growing imbalance in the pace of development in rural and urban communities.

Communication is at the centre of transactions in all spheres of leadership, governance and political developments. In Nigeria, politics remains a word game and communicating it becomes a great deal especially as it pertains to the diverse nature of the country, leading to conflicting and competing interests among the major actors. In the letters written by Obasanjo, he brought out the marks of national integration as a focal point of Nigeria’s political journey and place same ahead of personal interests of the individual receivers – Jonathan and Buhari as the case may be. To Jonathan, Obasanjo stated thus:



For me, I believe that politically, it was in the best interest of Nigeria that you, a Nigerian from minority group in the South could rise to the highest pinnacle of political leadership. If Obasanjo could get there, Yar'Adua could get there and Jonathan can get there, any Nigerian can. It is now not a matter of the turn of any section or geographical area but the best interest of Nigeria and all Nigerians. It has been proved that no group — ethnic, linguistic, religious or geographical location — has monopoly of materials for leadership of our country. And no group solely-by itself can crown any of its members the Nigerian CEO. It is good for Nigeria.

The above statement leverage all Nigerians as having equal opportunities of becoming president some day if they so desire, a position meant for all citizens as puts by Obasanjo. In addition, the emergence of Jonathan was a different angel to Nigeria's political history, since it was the first time a minority ethnic group was producing a leader against the long time rule by the majority ethnic groups. This dominance over the years has made the leadership struggle a privilege enjoyed only by the majority ethnic groups especially Hausa/Fulani and the Yorubas, leaving the Igbos with the wounds of the civil war in the 1960s. This development put the Igbos and the minorities in the same category since they too could not have access to leadership. The essence of communication in political cohesion becomes palpable in line with the letter written in order to call of attention of the presidents to national interests and goals.

One important thing that affected the communication level between Obasanjo and Jonathan was the fact that Jonathan was said to be running for only one term, a creed he broke according to Obasanjo:

A leader must lead, no matter whose ox is gored. In the present circumstance, let me reiterate what I have said on a number of occasions. Electing Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, in his own right and on his own merit, as the president of Nigeria will enhance and strengthen our unity, stability and democracy. And it will lead us towards the achievement of our Nigeria dream. There is press report that Dr. Goodluck Jonathan has already taken a unique and unprecedented step of declaring that he would only want to be a one-term President.

This is however different from that of Buhari whom Obasanjo believed could be a perfect replacement to Jonathan back in 2015. Unfortunately, in his letter to Buhari, Obasanjo reiterated his commitment to credible leadership that could lead to national integration and or cohesion, as well as recognition of all the stakeholders in the Nigerian project. Amid this, there is also the need for security and inter-ethnic tolerance, in the face of massive killings and genocide by the Fulani herders across Nigeria. Obasanjo restated his goals of writing letters to Buhari by referring to his earlier support in 2015, as having the thoughts of national interests, against selfish desires of few as follows:

All these led me to take the unusual step of going against my own political Party, PDP, in the last general election to support the opposite side. I saw that action as the best option for Nigeria. As it has been revealed in the last three years or so, that decision and the subsequent collective decision of Nigerians to vote for a change was the right decision for the nation. For me, there was nothing personal, it was all in the best interest of Nigeria and, indeed, in the best interest of Africa and humanity at large.

Also, his reason for the letters was to jaw-jaw and to avert another disaster in Nigeria's history where citizens' rights will be swept under carpet against the ideals of nationhood. Thus communication becomes the principal tool with which such fit can be achieved, a major reason for the letters to the presidents. National integration and cohesion was at the centre of the letters, however, while the letter to Jonathan was based on his (Jonathan's) quest to contest for another tenure, the letter to PMB was based on the indices of governance which according to Obasanjo failed to meet up with the standards of leadership that can drive a way forward for Nigeria, hence "a clarion call", according to Obasanjo.

### **Communication for political mobilization: Obasanjo's letters to GEJ and PMB**

One very important factor in communication is the fact that it is a veritable tool for political mobilization, needed for a change of government, political orientation and development (Nwanko, 2012). In the letters to both presidents, Obasanjo never minced words about the needed for political mobilization. Or simply put, one cardinal reason for writing those letters is political mobilization against the incumbent presidents. To Jonathan in 2014 and to Buhari in 2018. While the political mobilization included all the words – positive or negative used for the ousting of former president Jonathan, the words used in the letter to Buhari include the need for ousting of Buhari in 2019, making it mandatory on Nigerians to allow people take deliberate decisions towards voting out Muhammadu Buhari in 2019.

Writing to Jonathan, he stated ten reasons necessitating his actions; including

“...everything must be done to guard, protect and defend our fledgling democracy, nourish it and prevent bloodshed. Six, we must move away from advertently or inadvertently dividing the country along weak seams of North-South and Christian-Muslim. Seven, nothing should be done to allow the country to degenerate into economic dormancy, stagnation or retrogression. Eight, some of our international friends and development partners are genuinely worried about signs and signals that are coming out of Nigeria.”

From the reasons adduced by Obasanjo, the Jonathan administration needed to brace up and turn the tide from the day it was elected into power, unfortunately the country was divided sharply along regional, ethnic and religious sentiments, for political reasons. The mobilization was shown in the parts of the letter where Obasanjo stated categorically that there was need for a change in leadership, which made him and other politicians galvanize

support for the emergence of Buhari to replace Jonathan in 2015. In the Buhari letter, Obasanjo stated: “As it has been revealed in the last three years or so, that decision and the subsequent collective decision of Nigerians to vote for a change was the right decision for the nation.” Based on this, Obasanjo kept the dream of one Nigeria alive and stated his position to Buhari as he did to Jonathan back then. In addition, in stating the reasons for mobilization against Buhari, Obasanjo puts it this way:

The situation that made Nigerians to vote massively to get my brother Jonathan off the horse is playing itself out again. First, I thought I knew the point where President Buhari is weak and I spoke and wrote about it even before Nigerians voted for him and I also did vote for him because at that time it was a matter of “any option but Jonathan (aobj).

In line with this, the need for political mobilization becomes clear since Buhari has performed below the expectations of those who voted for him, according to Obasanjo. For this reason, he pointed out the weak points of Buhari, against the strong points or ills of Jonathan, unfortunately this has not been changed or has worsened under Buhari, hence the need for another political mobilization before 2019.

Political mobilization is the centre of political change and leadership ideology. This is more so, especially with the situation in Nigeria, where several political interest groups give support for their candidates and selfish interests against national interests (Melkote, 2011). This however, is arguably the most cog in the wheel of political emancipation among Nigerians, since national interest tend to be the least thought out plans in the minds of the people. While Buhari remains in power, there is the heavy change of mind especially across ordinary Nigerians to adhere to the mobilization for a new Nigerian political landscape in order to change the current government of Buhari and opt for a new and youthful government. In the two letters to the two presidents, while that of Jonathan was an advice subject to change before the 2015 elections, that of Buhari was a clarion call for another political institution where all Nigerians are represented against the “lopsided government” of Buhari. He further clearly stated the words for mobilization thus:

I, therefore, will gladly join such a Movement when one is established as Coalition for Nigeria, CN, taking Nigeria to the height God has created it to be. From now on, the Nigeria eagle must continue to soar and fly high. CN, as a Movement, will be new, green, transparent and must remain clean and always active, selflessly so. Members must be ready to make sacrifice for the nation and pay the price of being pioneers and good Nigerians for our country to play the God-assigned role for itself, for its neighbours, for its sub-region of West Africa, for its continent and for humanity in general.

The current mobilization is expected to produce the new political party where every part of the country will be represented across board, and to provide an alternative to the current APC and PDP struggle, since the two have failed Nigerians, according to him.

### **Communication and Good Governance: Obasanjo's letters to GEJ and PMB**

One of the cardinal objectives of the letters to both GEJ and PMB include the place of good governance ahead of any other interest in order to sustain national interest and actualize the Nigerian dream. In addition, there is the principle of core values needed for sustainability of the nation's interest, according to Obasanjo. Such include the identification of the various groups, regions, faiths and regions of the country, since the nation is based on these divisions and need to move on the lane of development against all odds. Based on this principle, the letter to GEJ indicated and Obasanjo clearly stated:

And no resort to sentiments and emotions or religion and regionalism is self-serving, unpatriotic and mischievous, to say the least. It is also preying on dangerous emotive issues that can ignite uncontrollable passion and can destabilize, if not destroy our country. This is being oblivious of the sacrifices others have made in the past for unity, stability and democracy in Nigeria in giving up their lives, shedding their blood, and in going to prison. I personally have done two out of those three sacrifices and I am ready to do the third if it will serve the best interest of Nigerian dream. Let me appeal to those who have embarked on this dangerous road to reflect and desist from taking us on a perishable journey. With common identity as Nigerians, there is more that binds us than separates us. I am a Nigerian, born a Yoruba man, and I am proud of both identities as they are for me complementary. Our duties, responsibilities and obligations to our country as citizens and, indeed, as leaders must go side by side with our rights and demands.

The mixture of both tribe and national interest go concomitantly, since they are needed for recognition and patriotism of any individual, as indicated by Obasanjo in the above statement. It then suggests the fact that Jonathan was expected to have put into consideration the various political differences and the consequence of actions and inactions as a leader, in a bid to avert certain dangers on the country. In writing to Buhari, Obasanjo also did not hide his thoughts on the need for good governance in terms of accountability, trust, rule of law, equity and justice. However, he queried Buhari in some areas such as nepotism, tolerance of corrupt people and lack of singleness of purpose for the country in general. According to Obasanjo:

...President Buhari has come out more glaringly than most of us thought we knew about him. One is nepotism bordering on clannishness and inability to bring discipline to bear on errant members of his nepotism court. This has grave consequences on

performance of his government to the detriment of the nation. It would appear that national interest was being sacrificed on the altar of nepotism.

Again, the case of Abdulrasheed Maina was pointed as one of such situations where Buhari seem to be protecting his cabal of violators of government protocols and systemic abuse. Obasanjo stated further:

What does one make of a case like that of Maina: collusion, condonation, ineptitude, incompetence, dereliction of responsibility or kinship and friendship on the part of those who should have taken visible and deterrent disciplinary action? How many similar cases are buried, ignored or covered up and not yet in the glare of the media and the public?

From the above, it is clear that Obasanjo pointed out real areas of clannishness and insincerity about Buhari as against the earlier expectations before Buhari was supported by Obasanjo in 2015.

As Osita (2010) and Adejoh (2015) observed, Nigeria's efforts at achieving national integration have remained largely unrealized. In their words, the history of democratization in Africa, in general, and Nigeria, in particular, has remained the history of national disintegration. Thus, the integration crisis facing Nigeria is manifested in the minority question, religious fundamentalism and conflicts, ethnic politics, indigene-settler dialectic, resource control, youth restiveness and militancy and the clamour for a (sovereign) national conference or conversation about the terms of the nation's continued unification. The status quo has convulsed the productive sector, limited the impact of government's economic programmes on the people, threatened food insecurity, complexified social insecurity, deepened the deterioration of physical and social infrastructures, distressed the living standards of a vast majority of Nigerians, militated against the educational system and resulted in the ostracization of the generality of Nigerians and their exclusion from the political and economic space, among other glitches (Megwa, 2009). The entire social matrix in Nigeria is characterized by inter and intra-community, inter and intra-ethnic, and inter-and intra-religious strife. Some of these conflicts are as old as the history of the Nigerian nation.

### **Implications of Obasanjo's letters on the two presidents' leadership style**

Development studies (Kothari, 2011; Gyimah-Boadi, 2014; Gabriel & Akindele, 2015; & Diamond, 2014) of recent years indicate that responsible and effective governance is a sine qua non for sustainable democracy and political stability in developing nations of Africa, especially in a country like Nigeria, where the citizens and other significant stakeholders have been clamoring for policy reforms, improved quality of life, and a more robust media presence. Communication scholars and political analysts (Entman, 2016; Asobie, 2012; Gyimah-Boadi, 2014) explain that over the past two decades participatory democratic process has taken a dramatic turn in the emerging democracies in the wake of citizens' agitation for good governance, expanded ethnic integration, independent and vibrant

press, increased citizen participation, freedom of speech, and informed public debate. This same factor instigated Obasanjo's letters to the two presidents, as indicated that above all other things, he put Nigeria on top of his agenda having sacrificed so much for the country through unlawful jail term and institution of democratic ideas both as a military officer and as an elected president.

One significant factor in the Obasanjo's letters to Jonathan and Buhari is the fact that Obasanjo still has relevance in Nigeria's political decisions, electorate winning and candidacy endorsement across the length and breadth of the country. This significance was downplayed by Jonathan in 2014/15, when he thought Obasanjo's letter may not prevent his chance of winning the elections. However, things fell apart and the centre of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) could no longer hold, culminating in the emergence of political influence and internal ramblings, results of which was the defection of five ruling governors and leaders of the PDP in their states, led by Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State. Initially, the Obasanjo gambling seemed not to be working since some juicy positions were been given to those who defected to the ruling party by the then president. However, the meetings upon meetings by major political stakeholder across the country gave a heavy push to realization of the "Before it is too late" letter to Jonathan by Obasanjo. It rather came too late for Jonathan to galvanize the needed support for the country's leading political party, since the change in the leadership and interests within the PDP caucus became intermittent especially at the national level.

Again, the Obasanjo letter to GEJ was a warning sign to him to prepare and galvanize the support of members of the ruling party and Nigerians in general towards achieving greater political future, instead of the then internal crisis rocking the PDP. He further stated that Jonathan should call all the aggrieved stakeholders of the party to order and champion a specific future for the country, a development that would strengthen the nation.

Let me also appeal to and urge defected, dissatisfied, disgruntled and in any way displeased PDP governors, legislators, party officials and party members to respond positively if the President seriously takes the initiative to find mutually agreeable solution to the current problem for which he alone has the key and the initiative.

Obasanjo's position on the letter was to ascertain the progress so far made by the Jonathan administration to strengthen the nation's democracy considering the price paid for it by several others in the past, including him. Hence, referring to himself as a father of the current politicians showed he had a bias towards the success of Jonathan administration. This he further stated:

I have heard it said particularly within the Presidency circle that the disaffected Governors and members of PDP are my children. I begin to wonder if, from top to bottom, any PDP member in an elective office today is not directly or indirectly a beneficiary, and so to say, my political child. Anyone who may claim otherwise will be like a

river that has forgotten its source. But like a good father, all I seek is peaceful and amicable solution that will re-unite the family for victory and progress of the family and the nation and nothing else.

One important angle to the letters is that while Obasanjo's letter to Jonathan was based on corrections and a call for change of attitudes in governance, that of Buhari was a call for a total change of government since Buhari could not meet up with the tenets of leadership as expected by Nigerians, according to him. Then, the point of departure indicates national interest for good governance and political interests for sustenance of democracy. In the letter to Buhari, he further stated:

This Coalition for Nigeria will be a Movement that will drive Nigeria up and forward. It must have a pride of place for all Nigerians, particularly for our youth and our women. It is a coalition of hope for all Nigerians for speedy, quality and equal development, security, unity, prosperity and progress.

From the statement, it could be viewed that Obasanjo had already taken a position as to what would happen to topple the Buhari administration with a moderate Nigerian ideological based leadership, where problems of national development are solved. Such problems as identified by Obasanjo include "poverty, insecurity and despair". In addition, Obasanjo posited that the Coalition for Nigeria, which he would form would galvanize support from across the country in order to foster good governance and bring the country back together beyond the divisive tendencies of Buhari led federal government.

Coalition for Nigeria must be a Movement to break new ground in building a united country, a socially-cohesive and moderately prosperous society with equity, equality of opportunity, justice and a dynamic and progressive economy that is self-reliant and takes active part in global division of labour and international decision-making.

To achieve this dream, the Coalition for Nigeria (CN) becomes a necessary tool for championing a good cause for Nigerians in general since national interest has been undermined under the Buhari government to the detriment of the Nigerian people.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has been able to bring out thematic comparative analysis of the various issues which led to writing of letters to former President Jonathan and President Muhammadu Buhari, by former President Obasanjo of Nigeria. The essence of this study was to bring to the fore the key issues of poverty, inequality, corruption, insecurity among other issues affecting Nigeria, still under the watch of each of the presidents written to. While the letter written to Jonathan was about correction and forward upward movement for the country, that of Buhari was to create a total solution different from Buhari's current leadership – a sort of loss of hope that Nigeria can be greater under Buhari. Based on these premises, the two letters considered issues germane to the nation's interest, across all divides and the need to

have credible leadership to enable Nigeria compete with any growing and economically viable country on earth. The comparative and thematic analysis of the contents of the two letters in terms of communication for national integration, political mobilization, governance and implications for leadership, shows that Obasanjo's letters were focused on moving Nigeria forward, as against personal or political aggrandizements. Communication is also proven to be the centre-piece of political mobilization since the letters have implications for survival of Nigeria, galvanizing the citizens to follow the ideas raised by Obasanjo.

Therefore, the following recommendations have been made;

- ✓ That the president maintains national interest ahead of tribal or regional interests, as shown in his cabinet.
- ✓ The Nigerian leadership should place Nigeria's interest instead of personal interests. Through this, patriotism and commitment from the citizens will be achieved.
- ✓ Political appointments should cut across the various states and regions on relatively equal status. This will lead to national cohesion and integration, instead of lopsided appointments.
- ✓ There should be no sacred cows in the fight against corruption. With this, there is need for prosecution of corrupt officials irrespective of their affinity with the president or any other government official.
- ✓ Security challenges such as the Fulani herdsmen/farmers crisis should be tamed in order to control enmity among the people. This should be done with all sincerity of purpose putting the nation first in all things.
- ✓ The president should consider appointing intelligent Nigerians into various positions to render services to the nation. This should not only be based on their contributions to political parties' victory at the polls.



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