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Ethnic and Religious Conflicts and it's Impact on National Development

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Abstract

This study is on ethnic and religious conflicts and its impact on national development. The study was carried out because Nigeria today, ethno-religious conflict has been a recurrent and common phenomenon. The study used conflict theory to analyze the subject matter. It was found that Nigeria can only achieve national development if the challenge of ethno-religious conflicts is reduced. It was recommended that both federal, state governments and religion leaders both Muslim and Christian should develop other strategies like external assistance to take full account of the political, ethnic and religious dynamics in order to reduce ethno-religion conflicts and the occurrence of the phenomenon. There is need to create room for interethnic and interfaith dialogue, this will promote and protect the rights of all citizens irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class and age and preventing insecurity and Federal, state, and local governments should address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, in order to reduce conflict.

Keywords: Ethnic, Religious Conflicts, National Development

Introduction

In Nigeria today, ethno-religious conflict has been a recurrent and common phenomenon. According to Odey (2005) This ethno-religious conflicts is Not actually peculiar to Nigeria nor a phenomenon of recent origin, because from time immemorial, there has been ethnologious conflicts as described in both the bible and Koran (Gberevbie, Shodipo, & Oviasogie, 2023). The persistent ethno religious crisis in Nigeria and the

enormous security challenges it poses has made the country a breakable state. It is observed that ethnicity has caused ethnocentricity in Nigeria which ethnic groups or its members instigate to see that one group is superior to all the other, the mentality is even displayed in the socio-economic relations among various ethnic groups. This has become a common practice in Nigeria to have settlers within a cultural milieu developing cooperative and communities within the host community where they settled and creating boundaries and barriers that separated them from the most community and thus makes the process of acculturation a near impossibility (Adesiyan & Ojuola, 2012).

According to Alemika (2015) ethnic and religious conflicts results to several negative consequences such as loss of lives and property, population displacement and traumatic experiences, poverty, diverse deprivation such as lack of access to education, health care facility, employment opportunity and denial of human rights among others. Also trust between and within groups and communities are destroyed thereby undermining inter and intra community cooperation and alliance that may promote community development and unity. It has been observed that it is very hard in Nigeria to have ethnic conflicts which will not end up as religious crisis. According to Oladosu (2013) the fact that Nigeria is a plural polity has long been acknowledged. The introduction of sharia legal system has introduced another dimension into the whole farce. While the Muslims justifies its introduction as part of the dividends of democracy, the Christians see its introduction as contrary to the spirit of secularism as provided for in section 10 of the 1999 constitutions, which states that 'the government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as a state religion.

The February and May 2000 conflicts cannot be divorced from the spate of conflicts between the Muslim Hausa-Fulani and the Christian ethnic minorities in the state. Often religious differences have been evoked to explain these bloody clashes.

Since the 1914 amalgamation of the northern and southern regions of Nigeria by the British colonial government, Nigerians have continued to debate the issues of peaceful coexistence among the various ethnic groups on the one hand, and between Christians and Muslims on the other. Nigeria has been deeply enmeshed and suffused in ethno-religious conflicts characterized by genocidal attacks, maiming and killings of several person's, loss of business investments, industries and property worth several millions of Naira, Within the space often years, several violent ethno-religious conflicts have been reported in several state of Nigeria. Furthermore, these violent conflicts have compelled many Nigerians to attempt a redefinition of their identity as fallout of emotive feeling and perceptions (Williams, 2018).

The violent conflict which has remained a recurring decimal has severally threatened the nascent democracy, national security and the unity of the country and has brought the nation to the brink of disaster. A number of reasons have been given as causes of ethno-religious conflagrations in Nigeria. Ethno-religious entrepreneurs who fan the embers of violent ethno-religious conflicts in the past are evidently mobilizing negative ethnicity,

religious schism, whip sentiments and pitch one ethno-religious group against another. Also, competitive partisan political activities are used as avenues through which groups are mobilized, identities rigidly reinforced, often infused with excessive religiosity (Aniako, 2011). Furthermore, a large proportion of the youth who are able-bodied but idle, unemployed, frustrated and aggrieved with the social system are willing and ready to be recruited and mobilized to engage in violent ethno-religious conflicts because such offer them the opportunity to break into public and private property and cart away whatever they can find. In addition, the recurrence of the violent conflicts has been blamed on significant gap in the inability of the security agencies to guarantee security of lives and property as well as bring those responsible for the conflict to book (Gberevbie, Shodipo, & Oviasogie, 2023). Expectedly, the trend, dimension and casualties associated with the circle of violent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have generated serious concern locally and internationally. The orgy of violent conflicts apart from being condemned by all has generated calls from the local and international arena on the need to address it. The phenomenon of ethno- religious conflicts in Nigeria has generated sustained academic interest evident in the number of extant literature in relation to the issues. The nature, scale, forms, propellants and consequences of ethno-religious conflicts have been examined.

Ogbeidi, (2018) evaluated the nature of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Odey (2005) examined the implications of religious conflicts for national development in Nigeria. Saadu (2004) has analyzed the current trends of ethno- religious conflicts in Nigeria. Fayeye (2006) reviewed inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria. The challenges associated the solutions of ethno-religious conflicts and national development in Nigeria will be critically analyzed. This study is tends to fill this gap in knowledge.

Concept of Ethnicity

According to Adesiyan and Ojuola (2012) they opined that ethnicity as a shared cultural identity, involving the same practices, initiations, beliefs and linguistic features passed over from generation to generations. Etymology Online (2019) described the word ethnic which originated from Latin (ethnicus), or Greek (ethnikos), both of which referred to it as for nation, national or people. It was later adopted by grammarians to be pronounced as ethnos, which means band of people living together, nation, people, tribe, caste. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019), ethnic is an adjective and it is defined as something related to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background. In an eloquent style and exhaustive effort at explaining the term ethnic within the context of group of people: it is observed that ethnicity is close to Max Weber's conception of a subjective belief in common descent, ethnicity embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion; it covers 'tribes,' 'races,' 'nationalities,' and castes (quoted in Isah, Dando and Mukhtar, 2018). Isah (2018) described ethnicity as a concept which can best be understood within the context of people or group.

Concept of Religion

Religion has been variously defined as a body of truths, laws and rites by which a man is subordinated to transcendent being. Ayu (2014) religion denotes a set of symbolic forms and actions that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence. Drawing similar concern, Alemika, (2015) conceptualized religion as system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting mood and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Ogban-iyam, (2005) maintained that religion is one of the phenomena that is often misunderstood in the analysis of interpersonal activities, especially violent conflicts in Nigeria. In many instances, religious riots provide grounds for economic, political, psychological and sociological redress for looting, intimidation and controlling the affairs of co- religionists and non-co-religionist and even that of the hated co-religionists. Threats are purportedly to be issued to one religious sect when adherents of another religious sect occupy the advantageous position within the social production process. When this happened conflicts and violence is endangered. It is usually within that context, that the religious violent become rampant.

According to Bala and Usman (2000) in his popular book titled: ‘‘manipulations of religion in Nigeria’’, believes that religion is invented as a powerful weapon to control the people politically and economically. Religion is a latin word relegere meaning ‘‘join or bind together’’ that is to say, certain people that are joined by principles, values or covenant towards the ultimate reality (Aniako, 2011). The term religion derived its name from the Latin word religare (which implies to read or pursue together; the same origin goes to legible and intelligent), or rather generally accepted from the term religare (to tie back, to find fast). Abdul (2012) described religion as an identity issue, which implies solidarity and setting boundaries between those who are consider believers and those that are not. This deals with issue of sentiments, and norms that are result of shared experiences. Religion has evoked man since time immemorial to attempt to work out their relationship with supernatural beings or powers often regarded as God’s. Absolute to this regard is the interaction between religion and the society within which it functions. According to Odey (2005) conceptualized religion as system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting mood and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

National Development

Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) described national development as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country. It is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people, namely, by providing social amenities like good education and pipe-borne water.

In the same vein, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) maintained that the people must be at the center of all development (UNDP, 2018). The World Bank (2018) also asserted that investing in people, if done rightly, would provide the finest foundation for lasting socio-economic development. It further noted that all people have the same basic needs in form of clean water, fresh air, comfortable housing, etc., which must be met if development is to take place.

Nature of Religious Conflicts and it impact on Nigeria National Development

Abubakar (2019) defined religious conflict as the struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, status and power in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize or eliminate their rivals. This definition very much mirrors the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, as the groups compete for political and economic power, as well as land and water resources. Since independence from the British in 1960, the country has had many religious crises, which have persisted into the 1990s and 2000s.

Examples are the Kafanchan-Kaduna crisis of the 1980s and 1990s; the Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000 and the Bauchi riots in 2001, both caused by the introduction of Sharia law in those states; as well as the 2001 riots in Jos, caused by a governmental appointment (Çancı & Odukoya, 2016). Hundreds of lives were lost during these conflicts and the effects reverberated beyond state borders. Since 2008, Boko Haram has been an increasing threat to national security. The terrorist organization is ranked the 4th deadliest terror group in the world and aims to establish an Islamic state in northern Nigeria. It opposes the westernization of the country, to which it links Christianity.

The struggle of Nigeria government to establish free and just societies has been hindered by lack of a genuine national cohesion since the 1914 amalgamation (Ayu, 2014). Since 1914, the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the differences in historical development of the people, their religious beliefs and customs and the people themselves do not show any sign of wiliness to unite (Ajayi, 2014).Nigeria unity is only a British intension for the country. The responsibility of ensuring successful genuine national cohesion is the responsibility of all and sundry regardless of ethnic and religious diversities Ethno-religious conflict has affected the fabrics of genuine Nigeria national integration and thus, a threat to the stability, development and future of the state. Ethno religious conflict has deepened the north-south dichotomy. The north-south debacle has made Nigeria a theater of conflict interest. The south, dominated by the Christians and the north, dominated by the Muslims have created an interface between domination and influence of these two religions. Ethnic sub-nationalism has today complicated the Nigeria political interplay (Williams, 2018). Politicians and elite use the aggregate interest of protecting the Christians in the north gather support and influence. The phenomenon of a patriotic Nigerian has not been realistic; Plural loyalties and citizenship identities along ethnic and religious lines continued to play a dominant role in the Nigeria State.

Ethnicity and Religion have become the basic problem of north-south dichotomy employed as a fundamental political factor. Nigeria Politics even when pitched on other lines of (North-South divide), always ends up being largely about Christianity and Islam. 'Religion factors become dangerous when they are linked to politics but even more so when they are linked to ethnicity and North-South Division' (Strategic Conflict Assessment Report, 2003). Sustaining a pluralistic and heterogeneous society can be upheld through unity in diversity. In the light of recent happenings, Nigeria operates on the verge of diversity in unity. Several ethno religious conflicts have occurred due to the inability to tolerate others ethnic identity and religion or religious perspective, lifestyle, political views and ideas.

National cohesion is rooted in the ability to tolerate others. Conflict itself is an evident of human and social forces relation but the management of this violence remains paramount before it degenerates into warfare. Ethno-religious conflict poses threat to sustainable democracy and development. The nature of governance and the conduct of election in Nigeria have become worrisome (Saadu, 2004). These democratic processes are exhibited within ethno-religious ideas, which have appropriately leads to underdevelopment, democratic retrogression, and lack of democratic consolidation. Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria can be described as a cycle of bloodletting. The plural nature of Nigeria reflects the weak state of the country to guarantee fundamental liberties and right, security, dignified existence for its populace, distributive justice and essences of social contract (Ogbeidi, 2018). Ethno-religious pluralism becomes a problem in Nigeria when opportunities in life and access to important socio-economic opportunities are dependent on membership of particular ethnic and religious group. Jakob (1995) defines ethnicity as groups which see themselves as constituted by the real or imagined bonds of a common decent religion, language, culture and history.

Nexus between Ethno-Religious Conflicts and national Development in Nigeria

It is imperative to know the various ethno-religious conflicts and socio-economic development that have swept across this country in the past three decades (Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2011). Religion and ethnicity have been a major source of conflict that has threatened the unity of Nigeria right from the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria in 1914. Northern axis of the country have not only hindered the nation's socio-economic and political development but also put to question the peaceful co-existence of the two dominant religions in Nigeria (Islam and Christianity)(Abdul, 2012). The consequential enormous loss in human and material resources has continued to register its multiplier impacts on all aspects of the nation's socio-political, economic and infrastructural development. These conflicts have had massive negative consequences on the economy, and especially on the poor masses, which are yet to be measured with a view to finding appropriate policies that will improve the situation. Destruction of human and physical capital, disruption of economic transactions, increased cost of conducting such transactions, to distortion of resource allocation by the state. Writing on the adverse effects of conflict on development, here marked that peace as opposed to conflict is increasingly perceived necessary for human development. He added further that

broad economic development and prosperity are possible only in the presence of positive peace, as opposed to the presence of war.

Ethno-religious identities have become disintegrative and disparaging social rudiments menacing the peace, stability and security in Nigeria. The frequent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes have posed a major security challenges. The long protracted ethno religious crisis leads to destruction of lives and properties. The number of lives and properties consumed because of these crises cannot be statistically determined. Onwumah (2014) posited that in economic terms, ethno-religious conflict damages resources and facilities, which took the government time to acquire. No foreign investor would like to invest funds in a country that is prone to communal and ethno-religious conflicts. Ethno-religious conflict has a devastating effect on Nigerian socio–economic structures and infrastructures such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Burning of schools, churches and mosque, destruction of community projects are problems that do not only affect the community involved but compiled the national problem of Nigeria underdevelopment. In the agriculture sector, farmers desert their farm lands to safety zones where there is no probability of getting new farmland, food insecurity and prices increases as a result of farmer inability to farm. This has a great deal of influence on Nigeria agricultural sector, which has been the mainstay of the economy. Ethno-religious conflict also leads to psychological problems. Victims of ethno-religious conflict suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS).

Also, Alemika, (2015) further asserts that conflict periods bring forth the worst instincts and impulses in man. Socio-economic vices such as increase level of crime rate and struggle over scarce resources. In post ethno-religious conflict, actors in this conflict remain reservoirs of ethno-religious knowledge of factual or distorted information. The aftermath of these conflicts disrupts social relationship as actors see no reason to live happily together with one who destroys one family and society. Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have presented many challenges that border on security and the corporate existence of the country which is the fundamental reason for the adoption of a federal system. In almost every parts of northern states of Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts occur in an alarming rate in the past three decades and the probability of future occurrence remains high amidst socio-economic and political strife facing the country.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is conflict theory.

Conflict theory

Conflict theory as propounded by Alegbeleye (2014) believes that competition is constant and, at times, an overwhelming factor in nearly every human relationship and interaction. Competition exists as a result of the scarcity of resources, including material resources, money, property, commodities, and more. Beyond material resources, individuals and groups within a society also compete for intangible resources as well. These can include leisure time,

dominance, social status, sexual partners, etc. Given conflict theorists' assumption that conflict occurs between social classes, one outcome of this conflict is a revolutionary event. Conflict/Marxist theoretical perspective shares the same assumptions concerning the nature of the society and ethno-religious conflict. Conflict theory on the other hand emphasizes conflict as the hallmark of the society (Yecho, 2005).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is believed that ethno-religious conflicts cause hindrance to social life, loss of economic sources of livelihood and psychological trauma. It is quite evident that ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria have fueled insecurity, violence and have succeeded in driving Nigeria into further poverty and reduce socio economic development. Nigeria is now labeled one of the poorest countries of the world despite its abundant human and material resources. The crises has further succeeded in driving away most investors from Nigeria and existing ones have since folded and settled in other more secured African countries. Billions of naira that meant to develop and establish industries, infrastructures and schools has been diverted towards fighting ethno – religious conflicts, insurgency and militancy. It is firmly believed that more reliance on mediation and dialoguing, especially at the grass-root levels would go a long way in curbing this turbulent societal menace in Nigeria. Besides, ethno religious conflicts brings about disruption of social lives of Christians and Muslims and destruction of worship centers, revealed reduction of economic resources and properties of individual families which bring about loss of livelihood.

Based on the above, the following recommendations were raised in this study.

1. Both federal, state governments and religion leaders both Muslim and Christian should develop other strategies like external assistance to take full account of the political, ethnic and religious dynamics in order to reduce ethno-religion conflicts and the occurrence of the phenomenon.
2. There is need to create room for interethnic and interfaith dialogue, this will promote and protect the rights of all citizens irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class and age and preventing insecurity and Federal, state, and local governments should address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, in order to reduce conflict
3. Government should design and implement a community-centered program on disarmament that focused on improving community security.

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