Causes And Impacts Of Ethno-Religious Crisis And National Development: A Case Of Plateau State

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Abstract

The spate of ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria is fast becoming a permanent feature despite the several measures taken to curb it. This phenomenon, is certainly not limited to Nigeria, but, also to some other Sub-Sahara African countries. A major defect of this is that it hinders national development and integration. The study investigated the causes of ethno-religious conflict and its effect on national development. Purposive sampling method was used to select respondents for the study to enable the researchers' select equal number of men and women of appropriate age. Questionnaires were distributed to 800 respondents comprising 400 males (50%) and 400 females (50%) from nine local governments in Plateau state, Nigeria. The mean age of the respondents was 24.89, SD =5.89. The result indicated that social, political, and economic factors contribute greatly to ethno-religious crisis which hinder national development. The study went ahead to make some recommendations, one of which is the need to articulate ideas and plans on how to deal with the issue of poverty and unemployment.

Keywords: Ethno, Religious, Conflicts, National Development, Integration.

INTRODUCTION

Ethno- religious conflict means a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another (such group in a multi ethnic and multi religious society) is characterized by lack of cordiality and mutual understanding "driven" by, suspicion, fear, and a tendency towards confrontation. The nature and composition of the state are very important and central to the nature of the relationship that exists within it. If it is an unstable, hegemonic, and illegitimate contraption; there is often the tendency to instability and chaos arising from the unhealthy rivalry that would always be built up within it. On the other hand, if it evolved on the platform of consensus and fair play, there is tendency to have a serene domestic politics. The Nigeria situation is such which boycotted the due course of legitimization at formation and this posits serious consequences on its stability at the present moment. The problem was further compounded by intense use of state authority to cover up this malaise which has impacted on the various segments of society. This has led to a catalogue of ethno religious crises in the country even after the return of democratic civil rule in 1999. According to Salawu (2010), the Nigeria state comprised of over 400 ethnic groups belonging to several religious sects. Nigeria, since independence has

remained a multi-ethnic nation/state which has been grappling and trying to cope with the problem of ethnicity on the one hand, and the problem of ethno-religious conflicts on the other. The phenomenon of ethnicity and religious intolerance have led to incessant recurrences of ethno-religious conflicts which according to Salawu(2010) have given birth to the formation of many ethnic militias like the O'dua Peoples Congress (OPC), the Bakassi Boys, the Egbesu Boys; the Ijaw Youth. Congress (IYC) the Igbo People Congress (IPC) the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); and the Ohaneze Ndigbo (Daily, Trust 2002). The emergence of these ethnic militias has led to frequent ethno-religious crises with more devastating consequences.

Since the return of democratic civil rule, ethno-religious conflicts have been on the increase despite the strong optimism that the enthronement of democratic rule would avert ethnic and religious conflicts. Salawu (2010), posits that about 40% of ethno- religious conflicts are credited to the fourth Republic of Nigeria. Observers have described it as a permanent feature of the Nigeria state. The issue has permeated the landscape from the colonial period to the present time. The dominant and religious groups treat each other with suspicion and the different religious world views clash at the slightest provocations (Adeyemi; 2009).

Successive government regimes have introduced several measures to check this ugly situation with varying degrees of success. Similarly, the present fourth republic governments have adapted so many means but, these seem to be elusive goals. This was what actually informed the study. Again, the violent nature of ethno- religious conflicts and the devastating consequences on national development and integration make it a relevant topic for discussion. Furthermore, the spate of ethno religious conflicts in recent times, no doubt, has great negative implication on the economy of the country and this makes it an important issue for discussion. This phenomenon is certainly not limited to Nigeria, other African countries that are multi- ethnic and multi- religious have also developed deep cracks as a result of ethnic conflicts and, therefore, demands urgent action to mend it, this also informed this study.   However, it is against this background that the paper examines the causes of ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria and its impact on national development and then suggests measures to curb this recurrent and seemingly permanent feature of the Nigerian state. The recommendations hopefully, would be of immense benefit to Nigeria and other multi- ethnic and multi- religious countries experiencing this ugly situation.

THE PROBLEM
The Nigeria state has been plagued with the persistent problems which had claimed many lives, and properties, and also threatened directly or indirectly the existence of national development and integration. These conflicts have resulted in hatred among the ethnic and religious groups in the society. In addition, the conflicts have handicapped the socio economic and even political activities thereby hindering peaceful co-existence of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Consensus in the literature on ethno-religious conflict is that ethno- religious conflict is a permanent feature of the Nigeria state (Salawu, 2010; Akinrinade; 2000; Irobi, 2010; and Adeyemi, 2007)**.** According to Adeyemi, the character of the Nigerian state is responsible for the country's deepening ethno- religious contradictions. This plural nature accordingly, originates a constant feeling of distrust between the component units and the fear of one ethnic or religious group dominating the other. Conversely, the   expectations that the

problem would be resolved with the emergence of the democratic civil, enlightened, and unfettered- society that is able to cultivate a culture of tolerance within its various components were defeated.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, frustration aggression theory of Feirabend and Feirabend (1972) and chock (1996) and conflict theory were adopted. The exponents of conflict trap theory (Collier et al 2003) attributed a number of interlocking factors to conflict. According to them, conflicts in multi-ethnic group are enduring possibly on account of their ready vulnerability to the rallying massaging and mobilizing of ethnic sentiments for both the warring groups and the government. In addition, in a plural state, especially where the populations are aggrieved, conflict usually becomes an effective strategy for pursuit of their interest and goals. In this theory, a causal link has been drawn between unfulfilled rising expectation and violence. It is contended that tension or violence arises from unfulfilled expectation to people who had experienced hardship or enslavement but, a new regime suddenly promised enhanced material condition only for them to be deprived of what has been promised. Again a relationship was drawn between relative deprivation and violence. However, the sense of deprivation in relation to those around them is believed to nurture violence (Dowse and Hughes 1982). However,the "Frustration –Aggression" explained that poverty is one of the genesis of ethno religious conflict. The theory postulates that ''Aggression'' is always the result of "Frustration". Frustration may lead to other modes of behavior. The argument of this theory is that people will become angry when they do not get what they want or are prevented from getting what they want or are deprived of what they have opportunity of getting.

METHODS

Area of study

The focus of this study was Plateau State. Plateau is situated in the "middle belt" regions.(and is known as) "The Home for Peace and Tourism", created on 3rd February, 1976 and is made up of seventeen local governments. Plateaus is divided into three senatorial districts namely Jos North, Jos East, and Jos south.(http//www. Plateau state gov.org) . It is located on the Jos plateau at an elevation of about 1, 238 meters, (14, 062 feet) above sea level. In recent years, it has suffered violent clashes between its muslim and christian populations and that is the major reason why we have selected it to be our case study (Wikipedia; the free encyclopedia).

Sample size and sampling technique

A sample of eight hundred (800) respondents was drawn from Plateau state. The mean age of the respondents was 24.89 and SD = (5.98). The sample was made up of 302 (37.75%) respondents from the urban areas and 498 (62.25%) from the rural areas. About 60% are married while 40% are single. They are a combination of christians and muslims. Slightly less than half were employed. (46%), 15.7% were students while 38.5% were unemployed.

Administratively, Plateau State is made up of seventeen local government areas, namely. Barkin, Ladi Bassa, Bokkes, Jos East, Jos North, Jos South, Kanam, Kanke, Langteng North, Langten south Mangu Mukang, Pankshin, Qua' pan, Ruyam, Shendam and Wuse. A multi stage sample plan that involved successive random sampling to choose

local government areas and respondents was done. This however, provided three urban local governments, namely, Jos East, Jos North and Jos South and six rural local governments, namely; Bassa,Riyom, Bokkos, Kanam, Quanpan and Langtang. During the sampling, we purposively chose 400 males and 400 females of appropriate age from both the urban and rural local government areas. Data were administered and collected from the respondents by trained research assistants. Focus group discussion was also organized in the rural and urban local governments to know if the responses in the questionnaires would be consistent with the focus group discussion. The questionnaires were structured in such a manner that ensured that objective responses would be obtained from the respondents. As a result, some vital questions were deliberately repeated to ascertain their consistency. We adopted Okoye's (2003) grouping method in the focus group discussion. Each session was made up of eight respondents of the same sex, same socio cultural background and same cultural orientations. There was a one all-male and one all-female session in the urban area and another one all-male one all-female in the rural areas.

MEASURES

To capture respondents view on ethno-religious crises in Nigeria, the implication on national development and integration. Respondents were asked to answer Yes, No, and don't know to the following questions.

(1)   Have you heard of or witnessed ethno religious crisis?.
(2)   Do you think that the enthronement of democracy would avert or reduce ethnic and religious conflicts?
(3)   Do you think that the country's colonial rule and plural nature of the state contribute to ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State?
(4)   Do accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination etc contribute to ethno-religious conflict?
5)   Is political factor one of the major causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State?
6   Do Social factors like unemployment, poverty, illiteracy contribute to ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau state?
7)   Do you think that security forces are useful instruments in quelling crisis in Plateau State?
 8) Do Ethnic and religious militancy and sects contribute to ethno religious conflicts in Plateau state?
..(9) Do Settlers Syndrome causes ethno-religious crisis in Plateau
10)   Does ethno-religious conflict hinder national development and integration?
(11)   Do you think ethno-religious conflict discourages the influx of investors in crisis prone area?

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Percentages, means and standard deviation of respondents view on ethno-religious conflict and implication on national development.

(N-800)   TABLE ONE.

Items	Yes Frequency	%	No. Freq.	%	Don't	%	Mean	Std. dev.
1	704	88	96	12		-	2.14	.875
2	766	95.7	16	2.0	18	2.3	2.02	9.19
3	704	88	80	10	16	2	2.14	.875
4	320	40.0	96	11.9	385	48.1	1.64	.685
5	675	72.9	225	28.1	-	-	1.96	.664
6	704	88	96	12.0	-	-	1.72	.665
7	240	38.0	431	53.9	129	16.0	1.86	.665
8	720	90.0	80	10	-	-	1.64	.685
9	431	53.9	249	30.0	120	16.1	1.86	.665
10	559	69.9	176	22	66	8.1	2.14	.875
11	766	95.7	16	2.0	18	2.3	2.02	9.19

Results from the study revealed that the majority of the respondents interviewed had witnessed ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria. About 88% claimed to have witnessed that with a mean of 2.14 and standard deviation of .875. (Question 1). Similarly, the majority of the respondents interviewed purported to have witnessed ethno-religious crisis in Jos. Some said that they had witnessed it in Kaduna, Enugu, and Anambra states. In fact, a whopping percentage believed that it was a terrible experience and stated categorically that they would not want to experience it again but also lamented on the recent frequent attacks by "Boko-Haram" In question no 2, about 95.7% with mean of 2.02 and SD-9.19 claimed that they strongly believed that the enthronement of democracy would avert ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. In question no 3, about 88% also claimed that the country's colonial rule and plural nature of the Nigeria state contribute to ethno-religious crisis with mean of 2.14 and standard deviation of .875. In question no 5, more than half of the number (72.9) with mean of 1.96 believed that political factors were the major causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Although, this is not an overt majority but it did appear that more than half of the ethno-religious conflicts experienced in Nigeria were politically caused. Moreover, 38% of the respondents with mean of 1.82 and SD,.684 believed that security forces were not useful instruments in quelling crisis in Plateau state. During the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the investigator had to explain to some members of both groups the various measures taken by government to quell the crisis and how they operate. In both the rural and urban groups, participants felt that both measures had not yielded positive results. Two of the participants in the urban group said that these measures were good if strictly adhered to. They tried to explain the importance of these measures but that notwithstanding, participants still felt that these measures had no long term effect. However, more than half of the respondents strongly disagreed with the activities of the security forces (question 7).They posit that security forces possess negative stereotype in quelling crisis since they were not trained to manage crisis. Some were of the opinion that they were not very useful instrument as their activities were coercive in nature. In some cases, they quelled the crisis but, did not serve as permanent agent of change rather they were more of "short term crisis management".

Similarly, about 704 respondents answered that social factors like unemployment, illiteracy and poverty tended to promote ethno-religious crisis.(Question 6). 88% of the respondents also believed that social factors contributed to ethno - religious crisis in Nigeria. Salawu (2010) in his search for the cause of ethno religious crisis discovered that the failure of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governments, forge national integration and promote what could be called real economic progress through deliberate and articulated policies has led to mass poverty and unemployment. This has resulted in communal, ethnic, religious and class conflicts that have characterized the Nigerian nation. According to Salawa, poverty and unemployment have therefore, served as nursery beds for many ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria because the country now has a reservoir of poor people with warmongers as mercenary fighters..

It is important to note that about 69.95% of the respondents with mean of 2.14 believed that ethnic, religious factors and sects contributed to ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. From the empirical example obtained from the field, one could link the causes of ethno-religious conflicts to unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, and factors such as political, and economic. These, nonetheless, have created opportunities for Nigerians to be in disagreement with one another at the slightest provocation. About 50% answered that settlers' syndrome causes ethno- religious conflict. Majority of the respondents (69.9) were of the opinion that ethno religious conflicts hindered national development and integration. It should be understood that the widespread violence among the various ethnic groups is a manifestation of these cleavages which threaten the political and economic stability of Nigeria.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study investigated causes of ethno-religious conflicts and their implication on national development. The study has yielded important findings showing that there is need to urgently articulate better measures of solving ethno-religious conflicts in this country. The findings of the study have shown that there is an expectation that did not come true. For instance, majority of the respondents expected that the enthronement of democracy would have averted/reduced ethno- religious conflicts. But, on the contrary, the nascent democracy has been witnessing serious upheaval in the ethno-religious conflicts. Between May 1999 and December 2002, there were about forty ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. This seems to imply that Democracy may not be working as it should. This suggests that if Nigeria continues in this way, it may find itself at a crossroad where national integration and development would be adversely affected as a result of ethno-religious conflicts. The democratic dispensation brought with it changes in the value system. Therefore, things that were highly valued before (eg life) were no longer of great importance today. Love for religion had made people not to think about the adverse effects of their actions. This being the case, ethno-religious conflict is fast becoming a seemingly permanent feature of the fourth republic and if left unchecked may result in serious economic distortions in the country.

The findings also show that majority of the respondents actually agreed with the findings of some scholars like Mimko 1996, Nnoli 1994,Irobi 2010,Ochoche 2002, Maguballc 1969, Moroegbe and Omohan 2005and Ibenwa and Ngele 2010 as to the plural nature of the Nigeria state as the cause of ethno-religious conflicts. This is in line with our theoretical framework and is encouraging in that it shows that Nigerians are aware of the problem faced by the plural nature of the country. From the findings, one can also deduce that the activities

of the security forces in quelling crises were not very useful. This agrees with Salawu's finding (2010). On this note, we recommend that the establishment of Panel of inquiry which was the second management strategy would yield better results if properly managed. We suggest a situation where ethnic leaders, religious leaders, national chiefs etc would be co-opted in the conflicts resolutions. The first and foremost thing is to find out from the parties involved the reasons for the ethno- religious conflicts. This should be brought to the fore so as to bring permanent ends to ethno religious conflicts. The relevant government step of establishing national council of traditional rulers is a step in the right direction. The second step is to work out modalities on how to take care of the problems so identified. This would go a long way in building bridges between religious and ethnic divides..

The negative impact of unemployment, illiteracy and poverty was also observed by some Nigerians like Obasanjo 2004, Babanginda 2002, Masari 2006, and Fatima 2010.This finding is reassuring in that it shows that Nigerians are aware of the negative impact of "Ethno-Religious" conflict on national development. According to these scholars, the impact of this inspired violent encounter consisting of the following: waste of enormous human and material resources, threat to security, lives and property, disinvestment of local and foreign companies with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy. There were empirical instances like burning of Jos ultra modern market (2002), cattle market in Onitsha (2006),and bombing of several churches and offices at Abuja,Yobe, Plateau, Kano, Kaduna etc which claimed many lives . One should note that "job seekers" are always disposed to fight at the slightest provocation. Therefore, the fact that they are poor and unemployed may be the overriding factor that is forcing people to engage in ethno-religious conflict. Government introduced a cluster of poverty eradication programmes, which accommodated everyone. Unfortunately, only those who are connected and knew how to play their "cards" well benefitted from these programmes. There is need for government to urgently address this problem. One of the first steps towards this is to minimize the bureaucratic bottlenecks that accompany the poverty eradication process. Government should also consider taking census of the core poor in the rural and urban Nigeria so as to adequately provide for them. To this end, it is suggested that government should build industries in urban and rural areas, encourage agriculture which is the main stay of the rural people, and provide support for private initiatives in services for the unemployed. There is virtually no private sector participation in service provision for the unemployed. Therefore, supports for private initiatives should be provided to assist reduce unemployment and poverty in Nigeria.

According to Salawu (2010) the civil society and the Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's) have special roles to play in conflict management. The NGO and civil society should be encouraged to embark on research and programmes of environment, religions and peace education for neigbourhood communities (Enukara 2005: 633). Salawu recommended that the NGO's should serve as facilitators of dialogues between conflicting groups. We welcome this idea. Furthermore, the public complaint Bureau in each state should be strengthened so as to encourage the parties in dispute to lay-bare their grievances for onward transmission to appropriate government agencies for necessary action. Distribution of economic resources which was found to be often skewed in favour of a particular group, pushing marginalized groups to use their ethnicity to mobilize for equality should be discouraged. Ensure that political, social, and economic development strategies are integral part of a well-focused approach for conflict prevention, management, and peace building

efforts. In this sense, immediate attention needs to be paid to laying the foundation for durable peace, security, stability and development.

Again, power sharing mechanism which was enshrined in the Nigeria's constitution has been thwarted as we operate one party system ever since the return of civil democratic rule. There is urgent need to address this issue.

Eradication of ethnic and religious militancy like the Odua peoples congress, Boko-Haram etc. Creation of affirmative action packages for disadvantaged groups is very important. We recommend for further studies on this.

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