

EVALUATING ETHNIC AND RESOURCE CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA AND CHALLENGES FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

The present Nigerian problems are rooted in the country's historical development. Since 1914, the situation has been that of political intrigue and bloodshed; nationalistic aspirations turned into inter-regional, inter-ethnic antagonism and mutual distrust. This paper argued that ethnic and resource conflicts in Nigeria are caused by the inconsistency in government policies, corruption in high and low places, officials' unguided pronouncements, inequitable allocation of resources, and deliberate marginalization of vulnerable groups, intra- and inter-group mistrust, poverty, and unemployment. Conflicts seem to be escalating in tempo and sophistication with the emergence of insurgent groups such as Niger Delta militant, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MASOP) and lately the more dreadful Boko Haram. Except the root causes are addressed, Nigeria may be sitting on a time bomb. The paper suggests good governance that will create confidence in leadership and the defense of rule of law as options for preventing, solving, and recovering from conflicts.

Keywords: Ethnic conflicts, resource conflicts, national security, democratic governance, rule of law

Introduction

Nigeria came into being in 1914 with amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by British Government; this development created our present framework. It is apparent that skepticism accompanied the amalgamation for a long period of time for some people considered the term 'Nigeria' a colonial creation and a mere geographical expression (Awolowo, 1947). This implies that by 1947, Nigeria was not yet a nation in terms of social relations, social integration and national identification.

Nigeria got independence from colonial control on October 1, 1960 but incidences of conflicts have continued to trail the post-independence history of the Nigerian nation. Indeed at some point, the continued corporate existence of the state was called into question. Several conflicts have shaken the unity of Nigeria to its foundation, among these are: the state of emergency declared in the old Western region in the early 1960s, the Tiv riots in 1964 which culminated in the Military Coup of 1966, the crisis between the North and Ibos, the declaration of the state of Biafra in 1967, the Civil War of 1967-70, the imbroglio over the June 12, 1993 annulled elections, and the post-election crises of year 2011. Yet, Nigeria has recorded a long

list of violent conflicts among which are those of Ife-Modakeke of Osun state, the Ogoni people of Niger Delta, Tiv-Jukun of Taraba state, Zango Kataf of Kaduna state, and Umuleri-Aguleri of Anambra state. Indeed Bauchi, Kano, Nasarawa and Plateau states are not spared of violent conflicts; the Boko Haram insurgencies in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states have added more complications to national life. The net results of these are massive death, destructions of public and religious buildings, industries, Government installations, and security offices. In sum since it emerged as a nation, Nigeria has teetered between consensus and conflicts and between exuberance and exhaustion (Ibrahim, 2006).

Ethnic and Resource Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society consisting of about 300 ethnic groups; this multi-ethnic composition of Nigeria is considered to be a bane of National Unity and Development. As Mezieobi (1994) noted, whatever is done or anticipated in Nigeria, particularly at government's quarters, has ethnic undertone. Furthermore, ethnicity and the associated primordial paradigms of communalism, religion and regionalism have emerged as the primary organizing principles for conceptualizing, articulating and protecting or promoting collective distributive interest in Nigeria (Williams, 1980). As a multi-ethnic nation, the cultural diversity has engendered major problems, including: rivalry among larger ethnic groups and the hostility that is derived from competition among people for wealth, position and power. Generally speaking, ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can be attributed to socio-economic and political factors. Conflict over political and social issues are increasingly depicted as a struggle for domination by one ethnic group over another. Thus, the heterogeneity of Nigeria has a strong link to the series of inter-tribal suspicions and conflicts, hatred, lack of trust, uncompromising attitudes, the tense and unsuitable struggle for political power and socio-economic resources. Since 1999, there have been scores of serious ethno-religious and political crises (Orji, 2012).

Albert (2010) identified competition for resources as the major cause of conflicts and crises in Nigeria. Resource as a cause of conflicts refers to all forms of human possession such as land, money, power, and other influences that are often in limited supply or unjustly distributed leading to high level dissatisfactions and agitations. Given the profound ethnic heterogeneity and relative underdevelopment of socio-economic processes and identities, it is inevitable that the public competition for the resources of the state would take place predominantly among ethnically defined constituencies. As resources are both scarce and unevenly distributed, conflict is a necessary outcome of perceived marginalization in the sharing of 'national cake'. The indigene – settler syndrome that is threatening cooperate existence can be a reaction to dwindling resource base of a people. In Plateau state for instance, Human Right maintained that more than 1000 people have been killed in ethnic clashes since the beginning of 2010; that the bombings, pitched battles, and mass slaughters are separate from the Islamic extremists attack of Boko Haram; that happenings in that state result from conflict over land and other disputes between different ethnic and religious groups (Global post, 2013).

Causes of Ethnic and Resource Conflicts in Nigeria

The sources of conflicts are many and varied. The precipitant could be economic stress, grievances against authority figure, cultural diversity, or even powerful people who want to gain advantage, and those who want to deflect hostility away from themselves. Several theoretical views including: Grievance model, Human Needs Theory, Relational Theory, Political Theory, Transformative Theory, Resource Mobilization Theory, and Frustration-aggression Theory have been advanced to explain causes of violence. All these views have implications for conflict and peace in Nigeria.

That cultural shock may result from inter-group interactions is an argument put forward by Relational Theorists. The suspicion that accompanies having to deal with people of different culture, orientation and religion could invoke conflict provoking behavior. Person assessment is not usually favourable when misgivings underlie interactions. Frustration-aggression Theory emphasizes prior dislike as part of a systematic concern with the characteristics of potential targets. No doubt, innocent citizens of this great country in the course of carrying out lawful activities have been victims of hate crimes.

Competition for political posts has implication for ethnic and resource conflicts in Nigeria. A situation where winners take all and where the more powerful eliminate the opponent and take advantage of others is conflict provoking. Resource Mobilization theorists see the employment of violence as a strategy to “extract benefits from those who control resources; a way of securing influence in the political process, and a mode of aggressive political participation” (Horowitz, 2001: 38). Political Theory seems to fit the pre- and post- election crises often witnessed in the country. Low democratic culture politicians who feel aggrieved, one way or the other, resort to their primordial instincts of whipping up sentiments to induce people to start such conflicts. This is corroborated by Diamond (1995) who is of the opinion that the contending elites manipulate ethnic, regional and religious cleavages in the struggle for power and thus escalating incidents of deadly conflicts in number and scale.

Grievance model for conflict is based on the concept of relative deprivation, which is a measure of a perceived disparity between expectation and gratification (Horowitz, 2001). While there are variations in the interpretation of relative deprivation, theorists share the assumption that violence is a response to grievance. The reasons for grievance could be because of deprivation of basic necessities of life and dissatisfaction that ensues. That a person who is deprived of basic necessities cannot achieve his full potential forms the basis of Maslow’s (1970) argument on human needs. The highest need is self-actualization and a person who attains this level will be well motivated to achieve, dedicated to a mission, love and believe others, and feel adequate to deal with issues of life and living. A person that reaches a state of self-actualization is in a position to contribute to the good of the society but the one that is deprived will reject social order and attack the same at the slightest opportunity. In agreement with Human Needs Theory and other analysts, the authors are of the view that deprivation has detrimental effect on behavior and it contributes

to continued agitation, trouble, conflict, crises and other forms of negative expressions in Nigeria. There is a strong relationship between individual survival and collective survival; survival of the latter cannot be assured except that of the former is guaranteed.

Relative deprivation is manifested in high incidence of avoidable poverty and unemployment. It is an irony that people live in poverty in the midst of plenty! It is unimaginable that people are poor in a rich country! Poverty is one of the socio-economic factors causing ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. In the face of poverty, people are willing to compromise ethical reasoning to get what they need. Poverty has the cumulative effect of raising tension that easily explodes on the slightest excuse. Relating to this is the economic and industrial retardation which is creating an army of unemployed youth. High rate of unemployment in the country stimulates poverty and is also another socio-economic factor contributing to incidence of conflicts in the country. The unemployed youth become restive, they rapidly form pools of disgruntled elements that can easily be mobilized to riot or cause civil unrest and unleash mayhem as regularly occurs in major cities. This is compounded by illiteracy as parents continue to make babies that they cannot take care of. These children grow up mainly with resentment for their parents, the society and governments and they form a ready pool of miscreants prone to violence and crime (Global Post, 2013).

It is not just the absence of resources, even the management of available ones provokes conflicts. Upheavals have arisen over the issue of resource control and the incessant clamour for alternate revenue sharing formulae reveals the desperation of communities housing natural resources. Environmental pollution, soil degradation, destruction of ecosystem, loss of means of livelihood and absence of basic necessities of life are sufficient to trigger youth restiveness and militancy, particularly in oil producing areas. In an attempt to satisfy some political interests, government policy wittingly or unwittingly alienate some communities and in the process create resentment which can easily be capitalized on by disgruntled elements to create havoc. Transformative Theory stresses that people will clamour for change if style of leadership favours inequality and injustice; such are usually accompanied by violent conflicts. The 1997 crisis between Ijaw and Itsekiris over the location of the headquarters of one of the newly created local governments in the area and the protracted Ife-Modakeke crisis are illustrative.

Slow government response in stemming resentment is another contributory factor. No visible step is usually taken until tensions build up to the extent that a little issue ignites it out of proportion. Neglect or even perceived neglect by government can be capitalized on by opposing groups to whip up ethnic sentiments, which invariably resorts to communal conflicts. It is neglect of this nature which has resulted in the creation of Odua Peoples' Congress, Egbesu Boys, Bakassi Boys, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Arewa Peoples' Congress and perhaps Boko Haram among others. In fact, the injection of ethnic militias into agitations is a major threat to national security. As main participants in some of the recorded conflicts, they usually function to satisfy and more often senselessly champion ethnic, economic, political, social, or religious interest.

Lack of good governance and failure of leaders to adhere to rule of law also contribute in no small measure to ethnic and resource conflicts in Nigeria. In the first instance, political parties do not seem to have any ideology, philosophy or vision; thus it is easy for members to cross-carpet, “divorce, marry or remarry” in attempt to satisfy personal ambition. In true representational democracy people should choose their own leaders but where election malpractices prevail, it is unlikely that “winners” will serve the people. Within the Nigeria system, almost everything that should support good governance can be sold and bought in the “cash and carry” politics: voters’ card, right to choose, and even justice have been sold to the highest bidder. When peoples’ votes do not count and electoral processes are characterized by fraud, rigging, over-bloating of voters’ register, disappearance of ballot boxes, and manipulation of election results in favour of a particular party, then the stage is set for the worst form of governance and violent reactions from aggrieved individuals.

Judiciary, they say, is the hope of the common man but miscarriage of justice because of “order from above” or “hands are tied” shows either the influence of money or level of control by the executive arm of government. When the electoral Tribunals continually adjourn or dismiss election petitions over genuine injustice on “technical” grounds, the condition is ripe for expression of anger which could translate to violence and terrorism. Thus corruption of judicial system is both a reflection of bad system of governance and a contributory factor to violent behavior in the country.

Effects of Ethnic and Resource Conflicts on Nigeria Polity

The incidents of hostilities in different parts of the country have shaken the very foundation of a hitherto peaceful disposition. The savagery with which the atrocities are committed manifests an inherent danger in the survival of individuals, the well-being of the society, and stability of the nation. Exposure to and being victims of violent conflicts exert pernicious influence on people in different dimensions. Psychological effects of violence on victims are better imagined. Conflicts create complex emotional reactions and psychological responses; they cause changes in physiological functioning, which in the longer run may threaten physical health. Prolonged exposure to violence, fear and uncertainty over the future may lead victims to experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that disrupts intimate relationship (Deangelis, 2008). In general, violence leads to massive human displacement; there is usually out migration of members of target group especially. Even when they remain where they had always been, social relationship is broken or distorted because of fear, suspicion and mistrust. Fear and hatred interrupt social life.

Economic base of the family may be affected during violent crises. In many instances, people have had to leave their jobs or economic base to escape a conflict zone. There has been heavy population movement from the north-eastern part of the country in recent times as a result of Boko Haram onslaught. Violence ultimately results in economic loss for both victims and perpetrators. Bagura (2002) noted how the loss of economic power, resultant general lack, financial difficulties and inability to carry out usual activities lead to an increase in family violence.

People discuss violent events wildly, resulting in rapidly spreading ripple effects. Polarizing effect occurs when people begin to take sides and this usually complicates problems of social relationship. Each group paints the other in negative terms so that people are reluctant to have dealings with members of the other group. As Horowitz (2001) observed, paramilitarization of ethnic relation ensues while inter-group cleavages widen. The emergence of militias in Nigeria is to ensure the security of ethnic members. Violence creates fear and mistrust of other ethnic groups and these lead to hate crimes. The searing memory of what happened triggers a desire for revenge; one imagines what future would be like in the hands of children and youth who witness present mayhem in the country! When hostility is over, it is unlikely that attitudes would return to anything like earlier friendliness; attitude becomes decidedly less favourable. Targets tend to be fearful of further violence and this could lead to disruption of residential arrangement and polarization of population. Kaduna state had witnessed many crises; today, Christians and Muslims dominate different parts of the Kaduna metropolis.

Full-scale crises lead to disastrous consequences on infrastructure, the economy and social services; it undermines stability in government. The instability in government also destabilizes the political and economic system of the nation, creating new crops of power blocs and influence peddlers. Instability causes destruction of life and property and a diversion of resources from long-term development programme to those of reconstruction and resettlement. Much money goes into security, compensation, amnesty, and reconstruction as a consequent of conflicts in the country. Security votes have greatly increased since the onslaught from Boko Haram began. No meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere of insecurity, chaos and the breakdown of law and order; the social, economic, and political activities are usually badly affected.

Conflicts undermine the external image of the country and threaten foreign investments. This state of affairs engenders capital flight due to uncertainty and fear instilled in foreign investors. Even local entrepreneurs seek refuge for their capital in offshore economic institutions. In addition to weak state of infrastructure, security challenge has forced many industrial outfits to relocate from Nigeria to neighbouring countries. Despite its huge market potentials and resource endowment that should make the country a boisterous centre for economic activities, Nigerian leaders go, cap in hand, to woo investors into the country because it is no longer a safe haven for investment.

To sum up, ethnic and resource conflicts leave social, economic, physical and emotional damages on victims and they undermine social and economic progress of the country.

Prevention and Management of Ethnic and Resource Conflicts

It may be impossible to prevent conflicts altogether and that is not an enviable state because conflicts has a way of drawing attention to important aspects of national life. Individuals, communities, ethnic groups would have been forgotten if there were no conflicts. However, conflicts need not turn violent if the spark is

prevented from turning to flame and that is where effective management comes in. In dealing with issue of conflicts, emphasis will be on national security, rule of law and good governance.

National Security: This refers to the maintenance of the survival of a nation state through the protection of its valuables in terms of assets and interests. National security encompasses all other facets of security issues including economic, political, military, physical, emotional, environmental and ecological securities. The year 2013 international condemnation of the United States of America for spying on other nations underscores the importance of cyber security; nations see espionage as another form of terrorism. Again, for economic and industrial development, sources of energy and available natural resources must be secured. A good blend and spread of these will eradicate contentions over lack and marginalization. With the prominent role of human needs in security matter, every effort must be made at establishing “just relationships and mutual care, one in which the needs of all are met and all are able to participate on the basis of equality without fear” (Gibson, 2011:99). A nation is not secured when people are intimidated with adverse conditions like unjustifiable arrest, unfair trials, environmental pollution and degradation, crises, domination, poverty, and unfulfilled aspiration.

Rule of Law: The Worldwide Government Indicator defined rule of law as “the extent to which agents have confidence and abide by the rules of society ...” while from the 2004 report of Secretary General of the United Nations it was defined as:

a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency.

Wikipedia (2013)

Rule of law focuses on norms, policies, institutions and processes that form the core of the society. Rule of law emphasizes the supremacy of the law, holds public institutions and officials accountable, places the wishes of populace before rulers, advocates fairness in dealing with people as to vindicate the right and punish the wrong, promotes safety and security of individuals, and puts constraint upon behavior of all, especially government officials (Egwu, 2001). However, situation in Nigeria is far from those stated. Though rule of law is enshrined in the constitution, Nigerian leaders show blatant disrespect for demand of the constitution and in so doing, the country is breeding and celebrating powerful individuals that are above the law. Rule of law does not exist in a country where constitution is not respected, where leaders are not accountable to the populace on financial and other matters, where

there is flagrant abuse of office with impunity and where judicial system cannot dispense justice and protect the right of the poor.

To Ameh and Sule (2010), the rule of law is an essential virtue of democracy while good governance requires transparency. This means that law made and decisions taken in governance should be enforced in a manner that follows due process. It means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions. Accountability cannot be enforced without the rule of law. It is when people see respect for the rule of law in high places that they will be ready to work for peace and for the good of the land.

Good governance: Absence of threat and violence is an enviable state that nations must work to achieve but it will remain unattainable in the absence of good governance. Alabi (2010) maintained that effective and efficient governance should be active, participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, responsive, equitable, inclusive, and follow the rule of law in managing ethnic and resource conflicts. In addition, it should be transparent, effective and efficient. A system of governance that is devoid of any of these is impoverished in principle, focus, and achievement; it will confront numerous upheavals. Where abuse of democratic principles of accountability, transparency and independence of judiciary prevails, people will demand explanations as they deem fit, even if it means formulating crises. It is only good governance that will respect the rule of law and promote alternate settlement of grievances.

The crucial elements in crisis management include empathy, information and action. In other words, it becomes necessary that whenever crisis erupts or suspected in any part of the country, government must show concern and put all machinery in place to address the situation. Furthermore, the authority concerned must be smart enough to make policy pronouncement that would detonate tension. Besides, it will promote the following measures in dealing with conflict and social unrest.

- i. **Dialogue:** At an infant stage of the unrest, the authority can enter into dialogue with the individuals as a means of resolving crisis. It is a process which aims at providing a decision aid and a “thinking structure” for ill-structured problem. It is a carefully organized exposition, by means of infected conversation philosophical intellectual attitudes.
- ii. **Persuasion:** This is equally an early tool of crisis management using the group’s own machinery. This is a situation where a matured group (the nation leadership) willingly appeals to the opposing group (the individuals) with the aim of smoothening or playing down differences by the popular action approach of “we are one big family”
- iii. **Joint Consultation:** This involves organizing meetings between leaders and representatives of aggrieved group where approach to matters in contention is primarily functional. It is an arrangement that provides for regular contact as a means of improving communication and opportunity for a better insight into management activities and problems.

- iv. **Mediation:** This becomes necessary when attempt to settle unrest through machinery of the group fails, This will involve the intervention of stakeholders like the National Executive Council, labour leaders, traditional rulers and generality of the society to resolve issues amicably.
- v. **Conciliation:** At the peak of crisis, when possible machinery within the system has tried without success, conciliation is one of the crisis management tools that could be used. At this stage, either the president, the National Assembly or minister would appoint conciliation to inquire into causes, negotiate with the parties involved, proffer solutions and measures to prevent future occurrence.
- vi. **Joint problem solving:** this has to do with the parties in conflicts working together to find mutually satisfying solution to the problem. It also involves a neutral third party, usually a mediator, working with the disputants to deal with the problem. This is where negotiation and mediation are found relevant.
- vii. **Joint task force:** this should be the last resort after every peaceful means had been exhausted. It involves the use of security and military intervention to enforce peace, prevent escalation, and pave way for peaceful settlement of a dispute. The Joint Task Force's operations in the north-eastern part of Nigeria are meant to achieve these.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Much is being done but achievement of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and societies in peace effort has been minimal because issues relating to security, good governance, and rule of law have not been adequately tackled. The generality of people do not appear to have any faith in the government of the day or how can one explain the controversy, debate and skepticism trailing the national dialogue proposed in year 2013 by President Jonathan Ebele Jonathan?

The preceding notes are perhaps enough evidences in support of the need for political restructuring and rebirth in Nigeria. The intensification of the various violent ethnic conflicts in recent years has confirmed the urgent need for a constitutional compact within the framework of which Nigeria peoples could address various pressures on the structure of the society. Political and religious tolerance and strict adherence to the secular nature of the Nigeria state and respect for the diversity of the nation are pre-requisites for a republic that desires peace with itself so as to consolidate its unity. The following are hereby recommended towards solving ethnic and resource conflicts in Nigeria.

- ✓ That the enduring politico-economic and social crisis ravaging almost all parts of the country could only be checked if the component units of the Federation agree on the terms of Nigerian being. This could be achieved through a Sovereign National Conference. This is to enable Nigerians for once, put unending bickering behind them by determining to re-plan and re-focus our nation, so that the pivot of corporate existence shall be more true togetherness rather than ethnic orientation and fake relationship.

- ✓ That the democratic institutions should be strengthened to prevent areas of conflicts and enhance national security and that Nigerians should devise and agree on rules of the political and social game that will ensure all the ethnic groups feel they have a stake in the defense and continuous growth and development of the Nigerian polity.
- ✓ There is need for the evolution of a political class that is not only patriotic but also selfless and detribalized.
- ✓ That there is need for balanced governmental policies which would strengthen national security and reduce ethnic conflicts.
- ✓ The civil society should be trained and empowered to carry out conflict mediation and resolution at all levels.
- ✓ There is need for the promotion of conflict awareness, conflict mediation/management and mitigation as means of guaranteeing the success of the Nigerian democratic process.
- ✓ Peace education, at both formal and informal levels, will be a worthy means of preparing the populace, especially the younger generation for peaceful coexistence.
- ✓ The government should also be fair and ensure equitable distribution of resources, good governance, adherence to the rule of law or due process, and equal employment opportunity.
- ✓ The Nigeria Army, Police, State Security Services and other para-militaries should be properly equipped and trained to provide security to all citizens at all times. Justice must prevail over corrupt leaders and terrorist.
- ✓ Finally for Nigeria to achieve its lofty potential and high expectations of the entire world as well as aspirations of its citizenry, the people must bury their differences and work with a common vision with each Nigerian taking other person's needs, feeling and desires into consideration.

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