

ETHNO RELIGIOUS POLITICS AND THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Since independent, Nigeria has been grappling with the challenges of ethno-religious politics in its bid for sustainable developments. Nigeria's peoples have not yet come to think of themselves as Nigerians. Ethnic loyalty took precedence over national identity. The nation's people identified themselves primarily as Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, or Yoruba. Their identity as Nigerians lay in the shadow of their tribal and religious parochial allegiances. Three main religions (Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religion) are found in Nigeria. This paper is aimed at verifying the extent at which religion, politics and ethnicity had dealt devastating blow on Nigerian sustainable development and proffer a way forward towards harnessing our pluralistic indices as a nation for national development. The methods of sociological investigation, textual exposition, historical interpretation and philosophical analysis are used. Our findings show that religion gets involved in politics, and on many occasions, politics also get theologized. It goes without saying that this last pattern is what we find in Nigeria, which poses a challenge to the sustainable development of Nigeria. The study found that, ethnicity and religion were used as political instrument during elections in Nigeria. It was discovered that the fusion of the trio in determining who gets what, when and how has had negative toll on sustainable development in Nigeria. The study concluded that socio- economic and political prosperity has been impeded because of the usage of ethnicity and religion as a political tool. The study recommended that, for meaningful development to take place in Nigeria, the component parts should uphold moral values, social justice and fear of God as epitomized in Church-state approach to conflict management.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Religion, Politics, Sustainable Development

Introduction:

In the opening section of chapter two of his work, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe (1984:5) emphasized that "nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than the word "tribe" in her vocabulary". Ethnicity/ethnic nationalism, which is also understood here as tribalism, has remained a lingering problem in the quest for national integration and sustainable development in the history of Nigeria. In Africa, where many nationalities were forcibly brought together, without their consent by Colonialism into the same country, or split between what emerged to be two or more hostile states, "ethnicity has necessitated the exploitation of the differences amongst the nationalities. (Igwe, 2005:142) engendered an inward – looking and chauvinistic attribute towards others, especially those held to be in competitive relations with one's own" (Ojimba, 2015:15).

Since independence, Nigeria has made little progress in forging and consolidating a sense of oneness among its diverse and often mutually antagonistic ethnic groups. Despite efforts by successive Nigerian government to instill a sense of national identity, the allegiance of most

Nigerians to their various ethnic groups still surpasses their allegiance to the Nigerian nation (Davis and Nwaiwu, 2001:8). The Nigerian society is religiously, ethnically and politically polarized and, this has impacted negatively on developmental policies of the country. The political elites are in the habit of using ethnicity and religion as veritable instruments during electioneering campaigns to score a political point by making the end to justify the means according to Machiavelli (1951). This situation has at best aggravated the general misconception that politics is a dirty game, and at worst, created the atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust, resulting into political apathy.

Conceptual Clarification

Ethnicity: Ethnicity as a concept is an immensely complex phenomenon that portrays different perceptions. Even a search through the literature has revealed that ethnicity is a relatively new concept and it made its first appearance in the literature less than half a century ago. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines ethnicity as “how the aspirations and interest of ethnic groups are pursued in relation to other groups”. To help it off, someone can say ethnicity is the contextual discrimination by members of one ethnic goal against the others in the process of competition for national resources. According to Osaghae (1992), ethnicity refers to a social formation resting upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology. Ethnicity denotes a group of individuals who consider themselves, or are considered by others, to share common characteristics which differentiate them from other collectivities within a society. Distinct cultural behaviors are developed, and ethnic groups can be identifiable in terms of religion, politics, occupation, or language. Ethnicity is social in nature because it is based on cultural differences. Ethnic culture is one of the important ways people conceive of themselves, and culture and identity are closely intertwined. As a social construct, ethnicity can be regarded as the employment of ethnic identity and differences to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict and cooperation (Osaghae, 1995). Despres (1975) defined ethnicity as largely a subjective process of status identification. Hence ethnic groups are formed to the extent that the actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for the purpose of interaction. Ethnicity refers both to aspects of gain and loss in interaction, and to aspects of meaning in the creation of identity. In this way, it has a political, organizational aspect as well as a symbolic one. The transformation of ethnic identity in the democratization process has engendered a vicious cycle of intergroup conflicts across the state (Omotola, 2008). Ethnicity sometimes finds expression in “political domination, economic exploitation, psychological oppression, and class manipulation” (Ojimba, 2014:97). It is also expressed in religious domination.

Religion

Religion means different things to different people. There is no consensus of opinion on its meaning that is why Egwu (2001) argued that religion is a difficult subject of inquiry including attempts at its definition and conceptualization. Religion is thus defined in many ways and the definitions usually vary among scholars. According to Adeniyi (1993), religion is a body of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent being. This implies that religion deals with norms and rules that emanated from God and which

must be followed by the believers. Ejizu (1993) provides another definition of religion. According to him, religion is man's intuition of the sacred and ultimate reality and his expression of that awareness in concrete life. Many scholars such as Goody (1961) and Horton (1960) agree that the notion of 'sacred' at once indicates the idea of the transcendent in the concept of religion and they both go further to underline the fact that the 'sensuous religions' is a distinct type of experience that is essentially characterized by a feeling of mystery and awe. Ayinla, (2003) understand religion as a particular system or set of systems in which doctrines, myths, rituals, sentiments and other similar elements are interrelated. In its own definition, the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* explained religion as the belief in a super human controlling power that is entitled to obedience and worship. It goes further to state that it is a particular system of faith and worship that one is entitled to. In his own view, E. Durkheim defined religion as 'unified systems of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things'.

Connelly (1946) defines religion in terms of the sacred and the spiritual. He asserts that Religion originates in an attempt to represent and order beliefs, feelings, imaginings and actions that arise in response to direct experience of the sacred and the spiritual. As this attempt expands in its formulation and elaboration, it becomes a process that creates meaning for itself on a sustaining basis, in terms of both its originating experiences and its own continuing responses.

According to Glenn M. Vernon, a sociologist (1962:55), he defined it as: ... that part of culture composed of shared beliefs and practices which not only identify or define the supernatural and the sacred and man's relationship thereto, but which also relate them to the known world in such a way that the group is provided with moral definitions as to what is good (in harmony with or approved by the supernatural) and what is bad (contrary to or out of harmony with the Supernatural). Another Sociologist M. J. Yinger in a book entitled *the Scientific Study of Religion* (1970:7) defined religion... as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with these ultimate problems of human life. It expresses their refusal to capitulate to death, to give up in the face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart their human association... Yinger stated that men need some absolute values to enable them live harmoniously in this problematic world of suffering. He emphasized that science had been unable to solve human problems which only religion can supply meaning in moments of serious crises and uncertainties. A theological definition of Religion was given by Ekwunife (1992:1) in his book *Politics and Religious Intolerance* as, man's awareness and recognition of his dependent relationship on a transcendent Being-the Wholly Order, expressible in human society through beliefs, worship and ethical or moral behaviour. Here, the Clergy recognized or appreciated man's knowledge of a higher Being more than him which is the origin of faith in religion. Experience has shown that every religion in relation to politics functions as a catalyst to man's ultimate problems.

Politics: Politics is a part of Social sciences. Social science in itself is an amalgamation of disciplines that probe into the various activities of human beings in the society as a whole. To the Greeks, Politics meant the organization and administration of the state. Greek philosophers were very much concerned about how to organize and administer the state in

order to ensure the liberty of the individual and the enthronement of social justice. For us today in Nigeria, politics means more than this. The term politics is indeed very elastic. Many scholars have defined politics in different ways. For example, Harold Laswell defined politics as “who gets what, when, and how? He went further to explain that politics deals with the study of power or the study of influence and that of the influential. David Easter described politics as the authoritative allocation of values for the society (Omolayo & Arowolaju, 1987:6-7). Weber saw politics as the struggle to share power or influence the distribution process. Politics has a wide scope in human society. This may be why Aristotle described man as “a political animal”. We all belong to the supreme organization called the state. In Nigeria, as in every other state, individuals and groups of individuals make competing demands over the allocation of scarce resources. Disagreements are bound to arise from time to time on the nature of these resources and how they would be allocated. This may be attributed to the fact that, the demand for the basic physiological needs of man are more than the available resources meant to be allocated for a purpose, or that, the resources meant for it are misappropriated based on ethnicity and religious consideration. For example, ninety percent of key political positions of the present administration under Buhari were allocated based on religious or ethnic consideration. By so doing, cases of square pegs in round hole are common knowledge. This has negative toll on socio-economic and political development in the country and its spillover effects are high rate of poverty, crimes, unemployment and diseases.

Hornby (2000:657) defined Politics as “The Science and Art of Government”. It is the Science dealing with terms, organization and administration of State or part of one and with the regulation of its relation with other State. Politics is one of the oldest social sciences, in fact, second to religion. The three guiding principles to politics are:

1. It involve a state
2. It requires entering into relationship with other people as a way of satisfying man’s unlimited wants.
3. It involves rival groups as to make it competitive.

Leshe (1970:6) defined it as “...a sphere of purposeful behaviour through which we seek to live better than we do now, while Markle (1967:12) defined it from two perspectives. Positively he said, “Politics is a noble quest for good order and justice” while negatively he said, “Politics is a selfish grab for power glory and riches.” As a science or art of governing through legitimized government which means indispensable social organization established in every society for the purpose of formerly enacting, codifying and enforcing the laws and values of a particular society. According to Uju (1987:6) Government operates on three levels, with respect to Nigeria. These include:

1. The Executive Arm. This is the arm that implements policies made by the Legislatures: The Army, the Police, the Prisons and the Civil Service are here.

2. The Legislative Arm: This organ is responsible for making laws in the land. These include the National Assembly and various state House of Assembly.

3. The Judiciary: This organ of government has the sole responsibility of interpreting laws.

Sustainable Development: The concept of sustainable development is the efforts at improving the socio-economic and ecological status and at exploiting and processing the environment or natural resources for the purpose of improving the quality of human life in such a way that the needs of the future generations are not jeopardized. The ‘World Conservation Strategy’, published by the World Conservation Union, publicized the concept of sustainable development in the 20th century. The term became more pronounced and received greater attention in the report of the Bruntland Commission, which the United Nations General Assembly assigned to propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond (Sulaiman, 2002). The report spells out the definition of the term, sustainable development, its nature, scope, objectives, and approaches, among others. Most of the definitions given to the concept ‘development’ see it as a process of change in the social structure, attitude, institution, and general acceleration of economic growth through reduction of inequality and poverty. Going through the multifarious definitions of the concept, Mohammed (2002) identifies three important facts on it, namely:

- i. Increasing the availability and widening the distribution of basic life sustenance, such as food, shelter, and protection;
- ii. Raising the level of living in addition to higher income, provision of jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and humanitarian values, all of which serve to enhance material well-being, but also to generate greater individual and national self esteem, and;
- iii. Expanding the range of economic and social choice to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence.

From the above, some indices of development, which are no doubt prerequisites to sustainable development, are identified. According to Adedeji (1997), the level of human development could be measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), whose components are health, education, and income. To Aliyu (1999), the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is the total output of the economy, is a major determinant of development. Other indices of development, identified by Mohammed (2002) include: improved standard of living in terms of availability of decent accommodation, improved nutritional standards, qualitative health care and education services to the majority; life expectancy which is mainly influenced by the standard of living, availability of health services, literacy level, and income of the people. From this, it could be observed that all the identified indices of development could hardly be attained in an atmosphere of crises. The health, education, and income of Nigerians are jeopardized and adversely affected during any of the ethnoreligious crises. Dogarawa (2002) has broadly classified resources into four categories namely: common, definite, acquirable, and possessive resources. To him, common resources are resources that are common to all nations, people, and tribes which no one prevents anybody

from being used. Such resources are air, sunlight, moonlight, rain, weather, wild animals, forest, and time, among others. Definite resources, as the name implies, have terminal features, hence the need for speedy, effective, and efficient utilization. Examples of these are lifespan, target, completion, and strategy. Acquirable resources are acquired to change from one status to the other. Examples are skills, experiences, and orientation. Possessive resources are obtained through exchange by customary rights and other legal forms of ownership, which can be used, neglected, sold, or transferred by way of gift or control. Money, assets, technology, territory, and independence are examples of possessive resources. These resources put together are ingredients of development, which sustainability depends mostly on their effective utilization and which under-utilization and misuse could be a great loss and catastrophic. The point is that none of these resources could be managed or even harnessed in atmosphere of crisis and chaos. The summary of this is that a pseudo development could only be attained in an atmosphere where religion is used as an instrument of vendetta. In another dimension, one can attribute the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria as well as the refinery companies as an element of development. However, this blessing has been threatened by various agitations, protests and demonstration by the oil producing communities who considered themselves cheated in the sharing formula of the proceeds from the resources.

Colonialism and the Origin of Ethno-Religious Politics in Nigeria.

The area now known as Nigeria was said to have been colonized by 1900. According to Anyanwu (2004:77), “the Colonial government pursued programmes and policies, which encouraged ethnic differences from the outset”. In the first place, the area was separately administered as northern and southern protectorate. In 1914, under Richard’s constitution, some administrative changes were made. The country was split into four units, which include the colony, the Western Province, the Northern Province, and the Eastern Province. Although the Richard’s constitution laid the foundation for federalism in terms of ethnic accommodation, it was a complicating rather than a mitigating factor as it more or less legalized regionalism (Anyanwu:2004). The three regions: East, West and North were not homogenous and the colonial authorities did little to lessen these ethnic disparities.

The Mcpherson constitution of 1951, which abrogated the Richard’s Constitution, confirm regionalism and gave wider political powers to the three regions. The consequence of this was the emergence of the politics of ethnicity, which in turn heightened ethnic distrust and suspicion in Nigeria. In the North, emerged the Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC), dominated by the Hausa – Fulani, in the East, the National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC), dominated by the Igbos, and in the West was the Action Group (AC), dominated by the Yorubas. As a result of this bifurcation of political parties along tribal enclaves, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe’s dream to get elected into the Federal House was frustrated on the basis of tribal sentiment – because he was an Igbo not a Yoruba but contesting in Lagos. Ethnically based political parties were known to be harbinger of distrust and violence. To avoid this, and encourage national integration section 222 (b) of the 1999 Constitution states: “The members of the association are open to every citizen of Nigeria irrespective of his place of origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion or ethnic group”. Also section 223 (2b) of the said

constitution states: “The members of the executive committee or other governing body of the political party shall be deemed to reflect the federal character of Nigeria”

The Challenge of Politics in National Development

Politically, Nigeria did not have a strong institution that could enable the political system to face the challenge of governance in a systematic way. The success of democratic experiment in a country can be attributed to a political party that has a strong mass support and leaders that have interest of the nation at heart. Nigeria had political parties built along religions and leaders that were naïve and selfish (Achebe: 1964:13). In the 1964 elections the two main alliances for the election were Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) comprising the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and its client parties NNDP, NDC, MWDF, the other alliance was the United Progress Grand Alliance (UPGA) formed by the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) and Action Group (AG), NEPU and UMBC. In spite of the national cross regional appearances of the alliances, the two camps presented a North and South constellation of forces. The mainstay of the NNA was NPC whose motive was the consolidation of Northern hegemony. The UPGA on the other hand was a Southern coalition whose primary objective was to halt hegemony. These forces have produced Awoists, Zikists and Sardaunas and the trend continues today.

The other feature that the party politics exhibited and which affected the smooth functioning of democracy was the increasing use of violence. The parties employed violent tactics which sometimes involved the physical elimination of opposition candidates. This was well seen during the 1964 elections when opposition candidates were harassed, prevented from campaigning and even the filling of nomination papers was made impossible (Osaghae 1998:45). Electoral violence has been a culture par excellence from the post- independence era to the present day new democratic experience, which commenced with President Obasanjo administration 1999 till the present administration of Muhammadu Buhari.

Apart from using violence, there is also an absence of existence of free and fair electoral body. The entire electoral umpire set up by the leadership of this nation has not been able to conduct a free and fair election. Two factors could be said to be responsible for this ineptitude: firstly the appointment of Electoral commission chairman had been the prerogative of the President. This therefore lends credence to the charade Nigeria has had all these years, as he (the president) who pays the piper (NEC/FEDECO/NECON/INEC Chairman) detects the tune. Secondly, ethnicity factor is another cog in the wheel of progress in terms of the nation achieving a free and fair election where the electorates exercise their constitutional right through the ballot. During the first Republic, it was brought out that the members of the Electoral Commission regarded themselves as representatives of their regions whose duties were primarily to defend and protect regional interests (Eke, Dele Cole and Olasanya: 1969:116). This was the earliest foundation to Nigerian ethnic oriented politics that had like an ill wind blows the nation no good.

The Challenge of Ethnicity in Nigerian Development

Socially one finds heterogeneity prevailing for there are more than 250 ethnic groups that exist in Nigeria. Out of these, the predominant ones are the Hausa-Fulani, Ibos and the Yorubas. Each of these dominates a specific region of the country. The Hausa-Fulani dominates the northern parts, the Ibos dominate the Eastern part and the Yorubas inhabit the Western part. Among these three predominant groups, as well as the minorities hostilities have been rife as skirmishes of war are very much obvious. The roots of this hostility can be traced back to the colonial period when the British pursued the policy of divide and rule (Ademoyega,1981:3).

The Challenge of Religion in National Development

When the nation Nigeria was born, there existed different regions dominated by ethnic groups following a different religion of a type. In its simplest form, while the Northern Nigerians are predominately Hausa/Fulani and Muslims, the Southern Nigerians are largely Yoruba/Ibos and Christian. Nigerian colonial master sowed seeds of discord between Christianity and Islam-the two major religious bodies that held sway in the socio-political scene of her national life. Kalu (2000) painted a true picture of the scenario created by British imperialism which laid the foundation to suspicion and rivalry among the ethnic nationalities and religious groups in Nigeria when he posited: Meanwhile a contrary wind blew in the north as the root of Islamic fundamentalism was sowed. This veritable religions and political challenge to Christianity was nursed in the early days of independence. The conflict between Christianity and Islam was at first an aspect of regional rivalry and development. This ethno-religious plurality has not been for the best interests of Nigeria as it has been the basis for many conflicts, Nigeria as a nation-state has “witnessed the most perturbing and unprecedented upsurge of ...religious disturbance...” (Anugwom and Oji: 2003:143). Religious riot has remained a constant threat to peace in Nigeria and has continued to threaten the continued coexistence and habitation of the different ethnic nationalities that make up the country. One of the major religious crises ever witnessed in Nigeria on a large disturbing scale is the Maitasine religious riot which took place in Kano in 1980 (Okwueze: 2003:143). Others are in Jimeta Yola in 1984, in Gombe, former Bauchi State in 1985, in Ilorin in 1986, in Bauchi town in 1991, in Kano (1991), in Zango-Kataf (1992) and in 2000 the Sharia riots in the Northern states of Zangaria, Kaduna, Kano and the reprisal attack in the East. For the first time in the history of Nigeria’s religious riots occurred in Aba, Umuahia and Owerri (Anugwom and Oji: 2003:9)and Uyo in Akwa Ibom State, in Abuja (2009), in Madalla bombing(2011) in Baga (2015)

Religion in Nigeria functions as a means for the perpetration of violence, fueling ethnic consciousness, and solidarity, acquisition of political power and socio-economic gains, massive killings and the wanton destruction of lives and properties of those considered infidels or who pay allegiance to other religions. This is traced to the acrimony between, the two dominant religions- Islam and Christianity, which had often resulted in the struggle for power and supremacy, bitter feud and wanton destruction of life and property. This religious madness had like a cataclysmic vortex devastated the ground for sustainable socioeconomic development of Nigerian.

The Effects of Religion, Ethnicity and Politics on Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria.

In a multi-ethno-religious and socio-cultural differentiations like Nigeria, the concerted efforts expected from the citizens as well as Governments should be to enforce the dictum of unity in diversity principles for strength as in India, America and China. The researcher's worry has been expressed by Akinade (2002) cited in Omilusi (2015:12), thus:

Nigerians are passionately questioning whether their country should remain united as one entity. Some argue that they should seek a federal solution to Nigeria's problems based on several autonomous regions while others wish to jettison the colonial borders altogether and create new states. Incendiary strife between Christians and Muslims has added more weight and credence to the secessionist agenda.

Many prominent religious leaders have taken positions by their outright alignment to political candidates, not necessarily at the national level, but in many state. In recent times, mosques and churches have turned into campaign grounds where politicians besiege in search of "blessing" and clerics openly giving directives to faithful to cast their votes for certain candidates some clerics have even gone to the extent of invoking the wrath of God on followers who failed to heed to their directive (Hamza et'al, 2018). The political elite in Nigeria have always used religion and ethnicity as a tool of exploitation to achieve selfish socio-economic ends, while politically deploying religious fanaticism and favouritism to polarize the people and sustain unhealthy tension in the country. To date, public officials use public funds as an instrument for political patronage, thereby eroding the democratic tenets. The spillover effect has been the preponderance of ethno-religious and politically motivated assassinations and kidnapping cases across the country. Nevertheless, Nigeria is one of the most religious countries in the world. Religion is often employed among politicians, policy makers and religious leaders, as a determining factor in who gets what, when and how, in public and private offices and, a major influence on policy direction of government. Omilusi (2015) attest to the fact that the intrigue and nuances that usually go into this process, more often than not, lead to a compromise of public interests by the religious stakeholders and political gladiators, especially after elections.

Political elites are the sole source of values in the society or constitute the integrating force in the community without which it may fall part. The political elites have been regarded as the principal threat to the survival of democracy in Nigeria. Their existence has been taken to be the very denial of democracy. Elites which have exceptional access to key positions in the society or which appear to wield control over critical and crucial policies disproportionate to their numbers can understandably be living contradictions of the notion of government by the people and for the people. As it is in Nigeria to date, religion and ethnicity remain very useful political instrument for gaining political power. It has been keenly observed that whenever a politician loses an election he or she will also resort to blame game such as "I lose election because they don't want us to be there'. Ake (1996: 31)

cited in Omilusi (2015) gives a clear distinction between the ruling class and the government. He avers that both are related but also distinct in a very concrete way:

The ruling class is in power while the government is only in office. The government is the small group in charge of the major institutions of the state, particularly the legislative and administrative machinery. The ruling class is all power centered - political, cultural, religious, and economic that constitute the existing political domination.

Duru, (2012) narrates how the ruling class includes all the powerful traditional leaders, the major religious leaders, the higher ranks of the coercive institutions such as the military, the police and the judiciary, international capital and the wealthy protecting it from the dangers of totalitarianism. It is equally imperative to recall that, the 1914 Lord Lugard Amalgamation- constitutes another unforgettable defective foundation upon which Nigerian state was laid irrespective of socio-cultural, ethnic and political backgrounds. Another divisive politically motivated arrangement was the emergency of three major political parties in the post-independence era; Northern People's Congress (NPC) facilitated both religious and political interest of Northern region, Action Group, for the political interest of Yorubas in the Western region; and National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) that spearheaded the interest of the Eastern region under the three major nationalists: Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1964/5 general elections. This political arrangement signalled another conviction in the minds of many free thinkers and political commentators that, there is nothing so unique or special about Nigerian's unity in diversity as well as the need for national integration.

At independence, the politicians were mainly interested in dominating their regions and the government at the centre without any recourse to finding lasting solution to Nigeria's most unresolved problem which practically revolved around the question of integration, equity, justice and fairness (Falola, 1990; Kukah,1999), Kenny, 1996 ; Suberu, 2004,and Ilesanmi, 2001). Kastfelf (1994) attests to the prevalence of religion in politics in Nigeria when he admitted that, religion has and will continue to play a very sensitive and influential role in Nigeria politics. The 2005 political reform conference under Olusegun Obasanjo is one of the testimonies that lend credence to the above assertion. The Muslims in the North threatened to embark on a jihad if Mr. President refuse to address what they called "the unfair religious representation and three major Islamic groups: the Jamaatil Nasril Islam (JNI), the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN), and the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) went to the extent of examining the composition of the executive committee of the Conference. They argued that, out of the 393 delegates, the Christians were 233 while the Muslims were 160 and that the appointment of Justice Niki Tobi and Reverend Father Matthew Hassan Kuka as Chairman and Secretary respectively was an invitation for a Jihad in Nigeria. In the same vein, the voting pattern in Nigeria goes along ethnic and religious lines since 1964/65 general election in Nigeria (Danjibo, 2012). The outcome of this unabated anti-democratic practice has at best generated ethno-religious and politically motivated killings and by extension, deepened suspicious, hatred amongst ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. By implication, development can only take place in an

atmosphere of peace and tranquility. Nigerian state has gone too many steps backwards due to the incessant but avoidable conflicts occasioned by ethno-religious conflict.

The result of these divisive conflicts is the increasing ethnic agitation for self-determination. Few of such movements are: Oodua People's congress (OPC) Ijaw, Ogoni Survival movements, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF). The foundation on which Nigeria stood and the apparent lack of commitment to address injustices that tend to divide us has been the bane. In the light of this, national integration and peaceful co-existence efforts of many peace lovers yielded no positive result with the interplay of politics, religion and ethnicity. It is a known fact that, the expectant strength in diversity, given the abundant human and material endowments available in a country of over 400 ethnic nationalities has been elusive due largely to the incessant ethno-religious and politically motivated crises. In addition, the age long perception and derogatory remarks among the major ethnic nationalities constitute another worrisome division in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Politics, Religion and Ethnicity have placed Nigeria on the path of underdeveloped countries. The recommendations we make can help Nigeria utilize these three social dynamic factors to her advantage:

1. The word tribe or state of origin should be expunged from our vocabulary and should not be used in matters of national interest such as appointment into offices, employment, and giving other privileges to Nigeria citizens.
2. There is the need to address the leadership crisis. Attempt should be made to discourage the idea of choosing a leader because of his ethnic group, religion and political affinity. Whoever would serve to the best interest and sonum bonum (general good) of Nigerians should be given opportunity to serve Nigeria especially at the highest seat-president irrespective of his or her tribe, religion or political affinity.
3. Religious leaders should give proper orientation to their followers and should emphasize that religion pursues peace and not violence.
4. The emphasis on the political parties and ethnicity or religion in dealing with Nigerians is not to the best interest of the nation.
5. The leadership needs to undertake steps that would provide solution to socio-economic problems like poverty, unemployment. Power imbalance, inequitable distribution of resources, and The Niger Delta quest for justice in her God-given mineral resources.
6. Nigeria ethnic Nationalities should resolve their bitterness as well as sordid past and embrace themselves in love and live in harmony having fought together for a strong, indivisible and United State of Nigeria.
7. Nigerians should see their pluralism in terms of diverse religion, political and ethnic affinities as a blessing that would make her a multi-cultured nation with divers potentialities to give leadership to Africa, the third world and the globe at large.
8. The leadership of Nigeria headed by Muhammadu Buhari should as a matter of fairness keep to their electoral promise by putting in place electoral reforms that would enable Nigerians have free and fair election that has eluded them over the decades. The president would do well if he assents to, among others the recommendation of Justice Uwais - led

electoral reform commission on the removal of the prerogative as well as the power to appoint the chairman of electoral commission from the president of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The interplay of religion, ethnicity and politics unchecked in a heterogeneous country like Nigeria is antithetical to Socio-economic and political development. To this end, there must be political will on the part of government to set its priority right by redefining the limitations of the three concepts in order to allow for socio-economic and political re-engineering. For meaningful development to take place in Nigeria, the component parts should uphold moral values, social justice and fear of God as epitomized in Church-state approach to conflict management. The role of religion in fostering moral values, openness, fear of God, tolerance and forgiveness, should be supported by Nigerian Government to allow for the institutionalization of the hitherto value system. Such values are important for the development of sound economic and democratic political systems which should be the article of faith in all religious institutions in Nigeria. In the same vein, the National Assembly should come up with a legislation prohibiting political appointment based on ethnic and religious consideration. There is urgent need to outlaw federal character and quota system arrangement in the selection of political office holders to allow for competence and professionalism that is sine-qua-non for sustainable economic growth and development. The last but not the least, is the need to down play religious fanaticism, ethnic bigotry and undemocratic dispositions by Nigerian political elite as it obtains in the developed Countries such as; United states of America, United Kingdom and Canada. We should not be more Catholic than the Pope or more Islamic than the Sheik.

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