
LEADERSHIP, RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The importance of leadership and religion towards enhancing social stability and national integration cannot be over-emphasized. It is believed that a cohesive society is of fundamental importance and that religion is just one mechanism that helps to achieve this. However, the challenges emanating from religious sentiments seem to have contradicted this noble goal of religion, instead, the destructive role of religion dominates most literature today. One of the major factors threatening the unity and stability of Nigeria as a nation is traceable to religious sentiments. Past studies have associated the cause of religious tension to the activities of religious fanatics. Some of the sub topics discussed were Nigeria and religious diversity, religious demography, religious violence in Nigeria, religious conflict, religious intolerance, national integration, and implications of ethno-religious diversity and conflicts on national development. However, the paper recommends that since the psychological impulse for positive distinctiveness is a natural phenomenon, the different groups should not only acknowledge but should also respect this reality. Unity in diversity should remain the ideal principle of religion and its diversity so as to continue ensuring a healthy national integration.

Keywords: *Religion, Diversity, Leadership, Ethno-religious Conflict, National Integration, National Development.*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has suffered incessant religious chaos because of her ethnic and regional diversity. Approximately half of the country's population practice Islam, approximately 40 percent practice Christianity, and approximately 10 percent practice exclusively traditional indigenous religions or no religion (Oguagha 2001). Nigeria's democracy cannot be sacrificed at the "altar" of religious crisis. It becomes imperative for the citizenry to pull resources together to resolve religious crisis for sustainable democracy

and national development to thrive. One of the most noteworthy paradoxes of more than a few Nigerians involves communication. Nigeria experiences a lot of information culture yet the ability to communicate clearly and lovingly with others of differing religious convictions has declined, causing much pain, suffering and crisis.

Nigerians are being called upon each day to discover and apply new ways of communication in order to settle religious differences effectively and bring about an end to suffering (Oguagha 2001). One of the greatest problems confronting the country today, apart from the political malaise and economic depression, is the growing rise of confrontational religious crisis in the form of riots. Ethno-religious conflicts are creeping into the Nigerian polity unabated. Religious tensions have gradually become common features of the Nigerian polity. The resultant effects have been increasing cases of blood shedding, killings, looting, and destruction of properties and burning of worship centers in Nigeria. The causes of religious tensions are occasioned by activities of religious fanatics, fundamentalist and bigots across religions. Thus, elements such as fanaticism, fundamentalism and bigotry are viewed as catalysts to religious tensions. Unfortunately, the root cause of religious fanaticism, religious identity and social instability in Nigeria; thus, competition and hostility between groups is not only to be seen as a matter of competing over scarce resources, but also as the result of competing identities. The geographical landscape of the country varies, stretching from the Sahel Savannah in the far North to the rain forest down South, just like the people who are also remarkably unique in their individual outlooks and orientations, but united in their humanity. These diversities are evidently manifested in the citizens' cultural and religious practices. For instance, there are more than 400 documented ethnic groups across the land comprising of millions of people who are adherents of the two major religions of Islam and Christianity and, to a lesser extent, the traditional religion (Albert, 2002).

The citizens are religious in nature and even the constitution is religious, as it begins with the words "UNDER GOD", though the nation has not adopted any religion as a state religion. God is centrally considered in the affairs of the people. Most Nigerians adhere to the two religions, though, it is widely known that there are differences in their understanding and projections of the religions both at the intra and inter group levels. For instance, in spite of the fact that all Muslims are united in their belief of

the fundamental pillars of the religion, many of them, however, differ in their actions, sometimes determined by sectarian variation. The story is similar among the Christians. But that is not the main problem; rather the politicization, manipulation or outright mischievous projection of these sectarian differences or identities combined with ignorance and deep seated suspicions and stereotypes are what often result in violence and conflicts at the intra and inter group levels with severe consequences on the security and integration of the nation (Pate, 2010). In recent years, the frequency and prevalence of such conflicts appear to be on the increase in Nigeria. Fifty years after independence, the country is still confronted with some irritating and unacceptable facts about social reality that continue to dent the integrity and unity of the nation.

Ethno-religious violence and conflicts have literarily redefined the understanding and concept of trust as the basis of peaceful co-existence, especially in Northern Nigeria. For instance, between 1976 and 2009, over 100, 000 people lost their lives and property worth billions of naira have been destroyed in more than fifty recorded ethno-religious conflicts in that part of Nigeria (Newswatch, Nov 2, 2009; Elaigwu, 2004). These conflicts had left trails of political, social, economic and psychological losses.

Increasingly, Nigerians of different religions are feeling insecure and highly vulnerable in some corners of the country. Specific towns and zones have rightly or wrongly acquired images of terror centres that should be avoided. Such conflicts have affected the spirit of national unity and integration which is about living together, about the unity and harmony of the diverse people of the federal republic with a common goal accustomed to each other in freedom, love, interdependence, to the extent that we cannot think of an alternative that can be better than the country. A number of factors account for the explosion in sectarian violence in the country. The first is ignorance or insufficient understanding of the teachings of the religions. For instance, Muslims are enjoined to live as far as possible in the Islamic State. But, they are also taught to live with others (non-Muslims) and to treat these others well. Many adherents are ignorant about their religious teachings and ultimately resort to demonstrating anti-religious behaviors. Others are: unemployment, influences of international extremists, shallow media coverage, localization of knowledge and spread of provincialism among young people. Such factors contribute to the promotion of singularity of

identities with the attendant consequence on diversity and multicultural outlook of individual and collective identities in the country (Sen, 2006). All of these impact negatively on the tolerance level of Nigerians of diverse religions, which are reinforced by the poverty of ideas in the body politics and the irresponsible behavior of the elites. Although cultural difference would hardly be buried in many communities, let such differences remain in areas of promoting unity and development of the respective institution only.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Nigeria and Religious Diversity

Nigeria is the most populous country in the African continent. Her cooperate existence was traced to 1914, with the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern protectorate by the then British colonial master to Nigeria Lord Fredrick Lugard. Nigeria has an estimated population of 150-155 million people (as at 2006 national population census), constituted by diverse ethnic nationalities of different languages, cultural identities and religious perceptions. However, scholars are yet to reach a consensus on the actual number of ethnic and linguistic groups that make up Nigeria. Report presented on this varies between 395 language groups, 250 distinct ethnic and linguistic groups to 56 ethnic nations (Biwaloye&Ibeanu, 2007).

The major ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east. The more prominent among the minority ethnic groups are the Tiv, the Edo, the Efik, the Ibibio and the Ijaw. Six other major language groups are represented within the country, namely, the West Atlantic Mande and Gur group of the Niger-Congo family, the Songhai and Saharan groups of the Nilo Saharan family and the Semitic group of the Afro-Asiantic family. The Kwa group occupies the forest zone of the Southern part of Nigeria, the Chadic group occupies the large part of the Sahel north, the Saharan and the Semitics groups are found around Chad Basin. Religiously, there are three religious groups in Nigeria; Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). However, northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, though with Christians in the cities and in minority communities throughout the region. In the Middle belt, Christians and Muslim communities are equivalent and are often contentious. The South East areas of the country are overwhelming Christian, whereas the Yoruba in the South West are religiously plural; marriage and conversion between

different faiths is a common occurrence. From the foregoing, it is so glaring that Nigeria is a purely pluri- ethnic, pluri- cultural, pluri- religious and pluri-linguistic nation. Before the historic amalgamation in 1914, the various ethnic and cultural groups that now make up Nigeria existed as autonomous political entities, having their own political systems, social and religious values. The problem of Nigeria is associated to the failure of the Colonial masters to recognize and respect these diversities. The effect of this negligence, they had maintained, is the loose and cosmetic merger of the ethnic and cultural groups in Nigeria, which shall remain the main source of the Nigerian headache. After independence, Nigeria has experienced deep-seated divisions, pervasive instability, and recurring conflicts. The challenges to stability in Nigeria can be seen along political, social, economic and religious dimensions. Thus, leading triggers of political instability in Nigeria include elections, coup, large-scale social violence, elite rivalries and economic distress (Lewis,2009). For Okafor(2001) "political crises and instability in Nigeria are deeply rooted in the conflicting values and predilections that are ethno-religious".

Leadership in Nigeria

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. This definition is similar to Northouse's (2007) definition of leadership, where it was defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership knowledge and skills. This is called Process Leadership (Jago, 1982). However, we know that we have traits that can influence our actions. This is called Trait Leadership (Jago, 1982), in that it was once common to believe that leaders were born rather than made. Public policy is also made by leaders of religious and cultural institutions. Academics continue to contemplate the definition of public policy, since there is currently no consensus. The study of public policy began in 1922, when Charles Merriam, a political scientist, sought to build a link between political theory and its application to reality. Numerous issues are addressed by public policy, including crime, education, foreign policy, health, and social welfare.

Unfortunately, those who frame the issue to be addressed by policy often exert an enormous amount of influence over the entire process through their personalities, personal interests, political affiliations, and so on. The

bias is extenuated by the players involved. The final outcome of the process, as well as its implementation, is therefore not as effective as that which could result from a purely rational process. Overall, however, public policy continues to be vital in addressing social concerns.

However, while leadership is learned, the skills and knowledge processed by the leader can be influenced by his or her attributes or traits, such as beliefs, values, ethics, and character. Knowledge and skills contribute directly to the process of leadership, while the other attributes give the leader certain characteristics that make him or her unique. In Nigeria, several administrations were influenced by either their values or beliefs. Leadership can also mean a critical management skill and the ability to motivate a group of people toward a common goal.

Traditionally, leaders and other power elites have not seen themselves accountable as individuals. They were either above the law, as sovereign -- *rex non potest peccare* ("the King can do no wrong") or they had immunity just because they were leaders (*immunity rationaemateriae*). Alternatively, they were considered mere representatives of a state or organization which, it was believed, carried the responsibility for any wrong doings which has been committed by these leaders. Nigerian leaders most times are not accountable to their electorates.

Also, leadership has been described as the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Alan Keith (1996) of Genentech states that, "Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen. Effective leadership connotes the ability to successfully integrate and maximize available resources within the internal and external environment for the attainment of organizational or societal goals.

Religious Demography

The country has a total land area of 356,700 square miles, and its population is estimated to be 120 million; however, there has not been an accurate census for more than 30 years, and many observers believe that the country's population exceeds this figure. Approximately half of the country's population practice Islam, approximately 40 percent practice Christianity, and approximately 10 percent practice exclusively traditional indigenous religions or no religion. Many persons practice elements of Christianity or Islam and elements of a traditional indigenous religion.

The predominant form of Islam in the country is Sunni. The Christian population includes Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and a growing number of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Catholics constitute the largest Christian denomination.

Religious Intolerance

According to Pittsburg State University (PSU, 2005), a crisis is any critical incident that involves death, serious injury, or threat to people; damage to environment, animals, property and data; disruption of operations; threat to the ability to carry out mission; and threat to the financial welfare and image of the university. Information Technology Johns Hopkins Institutions (ITJHI, 2006) asseverates that crisis is a critical event which, if not handled in an appropriate manner, may dramatically impact an organization's profitability, reputation, or ability to operate. An operational definition of crisis in this discourse is that crisis is a situation which invokes unstable equilibrium in the minds of the citizenry that needs to be addressed; a situation with an unpleasant incident or event with consequences, which pose a significant threat to the strategic objectives of an organization. The term crisis is usually applied to situations, which are perceived (usually quite subjective) as involving an immediate threat of unacceptable adverse consequences (Exton, 2000). Threat is a potential hindrance to some state or goal desired by an organization or individual for a religious crisis to take place, all these elements must be present.

Religious Conflict

Essentially, conflicts based on religion tend to become dogged, tenacious and brutal, intractable and a threat to the meaning of life. Conflict is said to be religious if the reason for the conflict is based on religious disagreement. When conflicts are couched in religious terms, in most cases they become transformed into value conflicts. Unlike resource conflicts which can be resolved by pragmatic and distributive means, value conflicts have a tendency to become mutually conclusive. They entail strong judgments of what is right and wrong, and parties believe that there is no common ground to resolve their differences. Ikenga-Metuh (1999) identified three forms of religious conflicts thus:

- Intra-religious which occurs between different denomination or sects
- Inter-religious which is between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimensions and

- interreligious which is between adherents of different religious beliefs, but capable of assuming socio-ethnic dimensions.

Religious Violence in Nigeria

The most significant incident occurred between September 7 and 13, 2001, when 2,300 persons were killed in ethno-religious violence in Jos. It is unclear how the unrest began however, the appointment of an ethnic Hausa to the chairmanship of a local Poverty Alleviation Program had increased tensions and accompanied earlier violence between Christian Sayewa and Muslim Hausa in Bauchi. Approximately 80 percent of the victims in Jos were Hausa Muslims, who constitute a significant minority in Jos. On October 12, 2001, 600 to 1,000 Muslims peacefully demonstrated in Kano against U.S. and allied air strikes against Afghanistan. Several hours after the conclusion of the demonstration, riot broke out in the largest market in Kano, sparked initially by street thugs, the violence later took on religious and ethnic overtones. A number of churches and three mosques reportedly were burnt during the fight. On November 3 and 4, 2001, in Gwantu, Kaduna State, at least 10 persons were reportedly killed during a fight, which resulted from a long-standing dispute between rival local leaders that degenerated into violence due to the introduction of a modified form of criminal Sharia law. In addition, in June 2002, extremist Islamic militants killed and displaced Christians in Jos, several churches were burnt, shops and homes looted. Also on November 23, 2002, the "This Day" daily national newspaper published a controversial article. It suggested that if the Prophet Mohammed were alive and had viewed the Miss World pageant, he would have probably chosen to marry one of the contestants. The newspaper later published a retraction and apology. However, the original article triggered three days of riot, killing people and setting vehicles and properties ablaze. At least 100 people died, 500 were injured and many churches were burnt.

National Integration

Integration according to Parson (2006) involves societal solidarity and institutionalization of patterns of social interaction aimed at ensuring that rules and regulations that define the patterns of interaction and the means of achieving desired goals are accorded their legitimacy within the social system. There are certain factors that characterize societal integration.

Firstly, the question of societal solidarity and the existence of normative framework which presupposes in turn, the existence of shared cognitive orientation in the process of social interaction. In other words, in every

society, for effective societal integration to be achieved, people must be aware of, or share knowledge of both their historical past and culture which makes it possible for them to adapt to, and manipulate the situation, and also plan for the future.

Cognitive orientation more or less defines the parameter of social interaction by making acceptable norms and the sanctioning of deviant behaviour meaningful. This means that when people engage in social interaction, they can more or less anticipate the consequences of their actions. In Nigeria, this normative framework is seemingly absent so also is shared cognitive orientation. Each ethnic group is in search and expression of its "local identity" which do find expression as ethnic, political and religious conflicts across the country. National integration according to Weiner (2000) refers to the process of bringing together culturally and socially discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of a national identity. Integration as used in this context assumes the existence of an ethnically plural society in which each group is characterized by its own language, religion, arts, and other self-conscious cultural qualities. National integration therefore refers specifically to the problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality, which overshadows or eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. Secondly, Weiner (2000) sees the concept as establishing a national central authority over subordinate political units or regions, which may or may not coincide with distinct cultural or social groups. Thus, it has to do with the subjective feelings which individuals belonging to different political units have towards the nation. National intergration therefore refers to the objective control which the central authority has over the entire territory under its claim of jurisdiction.

Implications of Ethno-Religious Diversity and Conflicts on National Development

The religious peace of the society plays enormous roles in national development. National development on the other hand, involves changes or advancement in a nation aimed at improving the political, economic and social lives of the people (Oluwatoyin, 2008). National development therefore, is a multidimensional concept that involves every segment of the nation's life. However, violent ethno religious conflicts constitute great challenges to national development because ethno religious conflicts destroy lives, property, and the environment. The nexus between national development and violent ethno-religious conflict therefore, cannot be

over emphasized. Violent ethno-religious conflicts severely compromise the skills and assets that are essential to living a productive life and discourage planning and investment opportunities thereby leading to acute poverty. Areas experiencing high rates of violent ethno-religious conflicts tend to experience declining levels of progress in relation to human development as measured by poverty and income. Persistent violent conflicts lead to acute poverty, high rate of unemployment and hunger.

The effects of conflicts on national development are enormous. These conflicts have adverse effects on development in all ramifications. Conflicts in which ever form, leads to unemployment and loss of income because of disruption of economic activities, destruction of public infrastructure, uncertainty, increased cost of doing business, and capital flight. Furthermore, during conflicts social spending is often reduced to accommodate increased security spending as the economy undergoes structural changes. However, infrastructure does not only deteriorate as a result of direct damage from conflict as the government shifts expenditure towards restoring peace and unity, public investment and expenditure on maintenance are squeezed.

The cost of rehabilitating and reconstructing destroyed property after each violent conflict in Nigeria is very high and could have been channeled for development purposes. After conflicts, government spends millions of naira to put in place infrastructures which were destroyed during crises. Thus persistent ethno-religious conflicts are inimical to the development of the nation as the country's source of revenue is equally affected. For instance, imposition of curfews during conflicts brings every economic activity to a standstill because of restriction of movements until normalcy returns. Also, in the areas of investment, persistent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have added to the fear of foreign investors coming to Nigeria, especially with the rampant cases of kidnapping of expatriates. Conflicts therefore, have political, social and economic effects on the larger society.

Political Effects: The constant incidences of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria in the past three decades have contributed in overheating the nation's polity as the country is being constantly threatened with disintegration. The consequent abuse of basic human rights as a result of ethno-religious conflicts cannot go unnoticed. In the face of political

instability following these persistent ethno-religious conflicts in the past three decades, some Nigerians were forced to relocate to their states of origin and even to their communities for safety. Apart from this, government policies are influenced by emotional sentiments and manipulation of ethno-religious cleavages. Right from the formation of political parties to electioneering campaigns and voting patterns, all are being influenced by ethno-religious tendencies and affiliations. As a result of this, politics in Nigeria is always volatile and usually leads to violence and the destruction of lives and property.

Social Effects: The social effects of ethno-religious conflicts cannot be overemphasized. Incessant ethno-religious conflicts have continued to threaten the socio-economic development, peace, unity and stability of Nigeria in the past three decades. Ethno religious conflicts have adversely affected the existing social relationships between neighbours that were hitherto living peacefully. These conflicts have led to hatred, enmity and persistent suspicions among the adherents of Islam and Christianity. In Nigeria today, ethno-religious consciousness has led to various social ills ranging from problems of ethno-religious influence on job recruitments, promotions and securing admission to schools. Also, projects like road constructions, schools, electricity, water works, health centres and other projects were either frustrated or sited in wrong places as a result of ethno-religious influences. In the area of education, due to frequent disruption and closure of schools during ethno-religious conflicts in some parts of northern Nigeria, the educational quest of the children has been adversely affected and retarded and school calendars disrupted.

Ethno-religious conflicts affect children, girls and women in various ways. Death of men during violent conflicts raises the proportion of female-headed households. After each round of ethno-religious-conflict, women tend to face a much heavier burden of caring for their various families alone. Also, the adverse effects of violent ethno-religious conflicts on women and girls' reproductive and sexual health cannot be overemphasized. This is because their psychological, reproductive and overall wellbeing is often greatly compromised during violent conflicts. Violent ethno-religious conflicts tend to increase the risks of sexual violence on women and girls. Aside from this, health facilities are greatly disrupted during violent conflicts. The specific experience of women and girls in violent conflicts is linked to their status in societies.

During violent ethno-religious conflict, severe mental and social stress can be caused by deaths, separation and loss of family and friends; loss of home and social environment; exposure to violence, including witnessing or directly experiencing rape, torture and the killing of friends or relatives. So also the weakening or severing of family and community bonds, networks and material deprivation. Another major social effect of ethno-religious conflict is the displacement of women and girls as internally displaced persons. In conflict situations, adults too need protection and are therefore, less able to support and defend their families.

CONCLUSION

This paper has succeeded in breaking down religious intolerance in Nigeria and how it affects national development. According to Bankole(2001), when religion is practiced under checks and balances, it creates a cohesive force that is conducive for sustainable democracy and national development. There is need for enlightened leadership; therefore, religious tolerance, peaceful co-existence, sustainable democracy and national development would reign if followers emulate leaders with responsible character. A leader is the one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way. Efficiency and effectiveness are prerequisites of sustainable democracy and national integration and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus, for the promotion of religious diversity for strengthening of Nigeria's national integration, the following recommendations were made:

- Promotion of effective transformational leaderships that lead by examples; if the political leadership appreciates the enormity of the challenge, it could strengthen existing policies that promote mixing up in schools where young people of diverse backgrounds are encouraged to learn in communities outside of their own(others like excursions, sports, etc)
- Strengthening of weak institutions like the media, transport system, etc to encourage free flow of ideas and goods and services across narrow boundaries (e.g broadcasting, railways, etc.)
- Promote active debates on democracy and related ideological issues to expand the democratic space so that people would have enough to talk on instead of denying them the opportunity to

openly debate on such issues thereby confining their imaginations to their ethnic and religious groups. Encourage open debates on issues across ethno-religious boundaries.

- Address the challenges of poverty and mass unemployment in a more creative manner. Poverty promotes desperation making the poor to believe any false proposition made to him to exit from poverty. So, to reduce the vulnerability of the poor to mischief makers, their conditions must be ameliorated.

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