

RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effects of conflicts induced by religious beliefs on economic development in Nigeria. It highlights the fact that faiths or religion is a major influence in Nigeria and Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions in the country. It reasons that while each of these religions professes peace, conflicts arising from disagreement over practice by members remain a constant feature of life in the nation and this has affected peace and progress and denied Nigeria the necessary economic development. The paper adopted descriptive analysis and the library research method. It notes that Nigeria is a secular state and the strong influence of religion is unnecessary. It observes that secularism deemphasized has made religion to have overbearing influence on the nation therefore, it recommends less emphases on religion so as to curtail conflicts. It also recommends religious harmony through dialogue as well as emphasis on human rights and the rights to freedom of worship enshrined in the constitution to minimize conflicts.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Conflict, Development, Constitution, Economy

INTRODUCTION

The entire African continent is engulfed in conflicts and Nigeria is not an exception. The laudable goal of ‘silencing the guns’ initiatives of the African Union was aimed at ending all wars, civil conflicts, gender-based violence, violent conflicts and genocide prevention on the continent by 2020 but this was not achieved due to the prevailing trend (Alison, 2020). Wherever people with different attitudes, personalities and belief system gather together, their diversity will eventually surface or create discord (Afolabi, 2018). People are diverse and their belief systems differ with each belief system satisfying the needs of individuals who operate it and the divergent views they promote can create incompatible goals which can less or promote peace and harmony or results to conflict depending on how it is managed.

Social and political conflicts are common in Africa while conflicts influenced by religion are prevalent in Nigeria. Religious conflicts manifest as inter-faith and intra-faith disturbances and violence and the aim is to get new converts, claim superiority or serve a political and ethnic interest which may be positive or negative. Conflict is inherent in nature and there is no human relationship that is devoid of it. The diversity of Nigeria reflects a conglomeration of people of different cultural and religious backgrounds bound by a constitution and in a relationship that meets their goals and protects their religious interests therefore, leaving them prone to conflicts.

In every society, a conflict can either be in the form of disagreements or violence which can either build or destroy. Religious conflicts help to promote harmony among members as well as influence disagreement between members of opposing faiths thereby causing mayhem, insecurity and destruction which is unhealthy for economic development. In Nigeria, religion plays a major role in fuelling and perpetrating violence (Oduma-Aboh). Religious harmony from conflicts seeks a stronger economy while a disharmony between faiths tends to result to chaos and confusion which promotes insecurity and discourage investments.

In order to adequately study this phenomenon, descriptive research method was used. Primary data was gathered through questionnaires were administered to 373 selected members of Local Baptist Convention's using stratified random sampling. secondary sources of information and data was used. Journal articles, newspapers, magazines, textbooks and internet sources were used and the data generated were also analysed.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Conflict

Conflict stems from incongruity or incompatibility of rivaling goals (Shehu, 2021). It exists when two people wish to carry out acts which are mutually inconsistent (Amakiri, 2007). Conflict arises when there is misunderstanding between two or more people or group. (Fodang, and Mmegwa, 2016). It is an inherent phenomenon that has come to stay with man, it is inevitable and resolving or managing it is essential (Aliede, 2004). Conflicts can either be constructive or destructive and every conflict has its own effect on both conflicting parties depending on what form of conflict it is (Afolabi, 2018). Conflicts induced by religious beliefs are common in Nigeria and this is because religion is a double-edged sword and can create social order, harmony, cohesion and stability while it can be used by wealthy and powerful people to exploit and oppress the people therefore, becoming a veritable source of violent conflicts and social dislocation (Ogbeide, 2012).

Religion

Religion pertains to God and belief and it is the belief in religion that serves as mechanism engineering the prominent attacks against the other religion (Owutu, 2013). It is a human experience of and belief in the supernatural and an attempt to live, be guided by that experience and belief, to worship and relate with the supernatural and with his fellow men (Okweze, 2005). It is against this background that Iyer, (2010) observes that religion is the rational choice of individuals and the forces are important as they change the environment in which individuals operate, directly affecting individuals' choices and behaviour by changing the

utilities of goods. The change through religion affects the society and the economy with growth and development either hampered or enhanced depending on the pattern of change.

Religion affects the society in various ways and a serious devotion to it leads to fanatical choices that can affect development. Development is the collective activities by any human society, irrespective of its size, directed at reducing the totality of both perceived and actual obstacles to a higher standard of living thereby maximizing the quality of life of the citizens (Shamija, 2016). It is both a physical process involving the construction of roads, schools, hospitals, and railways. It is a state of mind involving a change of attitude for good; it implies a reduction or eradication of poverty, illiteracy, disease, malnutrition, and joblessness. It also means the provision of basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, water, good roads, electricity, education, affordable and accessible health care, among others (Enyi, 2020).

Economic Development

Economic development is the creation of wealth from which community benefits are realized. It is more than a jobs program, and is an investment in growing your economy and enhancing the prosperity and quality of life for all residents and is not community development which is basically the process of making a community a better place to live and work (California Association for Local Economic Development, CALED. <https://www.caled.org>). However, economic growth is a sustained increase in the output of the economy often termed the Gross Domestic Product (Obute, and Koko, 2014). It refers to the increment in amount of goods and services produced by an economy...economic growth means an increase in real national income/national output while economic development means an improvement in the quality of life and living standards such as measures of literacy, life expectancy and health-care.

Lack of economic growth and development can induce poverty. Dauda (2016) argues that poverty is a threat to every economy and is a potential source of political and social instability and is capable of igniting internal security problem and crime. He portrays poverty as lack and observes a religious perception of poverty as an act of God. Poverty,

unemployment and terrorist activities have undermined sectors of the Nigerian economy while policy instability and somersault have discouraged foreign investment despite the huge domestic market and Nigeria's strategic location regionally and worldwide (Bature, 2016). According to Bature, (2016), terrorism in Nigeria is a result of collective discontent caused by poverty. Zamba (2016) posits that genuine grievances against terrorism in Nigeria have been adulterated with banditry, insurgency, kidnapping, trafficking in drugs and humans to transform the Northeast and other northern parts of the country into an insecure zone.

Terrorism in Nigeria is mostly linked to Boko Haram, a self-proclaimed Islamic sect. The Boko Haram terrorist organization is locked in a deadly conflict with government over western education and the imposition of Sharia laws and outright criminality (Zamba, 2016). The activities of the Boko Haram sect impacted heavily on the Nigerian economy and its Foreign Direct Investment. In 2013, FDI flow into Nigeria dropped by 21%. The activities of Boko Haram have resulted to loss of over 17,000 lives, destruction of properties, business premises and closure of formal education in places affected. Boko Haram activities have seen the emergence of shadow economy which is an instrument used by terrorists to finance their activities and involved underground, covert or illegal trading in stolen goods, prostitution, gambling, smuggling and so on.

Empirical Review of Literature

Pluralism is a primordial reality consistent with nature and the society is affected by it. Oduma-Aboh (2020) considers man as a political and religious being regulated by ideas and beliefs of a supersensible being responsible for his creation and the awareness of God in the society leads to many pathways to reach him. He therefore explored threats of interreligious crisis to national security and development in Nigeria and devoted attention on religious conflicts and ways to attain a peaceful, tranquil and harmonious society where national security and Nigerian development is guaranteed. Using Marxist Theory of religion, Oduma-Aboh (2020), noted that Karl Marx attributes the origin and continued existence of religion to economic exploitation of the masses by capitalist exploiters. "the rich exploiters encourage religion and

use it as an opium with which they sedate the masses and prevent them from protesting or revolting against their exploitation.”

According to the researcher, Marx believes that the rich exploiters used religion as a weapon to calm the nerves of the exploited, prevent them from rebellion and revolution by assuring them of a reward to enjoy in heaven after their sufferings and reasoned that elite across the different religious divides in Nigeria have used Islam and Christianity for inordinate and ulterior motives to serve political, cultural, social and economic interests that are basically selfish thereby contradicting the gains and benefits of religious diversity in other countries. He further observed that religion is being manipulated in Nigeria and elite across religious divides always agree on the collective plundering of the wealth of the nation and when they disagree, whip up religious sentiments leading to interreligious conflicts which threatens the peace and stability of the country and affects the national security with implications on development. The researcher recommended an enforcement of the constitutional provision for freedom of worship across religious divides as well as emphasized needs of the citizenry across religious divides to shun ideas and acts likely to influence interreligious conflicts which poses a threat to national security and development among others,

In a study on Church conflicts in Nigeria, the researcher, Oluwasegun (2018) investigated strategies adopted in managing conflicts in local Baptist Convention with a view to identifying their effectiveness. The researcher relied on historical and survey research design to understudy 15 Baptist conventions that had witnessed conflicts in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria purposively selected. He conducted in-depth interviews among members across the selected Local Baptist Conventions and officials of National Baptist Convention.

Overview of Religious Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria as a corporate entity was the creation of British colonial authority (Musa, 2017). Before the arrival of the British, it existed as kingdoms, emirates and communities with different religious practices such as Christianity and paganism in the south and Islam in the north but despite this disparity, the British colonial government merged them together as one

country (Ogenyi, 2021). The Hausa-Fulani and other smaller ethnic groups that inhabit the north of the country are Muslims while the Igbo and other smaller groups residing in the south are primarily Christians and groups lying in the middle comprise a mixture of Christians and Muslims while the Yoruba found in the Southwest are almost half Muslim and Christians (Canci and Odukoya, 2016).

Nigeria has experienced series of violent and bloody confrontations between religious groups, especially between Christians and Muslims, causing the death of thousands of people and scholars argue that religion is the bane of Nigeria's drive to attain unity and cohesion (Oduma-Aboh, 2017). Human beings struggle to survive within their environment especially in a multicultural society and are bound to have cultural overlaps whereby some groups may view their own ways of life as the best whereas the others are bad (Chikada, 2020). This is so with Nigeria where the diversity of faiths has led to different belief systems that often result to disagreement on issues such as politics and economy with Islam as the most religion that has caused conflict while fear from the propaganda of a conspiracy to Islamize Nigeria tend to mobilize Christians to react and to cause confusion (Ogbeide, 2012).

According to (Okweze, 2005), human existence is about relations and relationships and it is impossible to exist at the human level without relating or having relations of some sorts therefore, Nigerians, despite their diversity have continued to relate with one another on the basis of their faiths and ethnicity. Indeed, no religious conflict in Nigeria is without an ethnic influence and the struggle between rival ethnic groups is often to maintain or gain control of state power and resources with the 1953 Kano riots between Hausa and Igbo as the beginning of conflicts influenced by ethnic and religious differences in the country (Ogenyi, 2021). Intra-faiths conflicts manifest as disagreements among members of the same faith or religion. Afolabi (2018) enumerates causes of Church conflicts as follows: disagreement about values and beliefs, conflicting roles and responsibilities of the pastors, organizational structure, leadership styles, inadequate communication, dependence on the financially-well-to-do church members for welfare, mismanagement of church funds, intolerance of other

people's views, doctrinal issues, a visionless church, misuse of the autonomy of the local church, unclear organizational structure, new pastor rushes into changes.

Interfaith conflicts result from violence and aggression among members of different religions and is prevalent in Nigeria with violence and destruction resulting from them and mainly in conflicts involving members of the Islamic faith with a typical situation as the outbreak of conflicts in Zaria in May, 1990 which led to destruction of property belonging to mainly Christians while December of that year witnessed the Maitatsine riot in Kano which resulted to the death of more than 4,000 people with large scale destruction of properties. Stewart (2004) captures the Nigerian situation with the following submission:

Some development costs are obvious as people who join the fighting forces, who are killed or flee, can no longer work productively; schools, power stations and/or roads that are destroyed reduce the productive capacity of the economy (Stewart, 2004: 4).

Over the past few years, Nigeria has witnessed series of violent attacks occasioned by the insurgent group popularly known as Boko Haram, the group has been operating in Nigeria since the early 2000, becoming increasingly active and violent since 2009 (Auwal, 2017). The sect exploited the poverty facing small business owners such as tailors, butchers, beauticians, traders in the northeast in 2016 and got them to accept loans through their microfinance in exchange for joining the group which has links with Al Qaeda and ISIS and in 2019, six Nigerian nationals were convicted in UAE for funding Boko Haram.

On April 25, 2018 the CNN reported that two priests and 17 worshippers were killed when armed men believed to be cattle herders stormed a Catholic church during early mass in a village in Benue State and razed over fifty houses while BBC reported that Boko Haram killed villagers in Christmas Eve attacks in 2020 in northeast Nigeria. At least 37 people died and 57 others were injured in an attack at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla, Abuja in 2011 with the Islamist militant group, Boko Haram claiming responsibility (Reuters, 2013). In Zamfara State, the Police command alerted the public of a letter by a Fulani Association warning Christians against public worship in churches lest they be attacked, abducted and their

places of worship torched. In a letter to the Zamfara Police command on November 19, 2021, the group claimed:

All these mirrors the security situation in Nigeria. Security is important in the life of a nation especially with potential hazards from terrorism, insurgency, banditry, computer hacking and viruses coupled with the emerging concern over Job security, income security, health security, environmental security and security from crime world-wide.

Ethnic and religious groups such as Boko Haram and armed Fulani pastoralists have wreaked havoc in Nigeria and scared investors away and the implications of a lack of investment in the country is that the GDP reduces, unemployment increases, risk is high and only when people are able to sleep with two eyes, can investment confidence be restored (Nwabughio, 2021). The Nigerian Economic Summit Group warned that insecurity is the biggest threat to investment in Nigeria. At the 27th Nigerian Economic Summit on October, 25-26, 2021 it was stated:

The Nigerian economy is a middle-income, mixed economy with emerging markets and is projected to grow by 1.5% in 2021 and 2,9% in 2022 based on expected recovery of crude oil prices and production (Wikipedia) but insecurity, especially from religious conflicts masterminded by religious terror groups are obstacles (Nigerian Economic Summit Group, 2021).

Discussions

Issue of identity and choice of religion is a source of tense atmosphere among followers of different religions but people of Mambilla Plateau with a predominance of traditional worship inherited from their ancestors, Christianity and Islam have risen above this to sustain harmony and peaceful coexistence among themselves. Located in conflict-prone Northeast in Taraba State, the researcher wrote that Mambilla Plateau is a contradistinction to Jos and Kaduna States which are ridden with religious and ethnic crisis because they live peacefully without unnecessary religious clashes despite the religious climate which hovered over them with the presence of Islam, Christianity and African traditional religion.

He explored the geographical location of Mambilla Plateau, its historical development and religions of the people as well as discussed, the factors influencing peace on the Plateau.

Nasidi (2016) considered religious tolerance as contributing factors to peace and harmony on the Plateau and observed that a lack of youth redundancy, the active involvement of traditional rulers in the prevention of violence and feuds in the area and the choice of a single social habitation without discrimination and divisions for Christians and Muslims as exist in Kaduna and Jos are critical stimulants for peace and harmony on the Plateau.

Other measures for peaceful coexistence he argued were the establishment of the *Jugulde*, as a secret society charged with policing and patrolling the borders of the area for a necessary assistance to the Police and other security operatives of government and the high level of literacy with more than 80% of the population literate. Religion is a consciousness that helps to regulate the society. It shapes how individuals react to the environment in which they live (Akinfenwa, Fagbamila and Abdulganiyu, 2014). For this reason, therefore, the Nigerian society with multiple religions is influenced by practices and acts that are at variance and tend to create an environment of discord among the populace with ethnic interests as a major cause of conflicts.

The social and political space in Nigeria is influenced by a strong sense of religion with the church and mosque as a major influence and hardly is a decision taken by government, individuals or corporate organizations without a recourse to their dictates, requirements and public perception of their impacts in society. For this reason, democratic practices reflect a divergence in religion and major political offices in Nigeria are considered with religion as a strong determinant of beneficiaries. This gives the chance for competition and corruption with each religion claiming superiority and the environment is conflicts prone due to suspicion and discord among the religious adherents.

In some parts of the country, especially the north, settlement patterns are affected by religion and adherents of dissimilar religions do not mix socially. This leaves a sense of discrimination and contradicts the constitution and religious difference compounds the wide spread conflict between indigenes and settlers in Nigeria (Ostien, 2009). While peace and harmony preoccupy religious expressions in Nigeria, extremity has led to violence with

economic implications. Activities of religious sects in Nigeria provoke conflicts and leave the country in a state of insecurity which discourages investments required to nurture a healthy economy in Nigeria.

Aside from killings, conflicts arising from religious extremism have led to hostage taking of individuals and destruction of property with each as an indication of an environment which cannot accommodate investors and economic development is therefore, negatively affected. Agada-Mba (2017) appraised economic development as an activity concerned with quality improvements, the introduction of new goods and services, risk management and the dynamics of innovation and entrepreneurship. Economic development is enhanced by peace and security with conflicts and violence as deterrents. Religious conflict in Nigeria is a source of violence and insecurity and it discourages investment and economic development.

Conclusion

Conflicts arising from religious extremism are prominent in Nigeria and they discourage investment and economic development. Aside from this is suspicion and discord arising from disparity in religion leading which lead to competition and corruption with negative implications on the economy. Religious conflicts leading to violence, corruption and insecurity have discouraged investments in Nigeria and have affected economic development.

Recommendations

- 1) The rights of the citizenry to freedom of worship should be enforced to check excesses that might cause religious upheavals and crisis.
- 2) Emphasis on economic development should dominate the focus of the citizenry
- 3) Dialogue should be a priority. Dialogue is speaking and another listens and responds and vice versa and living together inspite of religious differences peacefully should be upheld.
- 4) Political and social discontents should be addressed without the choice of terrorism and violence.

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