RELIGIOUS CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Adedamola Blessing ADEGOKE[1,] Lilian Nnenne AKAHOLU[2]
[1]Precious Cornerstone University, Department of International Relations,
[2]Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo
*Email of Corresponding Author: _adedamolaadegokeb@gmail.com_ Phone: +234 813 181 1946

Abstract

This paper discussed the role of religion in conflict zones around the world and how religious conflicts constitute an increasing share of violent conflicts today, resulting in stunted development. For many individuals and groups, religious beliefs give the moral ammunition to justify and carry out violence.The paper expresses religious conflict as an inhibiting factor in Africa's development, by looking at the steady increase of armed conflicts with religious overtones in countries like Mali, Nigeria, and Somalia in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years. Qualitative data from secondary literature, and utilize conflict theory.This paper reveals that incessant religious conflict in Africa has resulted in the loss of great human lives and the destruction of natural resources, thus dwindling the rate of development.The paper concludesthat only when the root of religious conflicts, which often stems from religious discrimination can be effectively tackled then there will be room forsustainable development.

Keywords: *Religion, Violence, Development, Conflict, Sub-Saharan Africa*

INTRODUCTION

Some of the major challenges facing developing countries are providing an equitable standard of living, adequate food, clean water, safe shelter and energy, a healthy and secure environment, an educated public, and satisfying jobs for present and future generations (Kanayo, Kizito, &Udefuna, 2013). Much like the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sustainable Development Goals have also faced several challenges on their way to implementing the 17 goals outlined by the United Nations. According to Jaiyesimi 2016, the major challenges that need to be addressed for achieving sustainable development in Africa are finances, maintaining

peace, measuring progress, and accountability (Jaiyesimi, September 2016). The focus of this paper is ofmaintaining peace; a phenomenon that has become increasingly hard to achieve with the rise of religious crisis. And peace is crucial to development and thus, sustainable development.

Conflict in a human association is inevitable. The fact remains that in the course of human diverse interactions there abound situations where there may be an interface between and among people which will inevitably result in conflict. Conflict according to Oseimen, 2010) (is everywhere, in every relationship, exist inside of us, around us, and occurs atintra-psychic, inter-personal and intra-group, intergroup, intra-national and national. What then is conflict? Coser (1956) defined conflict as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the opponents aim to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. This definition corroborated the earlier assertion by Hansfield (1943) that conflict refers to a breakdown of normal activities of an organization in such a manner that the individual or group involved experiences disharmony in working together. These definitions imply that the individuals or groups involved in a conflict will not just stop working together as a team, but can go on to devise means, strategies, and tactics to frustrate and mar the efforts and intents of the perceived opponent(s). This submission is captured by Pondy(1969) when he explained that conflict ranges from passive resistance to active

aggression. Essentially, Flippo (1980) noted that conflict occurs when two or more people or groups perceive that they have (a) incompatible interests or positional differences and (b) interdependent activities toward attaining the goals. Hence, as Katz and Kann (1978) rightly pointed out, persons, groups, organizations, and nations engage in conflict when they interact directly in such a way that the actions of one tend to prevent or compel some outcomes against the resistance of another (cited in Odoh, 2006).

Meanwhile, conflict refers to disagreements, misunderstandings, disharmony, confrontations, and struggles over values (status, power, resources) arising from a clash of interests and interdependence of activities, which may or may not be expressed violently. Conflict could be disagreement resulting from different interests, opinions, ideas, opinions, ideas, ideologies, attitudes, orientations, etc. Conflict could turnout to be mere differences in ideas, and opinions. Interest, viewpoints, and conversely, conflict may manifest in violent demonstrations, riots, or war. Conflict turns out to be problematic when it is based on religious beliefs which manifest violence, resulting inthe inability of the religious parties to respect and accommodate each other and failure to resolve differences amicably. Notably, in Nigeria, there are two main religions with notably relative proportional strength of followers usually in a competition of superiority, they are Christianity and Islam. Diversity in the

belief of these religions, like, their mode of worship, signs and symbols, and method of conversion, just to mention but a few had resulted in frequent rancor amongthe human race and Nigerians to be precise. The rancor and animosity that religious conflict has generated in Africa Nigeria had greatly hampered development and dwindled economic growth, especially as human and natural resources are daily wasted, for example in Nigerian as exemplified thus for instance in 1986 at Ilorin, Kwara State, militant Muslims attacked Christians on a Palm Sunday procession leading to the destruction of churches. Similarly in the same year, the statue of the risen Christ at the chapel of resurrection at the University of Ibadan was burnt by the Muslims, (Unah, 84). On the other hand, Gideon Akaluka was beheaded in Kano in 1995 allegedly for desecrating a page of the holy Qur'an, (Adega 50).

Types of Conflict

Conflict as stated in the works of Oseimen (2012) the diverse types, among them are these:

a. Intra- personal conflict: This connotes a conflict that occurs within an individual. The experience usually takes place in the mind of the concerned person. This conflict is psychological involving the individual's thoughts, and values, from the simpler mundane ones like deciding whether or not to go organic for lunch to ones that can affect major decisions in life. Most often this type of conflict can be quite difficult to handle, for it could lead to restlessness and uneasiness and can even cause depression. To come out successfully from such a predicament it is better to let go of the anxiety by communicating with others to ease out tension and finally get back to normalcy. And when one finally gets himself out of the situation, he becomes more empowered as a person.

b. Interpersonal Conflict:This conflict between two individuals. it occurs mainly due to the fact that people are different from one another. Diverse personalities usually lead to incompatible choices and opinions. Such conflicts are necessary becauseit helps develop relationships, for, in the cause of constructive management, conflictual parties will come up with better adjustment. Conversely, when not such a relationship gets very destructive, a mediator could be utilized to get it resolved.

c. Intra –group conflict: e. An understanding that occurs among individuals within a team is termed intra-conflict. It arises because team members are of diverse personalities which may automatically lead to differences in views and ideas. Conflict can help come up with decisions that can lead to the achievement of the objectives of a team.

Notwithstanding, if the rate at which it destroys harmony in the group is enormous, then guidance is needed from a different party for settlement.

d. Inter-Group Conflict: This occurs when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. For example, if a sales department of an organization has a conflict with the customer support department. One of the contributory factors of inter-group conflict is competition as well as rivalry forresources.

e. Intra-national: this connotes conflict within a nation, involving different groups within the nation. This could be inter-ethnic, inter-religious, or resources within the state. When managed constructively it could result in better understanding and development but if otherwise, it could amount to catastrophe.

f. International Conflict: This is a conflict that occurs among different countries which are constituents of an international organization. This conflict is because the concerned countries exhibit diverse interestsin socio-economic and political policies to be adopted for the organization to which they belong. Each member country usually prefers that the aims and objective of the organization corresponds to its foreign policy objectives.

CONCEPTUALISING RELIGION

Though the term eludes any single definition, religion is a key component of individual and group identity. At a macro level, for purposes of this study, the term "religious actors" refers to mainstream and indigenous religious/spiritual leaders, institutions and organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and communities that identify with a specific religion or spirituality, as well as informal networks and youth groups. This includes faith-based, faith-inspired, indigenous religions, and other actors. These actors play an important role in many societies as key stakeholders in communities where they are often trusted more by individuals than secular government actors.

Religion and spirituality reflect a deeper sense of inner identity, reflecting a framework of beliefs and principles that inform and shape worldviews.

RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

Religious and ethnic crisis in Africa, inclusive of Nigeria is as old as humanity. As cited in or alluded to by Danoya (2020), this crisis is due to diversified ethnic crisis and tribal groups as well as many religious epistemologies that permeates the nation. He further stated that the core issue in the case of religious conflict in Nigeria is intolerance of "all" religions in the country. In addition, he stated that factors like unnecessary suspicion and lack of understanding of the

precepts, doctrines, and liturgies of other religions are not left out. Notably, religious conflict leadsto violence and disruption of peace, and many African nations inclusive of Nigeria, are often between adherents of Islam and Christianity. Certainly, this is not to deny the occasional conflict between the adherents of the African Traditional religion and other religions groups. Religious conflict according to Wendy (2013) is a complex phenomenon that engages a combination of the contested domain (ideology /morality, power, personality, space, /place, and group identity) in turn enabled by a range of other conditions, political, social, economic, cultural and psychological. gain further clarity when we turn to consider what religious conflict is not. Certain

RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

North East Nigerian Crisis (Boko Haram)

Nigerians living in the northeast have endured varying levels of armed conflict since 2009, when the jihadist insurgent group Boko Haram announced its goal to form a province of the Islamic State in the states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. The Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in 2013, launching police and military response in the region (OHCA, 2019).

In 2014, the conflict gained wide international attention after the mass kidnapping of female students from Chibok province and the subsequent "Bring Back our Girls" global campaign. Still commonly referred to as Boko

Haram, the group switched allegiance from Al Qaeda to the Islamic State in 2015, adopting the new name of the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) (Muir, 2015). Although in recent years it has lost much of the territory it once controlled, Boko Haram and associated factions continue to terrorize the region with military-style offensives and other violence, including suicide bombings, and kidnappings. The conflict has significantly disrupted economic activity and further emphasized the stark socio-economic divisions between North and South (Stoddard, Harvey, Czwarno, & Breckenridge, 2020).

As of 2019, an estimated 7.1 million people in NE Nigeria required assistance, including 2 million displaced by the conflict, a large proportion of whom are living in IDP camps within garrison towns established by the Nigerian military. Humanitarian assistance provided by international aid agencies has largely been confined to these garrison towns. As of late 2019, an estimated further 1.24 million people need aid outside the Nigerian military zones, and by all accounts unreached by and unable to access humanitarian assistance. The UN reports that many of those who have made it out of the insurgent-controlled areas are malnourished and report being held for years in hostage-like situations by NSAGs with no access to basic services and suffering abuse(OHCA, 2018; OHCA, 2017).

In 2019, the conflict in northeastern Nigeria entered its eleventh year. Since 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency and the government's military response have killed tens of thousands of civilians and displaced millions across the Lake Chad region, which straddles Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. Although major military campaigns in 2015–2016 succeeded in degrading the group's territorial control, Boko Haram has proven remarkably adaptable in its tactics: the end of 2018 once again saw an uptick in attacks in Nigeria's Borno State (Maclean, December 28, 2018). As Muhammadu Buhari assumes his second term as president, the conflict in the northeast appears far from resolved.

In a bid to tackle the rising and seemingly never-ending crises, several efforts have been employed. These efforts have generally fallen into three main categories: programs aimed at strengthening local conflict prevention and mitigation systems, programs aimed at restoring local governance and basic services, and programs aimed at fostering social cohesion and ensuring the reintegration of former combatants (Brechenmacher, 2019).

Fulani Ethnic Crisis

Apart from the Boko Haram Religion-driven crisis, another conflict that has stunted the growth of the SDGs in Nigeria is the Fulani Herdsmen Crisis, which according to an article by the International Crisis Group is killing more Nigeria than Boko Haram has.

The rising conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria is already six times deadlier in 2018 than Boko Haram's insurgency. To stop the bloodshed, the federal government should improve security; end impunity for assailants, and hasten livestock sector reform. State governments should freeze open grazing bans. (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Fulani Herdsmen terrorism or Herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria have mainly involved disputes over land resources between mostly Muslim Fulani herders and mostly Christian farmers across Nigeria but more devastating in the Middle Belt (North Central) since the return of democracy in 1999. But most recently, it has deteriorated into terror attacks on farmers by Fulani Herdsmen - the fourth most deadly terrorist group in the world to the Global Terrorism Index (Ilo, Jonathan-Ichaver, &Adamolekun, 2019). These attacks have been carried out with impunity with no Fulani terrorists arrested by the Nigerian government to date. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has been criticized for turning a blind eye to the atrocities committed by his kinsmen and for his inability to issue an arrest warrant for killer herdsmen. Attacks have also taken place in northwest Nigeria against farmers who are mainly Hausa people. While the conflict has underlying economic and environmental reasons, it has also acquired ethnic dimensions (Nigeria Politics & Security, 2021). Thousands of people have died since these attacks began. Sedentary

farming rural communities are often targets of attacks because of their vulnerability. There are fears that this conflict will spread to other West African countries but this has often been downplayed by governments in the region. Attacks on herders have also led them to retaliate by attacking other communities.

CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Some of the factors that are responsible for religious conflicts are –

Refusal to move with change: The real tragedy of religion is that it fails to move along with times. It is not progressive as it is driven by displeasure for modernization. For instance here, Boko Haram is against Western cultureand blames the spread of materialism and capitalism as a major cause for the decrease in morality in religion. The methodology applied for conversion: different Holy books and two founders. Islam permits polygamy and makes provisions for contract marriage while Christianity voids polygamy. This is one of the divergent views of their radical differences.

Religion goes the extra mile to evangelize for converts to have a dominant population: The desperate style to convert people can lead to conflict. Sometimes a particular religion can be imposed on people without credence to their faith. Agence France Presse (1991) says that there were violent riots in Kano on October 14, 1991. The riots were reportedly sparked off by Muslim demonstrators in protest against a visit by a German preacher Reinhard Bonnke who had allegedly managed to convert some Muslims to Christian Faith. As many as one hundred people reportedly died and houses and vehicles were burnt down during the rampage. Utterances of religious elites: Reckless utterances by religious elites or leaders can spark conflict. The recent utterance credited to Apostle Suleiman of Omega Fire Ministry to kill any Fulani Herdsman trying to attack his church is enough to trigger violence. In Yalmaturu Deba of Gombe State, a religious leader accused a Muslim of deviating from expectancy by marrying many wives. According to him, it was a sin. The utterance brought maiming and burning of houses. The bloody clash claimed over two hundred lives.

Clothingpolitical Objectives with Religion: Elites and other religious nationalists view religion as closely tied to their lives and any threat to it is a threat to their existence. These groups of people seek a political forum to hide and perpetrate evil so cheerfully due to their convictions. This shows how people find it difficult to separate religion from politics. *Illiteracy:* The majority of religious fanatics are not schooled and this makes it easy for them to be bent. Believing whatever they are been told, and ready to do whatever they are been told to do.

Signs and Symbols: Religious signs and symbols are always used to forward ethnic

causes. Yusuf (1982) says that hypocrisy, corruption, and religious bigotry have all conspired to rob Nigeria of any regional leprosy. The misuse of religious signs and symbols can be a major cause of conflicts.

Poverty: This is a persistent problem that brings all types of evil into society as a poor man does not have regard for any law governing society. The poor are always unhappy and can brazenly destroy lives and property. The rich which is the "have" can easily influence the poor or "have not" to act under religion to implement their will.

Fight for Dominance: Christians and Muslims fight regularly to dominate or suppress each other. They use every available radical means as a necessary tool to silence those they see as their opponents. Delay in Federal Government Management of Conflict: The way Government manages conflict can either lead to more conflicts or less conflict. They are slow most times in response or entirely ignore actions, acts, or speech that might bring about full-blown conflict. In January 2008, some Shi'ites blocked the convoy of the Emir of Zazzau in Zaria, Kaduna State because they were celebrating their New Year. Federal Government did not respond immediately until it resulted in an ugly situation. Peter (2012) says that removing discrimination against one group may affect the rights of another group; simply replacing the rights of one group with the rights of another is no solution. It perpetuates discrimination in ways where the reconciliation of opposing demands is seen to be of interest to all groups as well as the general concern of the State.

IMPLICATIONS OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Federalism Innocent (2013) posits that religion with its moral principles and values is expected to direct societies and the lives of its adherents. Christianity and Islam, the two adopted alien faiths in Nigeria, have from their entryinto the society made social welfare services and educational development an important component of their activities. What is worrisome as he noted is the violence associated with this proselytizing religion. From the Maitasine uprising of the 1980s to the Boko Haram of today, it has been violence associated with religious beliefs that are almost bringing the government to its knees, while peace and security remain elusive. Ezenwaji (2003) observes that religion has tried to undermine and make a joke of the country's constitution and in the process create a state of confusion and lawlessness in the country. The implications are discussed hereunder;

i. Mistrust among the Federating Units: Nigeria which has thirty-six (36) federating units or States has a high level of intolerance. It has wounds that cannot be healed. Any move by any religious group irrespective of how sincere it claims to be is easily misinterpreted because everyone is suspicious of each other. This has

affected the free flow of communication because any information sent out might trigger crises. The Muslim States now associate with one another, and non-Muslim or Christian States in turn associate with their kind. Olupona (1992) opines that religious differences have high potentials for separating people from one another, many times, a certain fanaticism is associated with religious beliefs which exclude social relations with people of a different religion or hamper mutual trust and confidence when such relations happen to exist.

ii. Low Productivity: Religious laws and crises are so severe that it affects workers' motivation in Nigeria. People are no longer productive because they are not in a safe environment. This is altering organizational goals and Nigeria as a whole is suffering therepercussion in the form of recession. Productivity is now low in the nation and the masses are suffering from such religious recklessness. Even able-bodied men and women who would have contributed to the productivity of the nation are killed in a religious war. Kassam (2010) says that violence leaves us with various forms of retardation and underdevelopment resulting from the destruction of lives and property.

iii. Job Insecurity: Christians and Muslims find it difficult to relate with each other. They do not find it funny to work in an office with each other. Thus, each employer of labor of any religion prefers to employ people of their faith, thereby waving competency. According to Odey (2000), during the heat of the organization of the Islamic Conference, people like Tam David West, Bolaji Akinyemi, and others who did not support the signing in of Nigeria into the conference of Islamic Nations as a member country were all prematurely retired. Any slightest religious provocation or unresolved argument leads to loss of job. The most recent is the closedown of Federal Government University in Dustin-ma in Katsina State as a result of riots arising from an accusation of employment of more Christians in the institution by the former Vice-Chancellor. This incident has caused serious tension in the State. This perhaps is because the two religions see themselves as being loyal to different Gods. If they see themselves as being loyal to the same deity or God there would not have been much problem as it is experienced today. Migration: As a result of consistent conflict, people save their lives, and migrate to more or relatively peaceful States or places. The conflict zones become thinly populated. This affects their level of manpower. The remnants that refuse to migrate from such conflict zones or States become uncultured because they are not mixed up with other cultures, and it is a known fact that when a man becomes too far from reality, he becomes a beast. Whenever he travels out, he becomes culture shock as he or she will be surprised to find out that things are done in a way far different from their way of life.

iv: Over Population: Migration from conflict zones to nearby or relatively peaceful States or places makes such states overpopulated and unhealthy, and slums are built. Those migrants who do not have a ready source of income might turn to bandits and elude their host community or state of sleep. Their frustrations will be so visible that one wonders why they should transfer their aggression to those who in no way contributed to their woes. Again, more weight will be added to the existing social amenities of the host State. This type of migrant is not a good citizen and vandalizing government property will be to them a way of getting back to the government which refuses to be there for them when they were persecuted. Lack of Trust in God: Since religion tends to fail man in showing him the part ofGod, mankind in Nigeria tends to lose confidence in religion and God. This is the major reason for crimes, corruption, and the like. Religion has created two sets of men, those aspiring for saintliness and the other majority pursuing inhumanity and terrorism. The majority pursuing inhumanity and terrorism has produced so many massacres and conflicts than the goodness produced by those pursuing saintliness.

CONFLICT AND GROUPTHEORY

The theoretical framework of analysis is the Conflict and Group theory. Gluckman and Coser postulated the conflict theory. They conceptualize conflict as normal, widespread, and a little positive to change or cause some change while not displacing the social order as such. The theory is divided into Marxian and Non-Marxian. The conflict theory played a major role in this work due to the level of struggle for superiority, conversion, existence, and so on of both Christians and Moslems in most parts of the northern States. Group theory of Grift is the bringing together of people in a place or conducting people in some way as man only exists in groups of its kind. Group theory advocates for a struggle where a stronger group pulls the weaker one to their side depending on the largeness or strength of coercion of the dominant group. It is the group theory that causes conflict in the northern part of the nation. In light of the foregoing, this study is set to look at the causes and implications of religious conflicts in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Development of any kind never thrives in a situation of crisis, the government needs to work on ridding the country of the state of constant turmoil it has found itself in, as then and only then in a peaceful society will the citizens be ready to work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals A people who are constantly in a flight or risk mode are not settled enough to work towards allowing the mechanisms of the produced result. No matter the strides of the progress we make in achieving our sustainable development goals, we must appreciate that one terrible war like that in Syria

will erase whatever progress that may have been made (Lawrence,,2018), thus we must strive not just to eradicate the crisis we have on the ground, but work actively to stop any further spread or escalation.

It is time the world should know that a peaceful world is far better than a violent world because development, is the positive change that enhances, promotes, and advances well-being and is a direct function of peace. While backwardness, which distorts, disfigures, diminishes, and impoverishes his well-being, is a direct product of insecurity. Thus, for Development to occur concerning the SDGs, Peace is non-negotiable.

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