POLITICAL CONFLICT AND THE CHALLENGES OF NIGERIA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By

Dr. Umar Ubandawaki
Department of Political Science,
Sokoto State University, Sokoto, Nigeria.
umaruban84@gmail.com
08053600989 OR 08089123423

Abstract

In Nigeria, political conflicts have been characterized by both the desire to gain the desired values and the desire to create instability, disunity, and overall underdevelopment. However, the retrogressive trends of the political conflict seem to facilitate instability in Nigeria's socio-political development in the 21st Century thereby creating challenges to the overall development of Africa. The paper, therefore, examines the challenges posed by the political conflicts to the Nigeria's socio-political development in the 21st Century. After qualitative assessment of available facts, the paper notes that the direct challenges of political conflicts manifested on the socio-political system in forms of strikes, election malfeasant, moral decadence, improper offerings in policies, and insurgencies in different part of the country as well as inadequate social infrastructures. Thus, it recommends that the country's leadership need to be responsive by fighting against corruption, ethnicity, regionalism and sectionalism for the attainment of the stated goals for Nigeria's sustainable development in the 21st Century.

Introduction

Nigeria is a state with diverse groups and interests competing with one another all in a bid to maximize interests or grab what belongs to all. In recent time, the intense competition among groups resulted into conflict. Conflict is a social Phenomenon interwoven with other social institutions like politics, economy,

religion, and culture of a given society. However, recent conflicts and indeed, politically motivated conflicts in Nigeria have not only been mixed up with these socio-political factors, but also have the desire to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals (Dan Hassan, 2009). Existence of such phenomenal conflicts in a country like Nigeria implies a great challenge to the entire stability of the country thereby shaping the rate of development in the social institutions of the country.

Nigeria is a colonial construct with diverse ethnic, religion, language, and cultural heritage; it has witnessed many political conflicts and crises since its independence in 1960 until this period when the country attains successful in civilian to civilian transition in 2015. The causes of politically motivated conflicts in the country are mostly rooted and shaped by the assumptions and definitions imposed by the British, the Nigeria's colonial master. Taking from this root, the conflicts spread into various dimensions such as ethno-religious, inter-ethnic, and struggles over status, power, and resources, in addition to volatile mix effects of insecurity, instability, corrupt political institutions and poverty (Irobi, 2005). The situation precipitates serious challenge to the country's socio-cultural development. Hence, the paper examines origin and cause of political conflicts in Nigeria, cases of political conflicts in Nigeria, socio-cultural affairs and development in Nigeria, Types of conflicts that affect socio-cultural development in Nigeria,

and the challenges posed by the political conflicts to the socio-cultural development in the 21st century Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

To forestall explanatory and analytical ambiguities, it is pertinent to make clarification on some basic concepts that are used in this paper. These are conflict, political conflict, development and sustainable development. "Conflict" is an ambiguous term, and different people will interpret it differently depending on the context. For the purpose of this paper, the term "conflict" refers specifically to the "political motivated violence" in Nigeria. Therefore, "conflict" is used as synonymous to "political Conflict" and "violence." Generally, conflict could be seen as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different individuals or groups. Akinboye and Ottoh (2007) define conflict as "overt coercive interactions of contending collectivities." Ibeanu (2006) defines conflict as direct and indirect relations between two or more actors in which each attempts to undermine the interests of one another, often through the instrumentality of violence. This definition expresses the inescapable link between conflict and violence. Violence is simply a physical immorality that negates freedom. Salmi (1993) defines violence as an act that threatens a person's physical or psychological integrity. It is an intentional infliction of physical harm. Johan Galtung identifies two broad categories of violence, namely

direct and indirect (structural) violence (Ibeanu, 2006: 10). Direct violence involves deliberate attacks that inflict harm. Customarily, direct violence demonstrates physical, psychological or counter value outlooks. Direct violence has four major types: criminal, political, cultural and psychological violence. Political violence is the focus of this paper. Political violence is the use of violence for achieving political objectives or ends. It includes riots, pogroms, protest, rebellion, terrorism and war (Albert, 2007).

Though there is no commonly agreed definition of development, it can be broadly defined for the purpose of this paper as "a social contract for the public good that can be used pro-actively and consciously so that it becomes a tool of social, economic and political justice and healing". Studies from conflict-affected areas show that the economic reconstruction contributes positively to long-term political harmony (Junne and Verhoken, 2004). While conceding that a holistic view of development would encompass much more than economic factors alone, the paper confines its analysis to the socio-cultural, political and economic development. The terms "development" and "sustainable development" are used interchangeably in this paper.

Conflicts and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Conflict and development are certainly linked. Earlier development theories and practices were largely conflict-dispassionate, and even when they attended to conflict, the scope was quite limited. Traditional approaches to development presupposed that development takes place under conditions of peaceful atmosphere or conflict-free. Yet that is rarely the case. The absence of peace is a pervasive global reality. Most countries have to strive for development against a background of past, present or threatened conflict (Secretary General of the United Nations, 1994). The modern development theories thus largely focus on conflict and development in a holistic framework.

Most often the cause or drive of conflict in many cases is lack of development in economic, political, or social affair or a combination of all. The relationship between conflict and development is strong, and is a two way process: conflict retards development; and equally, failures in development substantially increase proneness to conflict (Collier and Hoffler, 1998). Modern analysts thus subscribe to the inclusive idea that development cannot be solely a reserved for peaceful and conflict-free environments. This argument is equally true on Nigerian situations. Development activities can occur in conflict zones, Collier and Hoffler (1998) argue, and thus play a role in defusing such situations gradually as, among many other things, poverty and under-development can fuel violence in conflict situations. Several studies have shown

that the influence of conflict on development, and vice-versa, is significant in both exacerbating tensions and minimizing them. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its Policy Statement and Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development in 1997, also argues that Sustainable development cannot be achieved without peace and stability, and peace and security are not possible without meeting the basic needs of the people (OECD, 1997).

According to Brecher (1996) cited in Akinboye and Ottoh (2005:136), the underlying and most fundamental characteristics of conflict are mistrust, tension, hatred, turmoil, and hostility. Akinboye and Ottoh (2005:136) see conflict as overt coercive interactions of contending collectivities where two or more parties engaged in mutually hostile actions and using coercion to injure or control their opponents. Therefore, conflict is an antagonistic state that causes instability, insecurity, and disunity in a community or a nation thereby derailing the overall human development in that community or nation.

Sustainable development, in its broad perspective, is the totality of the human development in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Orenuga, 1999: 110) for the preservation and maintenance of political and social structure of a given nation. Thus, the overall philosophy of Nigeria is to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality, and justice as well as promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding (FRN, 2004:1). Drivable from the philosophy of Nigeria, is the inextricable link between development and conflict-free or peaceful condition. Hence, Nigeria's national goals, which drive from the overall philosophy, are therefore, the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity, as well as the inculcation of the types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. This, therefore, signifies the power of sustainable development to facilitate unity, stability, and development among individuals and society. Sustainable development is an instrument for facing the challenges of different type of conflicts that can affect the overall human development in the 21st century Nigeria.

Types of Conflict that Affect Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Akinboye and Ottoh (2005:136) outlined different types of conflict; these include international, ideological, territorial, and internal and intra conflicts. International conflict, however, involves much more than violence or armed collision or war. In its specific manifestation, it results in armed struggles. It also involves the big powers hyperactive role, in the region of influence, which helps to exacerbate conflicts. Ideological conflict arises with

failure of regimes to meet the expectations of their people. In this situation, the nature of conflict is largely dependent on the method of transfer of power from a colonial regime to indigenous political leaders; present of colonial legacies in the country's socio-political structure demonstrates manifestation of this conflict in Nigeria. In Nigeria conflicts erupted because of internal disagreement between the political class over the issues of goals and the strategies to adopt in the pursuance of development of these goals. Evidently, third term bid of President Obasanjo, which is the alleged bid by President Obasanjo to continue office beyond 2007 after the end of his second and final term (Habib, 2006:9), was also a clear manifestation of this type of conflict.

According to Akinboye and Ottoh (2005:136), territorial Conflict is another type of conflict, which arises from the claims by two or more states to a piece of land or water and exhibit irreconcilable territorial ambitions. This kind of conflict manifested itself in Nigeria, in form of border disputes between the country and its neighbours such as the Bakassi boundary conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon. In addition, within Nigerian territory appeared issues of disagreement over state creation; this is also another manifestation of territorial conflict.

Internal conflict arises when a community, a state, or a system is witnessing internal crisis, which may attract domestic and foreign interventions to bring the state or system back to stability. Nigeria witnessed this kind of conflict in its socio-political systems including education. Internal conflicts in Nigeria are of different forms with both simple and complex faces. According to Osaghae and Subaru (2005) cited in Dan Hassan (2009), simple internal conflicts include ethnic, religious, cultural, social, regional and communal conflicts. The complex internal conflicts involve more than one identity, they therefore, come in forms of ethno-regional, ethno-religious, and ethno-cultural conflicts.

The foregoing conflicts constitute intra conflict state to Nigeria's sustainable development. However, the country's social, economic and political systems experienced conflicts that are internal to the system both simple (that relates to government, workers, policies and values) and complex (government-workers and policies-values conflicts), manifesting in forms of strikes and other inadequacies. Indeed, existence of these multi-sided conflicts to Nigeria as a nation and to the educational system of the country posed great challenge to the country's overall development and to the sustainable development of the country in the 21ˢᵗ century in particular.

Methodology

Literature on the challenges of political conflict to Nigeria's sustainable development is scarce; as there is no

substantial work on it to date. Hence, this study is a novel one, as the major source of material is based on qualitative information gathered from extensive investigation of the documentary evidences in government official documents, textbooks, Newspapers and journals. This enabled an examination of the social, cultural, political and economic trends in the phenomenon for establishing qualitative judgement.

An Overview of the Origin and Cause of Conflict in Nigeria

A number of factors came in to play vital role in causing political conflict in Nigeria. On one hand, some of the factors are associated with colonial laws and policies adopted by British colonial rulers to force the diverse people of the northern and southern provinces of the country to become an entity called Nigeria in 1914. British imperial rule provided identities, policies, and symbols for ethnic and regional groups that encouraged ethnic divisions, regionalism, and separatism; thus, leading into growing politically motivated conflicts (Irobi, 2005). The policies, such as the indirect rule administration, were designed to strengthen the colonial grip on Nigeria society and weaken the people's potentials for resistance. This British policy of divide-and-rule was autocratic and undemocratic and denied the people's basic needs of participation, equality, and social justice; indeed, inevitably led to conflicts in the country. The colonial laws that reinforced the

segregation of Nigerian society limited the mobility of Christian southerners to the Muslim north and created separate settlements for non-indigenous citizens in the north (Afigbo, 1989; Okonjo, 1974) cited in Irobi (2005).

Equally, the laws limited the purchase of land outside one's own region thereby distancing ethnic groups from each other in separate areas called "Sabongari" in the northern Nigeria, "Sabo" in Southwestern areas, and "Abakpa" in southeastern part of the country (Irobi, 2005). This arrangement created prejudice and hatred as different ethnic groups looked each other suspiciously in all spheres of contact thereby precipitating violent conflict among various ethnic groups in the country. The main conflicts in this respect involved Hausa-Fulani and the Eastern Igbos, the Yorubas and the Hausa, as well as with minorities of the oil producing states of the south.

On the other hand, regional division of the Nigeria by a colonial constitution (1947) that divided the country into three political regions; north, east, and west where the north was predominantly Hausa-Fulani; eventually the largest and most populous region. The Igbos dominates the east and Yorubas the west (Osaghae, 1991; Subaru, 1996) Cited in Dan Hassan (2009). Between 1952 and 1966, the three regions transformed into three political entities with quest for ethnic dominance threatening the survival of both east and west and

marked by competition for resources (Irobi, 2005). Thus, corruption, nepotism, and tribalism worsened the relations between the ethnic groups where political elites used public money to build and maintain patronage networks. The situation has been mixed with politics whereby the elites from different ethnic groups schemed to attract as many federal resources as possible to their regions, neglecting issues that could have united the country (Irobi, 2005). This regional division and competition led to anarchy, insecurity, and eventual ethno-regional conflict that led to the demise of the First Republic and culminated into the gruesome Civil War, 1967-70 (Burton, 1997) cited in Irobi (2005). Thus, the eastern Igbos felt mistreated; they therefore, seceded from the federation and created the Biafran Republic.

As the country tried to cope with effects of the violent conflict of the Civil War, which was caused by the colonial regional policies, the Nigerian military elites staged coups and false transitions programmes to civilian rule. The military actions, especially between 31 December 1983 and 1999 when the country experienced about fifteen years of uninterrupted military rule culminated into another dimension of conflict in the country. The military era was marked by ineptitude, corruption, and human right abuses; indeed, these created economic problems, poverty, and ethno-religious and sectional conflicts. Still, politics followed ethnic and sectional lines; thus,

the southerners developed distrust against the military regimes, particularly those of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha, because they felt that the regimes tried to maintain Hausa-Fulani hegemony in Nigeria. Amidst of distrust and suspicion, the regimes of Babangida and that of Abacha annulled a presidential election won by a south westerner, Chief M.K.O. Abiola and hanged nine Ogoni activists of Niger Delta area respectively. The separate actions precipitated formulation of militant organizations and protest because of the unfair treatment. The militant ethnic organizations formulated during this period, included Afenifere, Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafran (MOSSAB), Egbesa Boys of Bayelsa State, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Campaign for Democracy (CD) among others. These organizations and many others intensified violent protest across the country.

At the onset of the Olusegun Obasanjo administration (1999), politically motivated conflicts took worrisome dimension where different Nigerian groups competed for power and oil wealth. The resultant effects of these competitions was sprung of multiple ethno-religious conflicts in the northern cities of Kano, Kaduna, Jos, and Zamfara on the introduction of Sharia legal

system, while the oil producing area of the Niger Delta staged violent struggle demanding for resources autonomy. During this period, the conflicts cleared over 10,000 lives and rendered over 300, 000 people displaced (World Bank, 2003). This demonstrates the high rate of volatile nature of the country's political conflicts.

Cases of Political Conflicts in Nigeria

However, there are cases of politically motivated conflicts that had adverse effects on the socio-political affairs and overall development of the country from independence to Nigeria's independence to date. These included Census Crisis of 1962/63, the Action Group Crisis of 1962, the 1964 Federal Elections Crisis, the Western Election Crisis of 1965, General Election Crisis of 1979 and 1983 (Arazeem and Saka, 2007) cited in Dan Hassan (2009) and devastating Crisis of Civil War. According to Aka (2001), the Nigerian Civil War is the bloodiest civil war of the 20th century. Other events relate to religious politically motivated conflicts such as the Maitatsine uprising in Kano, 1982 and the conflicts witnessed at Shagamu, Kaduna, Kano, Kafachan, and Jos after the inauguration of the civilian government in 1999. Other events involved demonstrations in major northern cities in the country in support of Al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden, after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D.C. In addition, the hosting of Miss World Beauty Pageant contest involved uprising in Kaduna and Abuja (Fawole, 2008:104).

Besides, there are longstanding ethnic politically motivated conflicts between the Jukuns and Kutebs in Taraba State, the Aguleris and Umuleris in Anambara State, the Ijaws and Ishekiris in Delta State, and the Ogonis and Andonis in Rivers State (Alkali, 2003); these were all very violent and destructive. In the period between 2000 and January 2010, violent conflicts swept through out Nigeria with more devastation in Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, and the protracted crisis of Jos Plateau State. The most violent and worrisome of these conflicts in Nigeria have been the turmoil in the oil producing area of the Niger Delta (Paden, 2008: 103), the disruptive ethno-religious crisis of Jos- Plateau State and Boko Haram uprising in the north. Particularly, the Boko Haram conflict has been particularly more ferocious and violent as its operations involved act of terror across national boundaries. The bombing of United Nations' head quarter, Abuja, in 2011 and abduction of over 200 Chibok girls has internationalized the Boko Haram conflict. The conflict also transformed the North-eastern of Nigeria into a highly militarized zone, with obvious consequences for the country's sustainable development in the 21st century.

Political Conflicts and the Challenges of Nigeria's Sustainable Development in 21st Century

Virtually, politics has been instrumental towards the overall development of the country. Equally, the rate of conflicts and its potential to cause under development of the country is alarming. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960 to date, conflict has not only been great challenge to the country's security, unity, and stability but also constitutes serious challenge to the country's social, economic and political development in different forms and for several reasons. First, the ultimate goal of existence of any nation is maintenance of unity, and harmony thereby promoting solidarity and peace among individuals and groups in that nation. Yet, political conflicts in Nigeria negate this ultimate goal of existence; as the most apparent effects of the conflicts has been instability, insecurity, and disunity among the conflicting individuals and groups. In this regard, the foremost challenge to the country's socio-political and economic affairs is to inculcate national unity and national stability by promoting values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the society.

Second, development implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being (Rodney, 1972: 1). In the contrary, internal political conflicts in Nigeria tend to destruct the process of attaining these features of development. Instead, the conflicts create stagnation, recession, and disequilibrium in the economy of the country thereby causing devastating damages on the socio-political system of the country. Essentially, economy is the backbone of any country's development. In essence, education is not only a key to forward overall development, but also a means of resolving conflicts in any country. Yet, in Nigeria, political conflicts destruct provision of human and material resources for development thereby shaping the provision of sufficient funds, which could facilitate development of education in the country. This demonstrates that Nigeria needs intensive human socio-political formation through political and social reforms in order to face the challenges posed by conflicts to the economy and to the direct state of the country's sustainable development.

Third, the fact that Nigeria is a nation confronted with daunting challenge to its social, economic and political development demonstrates the need for some sustainable reconstructions to address the direct effects of political conflicts for the attainment of the set goals of development in the country. The direct challenges of political conflicts to the country's socio-cultural, economic and political affairs manifest themselves in connection to the following: insurgencies in different part of the country strikes and lockout, moral decadence in the society, improper economic and political policies as well as provision of infrastructures.

Insurgencies in Different Part of the Country

The most violent and worrisome of these insurgencies in Nigeria are the turmoil in the oil producing area of the Niger Delta and the disruptive ethno-religious crisis of Jos- Plateau State in the north central as well as the Boko Haram uprising in the north east. These conflicts have been particularly more ferocious and violent and have been internationalized since some of the targets of the conflicts were foreign nationals and corporations. The conflicts have also transformed their areas of operations into a highly militarized zone, with obvious consequences for the country's economy, national integration and international image (Paden, 2008: 103).

Strikes and lockout

In spite of the abundant human and material resources, Nigeria's socio-economic system suffers from the challenges of socio-economic deprivation due to the direct consequences of political conflict that manifests in form of strikes or direct effect of the conflict by institutions' lockout. Most of the government and private institution in the country experienced total closure for many weeks or months because of strikes or direct effect of the conflict. These problems are socio-political phenomena that have almost paralyzed all facets of human development of the country (business, health, education investments etc). For instance in educational sector, the phenomena promoted production of half-baked and unemployable graduates that

churn out in our universities and colleges yearly.

Moral Decadence in the Society

Morality and social stability are some of the ultimate goals to which socio-cultural development tends to achieve, either in peace or in conflict situations. On the contrary, political conflicts in Nigeria facilitate the promotion of immoral and instable states in the country's institutions. The acts featured in forms of cultism, drug addiction, and sex scandals as well as violent killings in work place, market place, road side and campuses. Most of these acts cropped out of conflicts that happened in the past; consequently, the conflicts helped in the spread of drugs, arms and ammunitions as well as some social vices. The spread of these social inflictors causes killings, fear, and panicking; of course posing a challenge to the country's sustainable development; with this kind of fear and distress in Nigerian environment, the country is no longer conducive for day to day livelihood activities and foreign investments.

Improper Economic and Political Policies

Another challenge that faces sustainable development in Nigeria is the foreign and improper policies offerings of the country's social, political and economic institutions. The programmes and policies are often foreign and improperly transplanted into the country; these make the process of sustainable development

ineffective and undesirable. For example Nigerian Schools imparted knowledge with little reflection on promoting social stability, rather, emphasizes social unrest and criminality (Mahdhi, 1996). According to Ogonlade (2004:36), Nigerian curriculum offerings are blended with characteristics that emphasized immorality and dishonesty and placed premium to the educational life of young kids on the distinction among various groups in the country. Ogonlade (2004:34). Similarly, the classification of Nigeria under "majority" and minority" as well as the distinction among the regions- north, east, west, and south are not helpful concepts in the country's political development. The emphasis on division and classification rather than stability and cohesion has been built upon in Nigerian constitution on the question indigene and settler, which in recent time caused serious conflict in Jos Plateau State of North Central Nigeria The situation created a serious challenge to the county's political institution; therefore, it needs to be reverted for the promotion of required sustainable development in the country.

Provision of Economic and Social Infrastructures

Conflicts are destructive in their nature; more often, they affect provision of qualified human resources and adequate infrastructures in Nigeria's Economic and social systems. They create stagnation and recession in the economy;

for example, in 2006, action of MEND in Nigeria led to a 20 percent reduction in the country's oil production (LC – FRD, 2006). The implication of this on the sustainable development was the deprivation of various government and private institutions in the country necessary infrastructures for development. The infrastructures include road network, power generation, educational facilities such as textbooks and laboratory equipments, hostel accommodation, lecture halls, and classrooms as well as industrial development. Of course, in adequacies of these infrastructures stand as a daunting challenge to Nigeria's sustainable development.

Conclusion

The attempt in this paper has been to evoke discussion on the interrelations between political conflicts and sustainable development in Nigeria in the 21st century. Nigeria is a nation with diverse ethnic, religion, culture, and language heritage that were forced by the British colonial rulers to become under a single territorial entity, which crosscut rather than unify. The lumping together of the country encouraged division and separatism and often led to growing political conflicts that created insecurity, instability and disunity, which constitute great challenges to overall development in the country. However, the direct challenge of the political conflicts to country's sustainable development has been the destruction of available

facilities for the overall development of Nigeria. The challenge promoted strikes, lockout, moral decadence, improper policies offerings, as well as inadequate provision of infrastructures. All these social inadequacies constitute internal conflict to the entire social, economic and political systems and they stand to create serious challenges to the sustainable development of the country in the 21st century.

Recommendations

There are constitutionally backed institutions for political conflict management in Nigeria. These include among others, federal and secular offerings of the constitution to manage ethnic and religious misunderstanding, the bill of right intended to allay the fears of ethnic minorities, and the Federal Character Commission to allay fear of domination by major ethnic groups in the country. Besides these institutional measures, the following measures are also helpful for the effective grabs of the challenges facing Nigeria's sustainable development in the 21st century:

1. The role of good political leadership cannot be overemphasized. Yet, Nigeria has not been fortunate in its leadership. Ethno-religious conflicts continued in the country because the political elites are corrupt, irresponsible, and split along lines of religion, ethnicity, and sectionalism. Therefore, there is need to promote sense of responsibility and fight against corruption and sectionalism right from the lower levels of our educational institutions.

2. Integrate traditional values, which encouraged unity and stability into teaching of all subjects in Nigerian schools as well as enlightenment in the mass and social media.

3. Integrate self-control principles and procedures in every administration, business and in teaching- learning situations.

4. Enlightenment and teachings of major religions in Nigeria to inculcate the importance of moral uprightness, religious tolerance and unity from an early age;

5. Use every possible opportunity to promote discipline behaviours that encouraged hard work and communal service in all sectors of society.

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