

**AFRICAN SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL
FACULTY OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
IMO STATE UNIVERSITY
NIGERIA**

VOL. 7 NO. 2 MARCH 2018

**COMMUNAL CONFLICTS AND CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN
NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

**CYPRIAN C. ALOZIE, PhD.
Department of Political Science
Abia State University
Uturu**

Abstract

Nigeria as a multi-ethnic and heterogeneous country is composed of people from different ethnic groups. As a pluralistic society, there has been the coexistence of people from these diverse ethnic groups and classes as they go about expressing their interests, beliefs and the pursuit of goals which are either mutual or conflictual. Communal conflicts in Nigeria have continued to pose enormous challenges to national integration in the country in view of the persistence of these conflicts. In Nigeria, some factors such as socio-economic, cultural, political and ecological have given rise to communal conflicts. Due to their virulent nature, these conflicts have resulted to the destruction of lives and property of innocent citizens. Cases of internal dislocation and displacement have also been recorded in some places. To a considerable degree, these conflicts have negatively affected the peaceful coexistence and mutual harmony among the people of Nigeria and thus, crippling the national integration efforts of the Nigerian state. The study adopted the qualitative descriptive approach. Data for the study was sourced through the secondary means of data collection. The study reveals that the low level of tolerance and spirit of accommodation among some Nigerians as well as the weak capacity of the state on conflict resolution have heightened communal conflicts in Nigeria. The study recommends improved governance and greater use of the pro-active approach in conflict management in Nigeria.

Keywords: Communal Conflicts, National Integration, Multi-Ethnic, Good Governance,

Introduction

There has been the persistence of communal conflicts in Nigeria up until the 21st century. The virulent nature of these conflicts has continued to threaten state security and mutual cohesion of people in the affected areas. Aside the way and manner the British colonial masters carried out the amalgamation process and the unwarranted boundary demarcations and adjustment which created a lot of problems, some other cultural, socio economic and political issues have continued to provoke inter and intra communal conflicts in Nigeria. Up till 2017, the consequences of the arbitrary creation of boundaries and ethnic groups by the British overlords have continued to be felt in Nigeria.

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The persistence of communal conflicts has therefore remained a national challenge which the Nigerian state is yet to find a lasting solution to. The threat posed by communal conflicts in parts of the country has therefore remained a ban on efforts made by the state towards national integration and development (Oji, 2015). For one thing, the conflicts have resulted to the destruction of infrastructures, interruption of the production process and diverting resources away from production uses (Adetula, 2004: 383).

Despite the restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, communal conflicts have continued to be recorded in parts of the country in varied magnitude. This development has constrained the citizens from enjoying the so much publicized dividends of democracy in real terms (Alimba, 2014). It has remained worrisome that after Nigeria has transited from military dictatorship to civilian democracy on May 29, 1999, the incidence of social and communal conflicts have remained unabated, leading to several loss of lives, displacement and dislocation of persons.

Across the various ethnic groups, the manifestations of various forms of conflicts such as electoral, ethnic, religious, herdsman versus farmer's clashes, has led communal conflicts to creating severe challenges to the nation building or national integration efforts of the Nigerian state. Of all these conflicts, communal conflicts have come next to religious conflicts as a major threat against state security and mutual co-existence of the people of Nigeria. (Alimba, 2014). While democracy has not favoured most Nigerians economically since the restoration of democratic rule in 1999, the reoccurrence of communal conflicts across the country has remained a much more disappointing experience (Onwudiwe, 2004).

National integration is aimed at the creation of common nationhood as well as structures and institutions necessary for national development. The re-occurrence of communal conflicts have however, continued to cripple the national integration efforts of the Nigerian state. Both human and material resources have been grossly affected with systematic deficiencies in Nigeria since the attainment of nationhood by Nigeria up until the 21st century, Northern Nigeria has recorded (and still record) a greater dose of communal conflicts in Nigeria than any other region of the country. Among the most volatile states are: Jos, Benue, Nassarawa, Bauchi, Adamawa, Kaduna, Taraba, Kogi, etcetera.

No doubt, communal conflicts have rendered these states most unstable, unsafe and uninhabitable for effective social engagement and business. Despite the negative consequences of communal conflicts on national integration in Nigeria, scholarly attention has been focused more on other factors such as ethno-religious, socio-economic and Political conflicts by scholars as factors militating against national integration in Nigeria. Little attention has been given to communal conflicts as a major factor working against national integration in Nigeria. Based on this, the study focused systematically on communal conflicts as a major threat to national integration in Nigeria in the 21st century. To achieve this objective, the following systematic areas were explored by the study:

- i. Conceptual clarification of conflicts
- ii. Communal conflicts
- iii. Causes of communal conflicts
- iv. Brief overview of communal conflicts in Nigeria.
- v. National integration

vi. Consequences of communal conflicts on national integration in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification of Conflicts

Scholars have expressed divergent views on the precise meaning of conflicts. The different meanings of conflict have arisen in view of the different orientation of scholars and the dimension or circumstance a particular conflict occurs. Conflict has been described as any action that is oriented intentionally to carry out an actor's own wish against the resistance of the other party or parties. In the same vein, Coser (1966) posits that social conflict denotes a struggle over status, power and scarce resources, whereby the sole aim of the contending party or party is not only to gain the desired value, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate possible or potential rivals, (Adetoye & Omilusi, 2015). In almost all cases, conflict involves the struggle and rivalry for objects to which individuals and groups attach value or importance. These objects could be material or non-materials (tangible or intangible). The materials may take the form of scarce resources such as money, employment and position such as Political promotion in both the private and public organizations. The non-material objects take the form of culture, tradition, religion and language (Osaghae, 2005).

Marxist or conflict theorists often situate conflict from class perspective which is often defined by economic disparity between the haves and the have nots. Karl Max wrote in the Communist Manifesto in 1937 that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle". This implies that conflict has remained part of human experience given the noted class difference in the different epochs in human history. Conflict may occur between members of the same group (intra-group conflict), as well as members of different groups (inter group conflict). Ethnic or communal conflict often takes the form of zero-sum contest and this has been the drive for the violent nature of some conflicts (Osaghae, 2005).

Conflicts have come to represent the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups. Often times, conflict takes the form of a linear phenomenon that consists of stages such as initiation, escalation, maintenance, abatement and termination. As Akpenpuun (2013:91) submits, "conflict is a state or quality of an on-going relationship among social entities such as persons, groups or Organizations". In the process of this relationship however, disagreements which are expressed in words and actions usually occur.

For Angaye (2003) conflict denotes the escalated competition at any system or level between groups or individuals whose aim is to gain advantage over others. In other words, conflict has come to mean the occurrence of disputes, disagreements, quarrels, struggles, fights, and wars between individuals, groups, and countries. This is derived from the fact that in almost every nation, organization, institution or group, there is hardly properly defined agreement on how to distribute wealth, power, status as well as other tangible resources. Disagreements or conflicts erupt in the bid of one group to attempt effecting necessary changes or reforms especially when a particular group or individuals tries to take undue advantage of the other or others. Given the fact that different groups and individuals have diverse interests or goals, the aim of some groups most especially in multi-ethnic and heterogeneous states will likely run into conflicts with those of others. In almost all cases, conflict occurs in the bid of the disadvantaged or deprived groups and individuals to advance their interest or modify the status quo to their advantage (Angaye, 2003).

Conflict has also been described as a situation of contention and encounter as well as irreconcilability or incompatibility involving two or more parties over access to or control of

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commonly prized and limited resources (Otite & Albert, 2006). Conflict dimension often take the form of verbal attacks or of arms in a struggle, which may eventually lead to warfare or to social disorganization and disharmony. In this situation, the concerned individuals, the state and its agencies may resort to different conflict resolution mechanisms. A dysfunctional conflict which is usually disintegrative is usually detested by most people as it is an ill wind that blows no one any good. Continuous encounters and reoccurrence of conflicts may have the potency of dredging a society to disorganization and breakdown which may constitute a serious obstacle to the realization of the socio-economic, cultural and political development of a state. Hence, although conflicts are naturally inherent and inevitable in competitive situations, the state, individuals and societies hardly relent in working out conflict resolution strategies or transformation of the conflict and the normalization of social, interpersonal as well as inter group relations (Otite & Albert, 2006).

Conflict usually manifest in the form of a clash of interest or goal between parties which may be at individual, ethnic group or state levels (John, 1990). Closely related to this view is that conflict reflects a determined action or struggle over a goal, which may be overt or covert (subtle); manifest or imaginary. In addition, there is real conflict situation as well as psychological conflict (Aja, 2007). In his further submission, Aja (2007:15) contended that:

Conflict is an attitude, a behaviour or an action or a process that introduces strains and stresses. In the relationship between two or more parties on, say, the attainment of a set of interests or goals. In conflict, parties perceive or treat each other as a stumbling block that will result in frustrating the other in attaining a set of goals, or even furthering one's interests.

Drawing from the existing definitions of conflict, Alimba (2014:180) describes conflict as “a state of incompatibility, behaviour, an opposition, an interaction of inter dependent parties, a bad omen and positive or constructive outcome”. Conflict is generally described as a state of incompatibility, that is, a situation in which the concerns of two or more individuals operating within the unit appear incompatible (Darling & Fogliasso, 1999).

Hellriegel & Sloeum (1996) posited that conflict is an opposition arising from disagreement about goals, thoughts or emotions with or among individuals, teams, department, or organizations. Opposition has to do with blocking an individual or a group from achieving set goals or objectives. This action will lead to conflict given the instant overt reaction that will emanate from the party being blocked. For Wilmot & Hocker (2011) conflict also represent a felt struggle between two or more independent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals or differences in desires for esteem, control and connectedness.

Conflict does not occur in isolation. It occurs among humans when a group of people are relating (or seem to be relating) or be depending on one another. The outcome of conflict may be good or bad. Conflict also takes a functional or dysfunctional dimension. When conflicts end in negative outcomes, such is regarded as dysfunctional. On the other hand, when conflicts bring about positive outcomes, such is regarded as functional or constructive conflicts.

What arises from the above scholarly views on conflict is that conflict has become or remained part and parcel of human existence. Conflict, whether latent or manifest is often psychological as it develops from the psychological mind-set of those involved in the conflict. It therefore follows that conflict denotes an overt or coercive interaction whereby a group, an

organization, or individuals with incompatible interests are engaged in mutually opposing actions and use of coercive behaviour with an intent to destroy, injure, thwart or outwit an opponent.

Communal Conflict

According to Alimba (2014:183) “communal conflict is made up of two axiomatic words; “communal and conflict”. Communal is derived from the word “communis” which means “common”. In this vein, communal is used to refer to groups and it involves things commonly used, shared or experienced by a group in a society. Such things that are commonly used may include tangible or intangible resources. Communal conflicts represent a social conflict that relates to a group or groups in a society. When the conflict emanates within a group, it is known as intra-communal conflict. Inter-communal conflict refers to the conflict between groups. In almost all cases, the common social ties or bond that exists among groups often make the competition take a fierce dimension. It has to be noted that the misuse, unequal distribution or hijacking of available resources that is supposed to be shared or enjoyed jointly by a group by a more dominant group often generate conflict. The management of the conflict often becomes complex to tackle if the level of hatred and animosity that may have ensued among parties have grown high.

Communal conflict is a conflict that occurs between two or more communities (Azuonwu, 2002). Communal conflict is usually wider in scope and dimension than community conflict. Oboh & Hyande (2006) posited that communal conflicts often involve two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims for land ownership, religion and political disagreement which may lead to loss of lives and destruction of valuable property. Communal conflicts occur in diverse forms. For instance, Albert (2001) contended that community conflict often manifest in the form of host-stranger face-offs in which a section of the community tags itself as the host (owners of the community) and some other groups as strangers. That is, those that migrated into the community at a date later than the coming of the “owners” of the community. Besides, communal conflict can also be imbued in religious issues, land, politics, resources, local government, kingship or chieftaincy tussle among others (Alimba, 2014). According to Oji (2015:2):

Communal conflicts are those in which the participants are communal groups. A communal group is one in which primary identity prevails. Membership of the group is not attained but ascribed. Within the communal group, the individual self is defined holistically. The totality of the individual's involvement in life is defined by the group. Examples of communal groups include: the family, ethnic groups, religious groups and regional groups: In such groups there is a collective sense of belonging, as well as self-realization and self – affirmation within the collectively. A shared history of achievement and of suffering is an important component of the communal situation which in turn increases the exclusiveness, feeling of uniqueness and therefore, the solidarity of the group.

In almost all societies, communal identity is held very strong to the extent that it defines for the individual the totality of his/her existence as well as the embodiment of his/her hopes, fears and sense of the future (Oji, 2015). Nature has therefore made it that individuals are usually very sensitive to matters of communal symbolism. Actions or thoughts that have the potency to threaten or undermine communal group identity usually evoke very hostile

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response. Such actions include; those that diminish group status, worth, and legitimacy in the eyes of its members (Horowitz, 1985). To a large extent, an individual's self-esteem is determined by the status, worth and legitimacy of the group to which he/she belongs. Generally, "the communal group is perceived by its members as a pseudo-family" (Goor, 1994:25). The group usually react to any action targeted at undermining the very (symbolic) existence of its members even though the actions may not be directed at them personally. The feeling is strong to the extent that the individual and communal group can seize their collective destiny in a manner that could be likened to the dynamics of mob action (Nnoli, 1998)

Apart from their intrinsically more violent scale than other forms of conflicts, communal conflicts by their nature are more difficult to handle, less amenable to diplomatic intervention or standard methods of crisis management and peaceful settlement. (Carmet, 1993). As Oji (2014:3) averts:

Such violence has a more pernicious character than other forms of violence. A certain xenophobic collectivism characterizes participation in it. Association in it is a collective sense of belonging to a group of willingness to contribute to the success of the collective mission, and of self – realization and self-affirmation within the collectively.

According to Chipman (1993:146) "one of the striking features of communal violence is the turning of every individual into a soldier by the sole virtue of his or her group identity". As Oji (2014:3) posits; "this is the result of the power of communal identity as it tends to totalize and transcend other loyalties and obligations. When people's multiple identities are narrowed down to a single focus, social divisions become deeper and more rigid". In this case, communal identity becomes a deeply emotional basis of mobilization that not merely distinguishes one group from the other group. Such identity makes it possible to draw an easy distinction between "us" and "them" (Gurr, 1993).

Causes of Communal Conflicts

In Nigeria, a number of factors have given rise to the persistent communal conflicts being recorded in parts of the country. These factors however vary from one area to another. In other words, the causes of communal conflicts in Nigeria are not static but dynamic and varied in nature. The prevailing socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances at a time have been a major drive for communal conflicts in Nigeria. In his study on causes of communal conflicts in Nigeria, Onwudiwe (2004) listed social conditions such as; population explosion, economic migration, and the anti-poor policies of the government as triggers of communal conflicts.

Horowitz (1990) narrowed down communal conflicts to revolve around politics, politicians and their pursuit of group advantage. Communal conflicts also result from indigene/settler problem, religious differences, ownership of land and its resources as well as inconsistent goals and aspirations of the people (Albert, 2001). Lyam, (2000) traced communal conflicts to loss of soil fertility, soil erosion, deforestation, bush burning and flooding. For Yecho (2006) the fundamental causes of communal conflicts are poor economic conditions, high level of illiteracy, the quest for and fear of domination by other groups, land disputes, market ownership, chieftaincy tussle and party politics.

In addition, Varvar, (2000) noted that increased demand for land for agriculture, unemployment, rural hunger, poverty and various forms of impoverishment are triggers of

communal conflict. In the same vein, Angaye & Dori (2006) identified other factors such as; deprivation, exploitation, and domination of minority groups by the major ethnic groups and leadership problem as triggers of communal conflict. In northern Nigeria for instance, competition for land, and chieftaincy tussle are the major causes of communal conflict. From the analysis and causes of communal conflicts in Nigeria, Alimba (2014) came up with the following factors;

1. **Economic factors:** Economic related factors manifest in the form of competition for inadequate resources such as land and its content, problems of distribution of available resources, unemployment and poverty.
2. **Social factors:** These are issues that have to do with deprivation, envy, jealousy, marginalization and exploitation of people. Fear of domination by the major ethnic groups also lead to communal conflict.
3. **Political factors:** This has to do with the contest for available political positions in a community and the failure of leadership. Related to this is the tussle over chieftaincy or kingship (Ezeship) crisis going on in several communities in parts of the country.
4. **Ecological factors:** These factors take various forms such as encroachment problem, farming and pastoral problems, deforestation, flooding, soil erosion, cattle grazing and bush burning. Up till 2017, communal conflicts have warranted people to drift from place to place in search of survival and livelihood. The persistent clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in parts of the country are attributable to ecological factors.
5. **Colonial factors:** Most communal conflicts in Africa, particularly Nigeria, has been traced to colonialism. This is as a result of the way African and Nigerian boundaries and territories were either amalgamated or Balkanized without a careful anthropological study of the people involved. Since after independence, communal conflicts arising from this have remained unabated among the people, especially border communities.

With the restoration of democratic rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, many believed that lasting solutions should have been found to the incidence of communal conflict across the country. Unfortunately, Nigeria has rather been witnessing the resurgence of high level ethno-religious, communal and citizenship conflicts with devastating consequences (Kwaja, 2009:105). One of the hallmarks of democracy is that "it provides for mass participation in governance as well as an institutional arrangement for the peaceful resolution or management of ethnic, religious and other identity conflicts" (Oloyode, 2007:134). For Nigeria, this is yet to be achieved after over 17 years of unbroken democratic governance given the fact that communal conflicts have remained unabated. It has become a common experience in Nigeria for the ethnic, religious and communal groups that feel marginalized by the major ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) to adopt constitutional and extra constitutional means to challenge the hegemony of the major ethnic groups. Osaretin & Akov (2013:352) aptly captured this when they contended that;

the main cause of violent identity conflict in Nigeria is that most minority groups have remained permanent minorities, while the majority groups are permanent majority, a trend which has serious implications for inter-ethnic and religious relations among the diverse ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria. In this way, the incentives for cooperation, consensus and compromise have been undermined thereby posing an enormous challenge

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for the task of peace building as diverse ethnic groups are forced to co-exist in an environment of mutual mistrust, apathy and suspicion.

Brief Overview of some Recorded Communal Conflicts in Nigeria

Since the 1980s, there has been the re-occurrence and persistence of communal conflicts in Nigeria with the Northern region recording more of such cases (Abdu, 2002). At various times, communal conflicts were recorded between Modakeke/Ife, Sabongari/Kano, Sabo/Ibadan, Zango/Kataf, Urhobo/Itsekiri, Jukun/Tiv, Kuteb/Jukun-Chamba and Hausa/Shagamu (Danfulani, 2006). Kwaja (2009:106) also noted that communal conflicts also broke out between the following communal groups:

Chamba vs Kuteb, the Ogoni Vs Andom in Rivers State, the Sharia crisis in Kaduna state, the Tiv Vs other ethnic groups in Azara of Nassarawa State in 2001, the Tarok vs Hausa/Fulani in Plateau state in 2004, the Geomai Vs the Hausa/Fulani in Shanda local government of Plateau State. In 2002, the Quan Vs Pan in Quan Pan Local Government of Plateau State. In 2006, the Hausa/Fulani and the Beron, Anaguta and Afizare in Jos North Local Government in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2010. The Boko Haram violence that has engulfed Borno, Yobe, Bauchi and Kano States since July 2009.

The findings of Enaruna (2014) revealed that population was the determinant factor of the communal land conflict in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. In the same Cross River, the Biakpan and Etono II communal groups clashed over land matters in 2012. In Ebonyi State, there was a prolonged communal conflict between the Ezza-Ezillo communities. The conflict lasted between 2008 and 2011. The prolonged land dispute between the communities led to the loss of 150 lives in 2010, forcing the State government to sack everybody from the disputed land which brought relative peace to the area (Oji, 2015). Children between the ages of three to five and women were among the major victims of the crisis. Several lives and property were lost on both sides. In Akwa Ibom State, Eyo Abasi and Idua communities experienced communal conflicts over an oil rich parcel of land located at the boundary of their communities.

Communal conflicts have also been re-occurring between the Yoruba-Hausa communities in Sajama, Lagos, with respect to the Oro traditional festival. Other areas where communal conflicts have been recorded at various times include: Ogoni-Adoni, Hausa-Yoruba clashes in Idi-Araba in Lagos state; the Eleme-Okrika which was centred on the creation of state and local government, unclear boundaries and clashes over ownership of oil fields, farmlands and water ways. Communal conflict also broke out between Itsekiri-Ijaw and Urhobo communities over the movement of a local government headquarter from Ijaw area to Itsekiri territory.

The Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra state experienced communal conflicts that lasted several decades with thousands of lives and property worth millions of naira lost. (Aja, 2007). Protracted communal violence was also the lot of the Ijaw-Ilaje in Ondo State over the ownership of a land reputed to be rich in oil reserve. The prevalence of communal conflicts has posed a serious challenge to national security in Nigeria. For Northern Nigeria in particular, communal conflicts have remained intractable. Between 1988 and 2004 for instance, the

Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in Benue State recorded that 29 community conflicts occurred in Tiv area of the state. Within the periods, some of the conflicts re-occurred several times.

Communal conflicts also remained unabated among the Hausa/Fulani and Sawaya in Bauchi; Fulani-Irigwe and Yelwa-Shendam, both in Plateau State. Communal conflicts also exist in Assakio, Obi and Odoibu communities in Lafia local government area in Nassarawa State. Up until 2017, Tiv farmers and nomadic Fulani in Benue and Nassarawa States and the Tiv in Guwa and Gwer west were also engulfed in communal dispute.

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, is not spared from communal conflict. For instance, there has been the re-occurrence of communal conflicts between Fulani pastoralists and Gwari farmers in Gwako village in Gwagwalada Area council. The nature or form of the outbreak of communal conflicts often makes its early identification or management difficult. It therefore becomes apparent for all necessary pro-active steps and proper intelligence gathering networks to be adopted so as to detect or identify the early warning signals in order to take steps to forestall possible explosions of communal conflicts across the country.

National Integration

National integration has been devised as a strategy that has to do with the alteration in the relationship between people with respect to the flow of interactions and co-existence whereby individuals find their places within the community without reference to ethnic origins (Tunde, 1984). What this implies is that in the interactions among people of a multi-ethnic or heterogeneous entity, the individuals involved pay greater allegiance to their national unit than their ethnic groups. Nwosu (2005:48) corroborates to this view when he contended that “integration has to do with the elimination of ethnic sentiments and parochialism among the ethnic groups that make up a political system”. A properly integrated society hardly witness incessant political or communal conflicts because of the people’s high level of nationalism, compromise and tolerance.

For Coleman and Rotberg (1964:9) “national integration denotes the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogeneous political community. Related to this view is that national integration efforts are usually geared towards the promotion or emergence of peace through the breaking down of cultural and regional divides in the process of building a united nation (Enaruna, 2014). Contributing, Ogunjenite (1978) contends that national integration relates to the building of nation states out of desperate socio-economic, religious and ethnic geographical elements. This implies the translation of diffuse and unorganized sentiment of nationalism into the spirit of citizenship through the creation of state institutions for the realization of both individual and national aspirations.

National integration efforts are usually aimed at wielding together a pluralistic society in order to enhance development without necessarily jeopardizing ethnic identity. As a purposeful endeavour, the slow pace of national integration especially in multi-ethnic and heterogeneous societies such as Nigeria usually result to severe consequences such as civil war or uprisings, ethno-religious or communal conflicts, rise of ethnic militia and separatist movements. According to Enaruna (2014:5) “national integration is actualized when members of a state see themselves as one, treat one another fairly and work together co-operatively and freely agree

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to, and do resolve their differences peacefully in the overall interest of the nation and its people”.

National integration is aimed at ushering in unity, fairness, cooperation, consensus building and nonviolent mechanisms for conflict resolution which of course are the critical ingredients of loyalty of the people to the nation. A society therefore is considered integrated when:

- i. It has effective control over the use of the means of violence.
- ii. It has a centre of decision making capable of effecting the allocation of resources and rewards and;
- iii. It has a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens. In multi-ethnic and pluralistic societies such as Nigeria, national integration is believed to have been attained when the various diverse units develop a system for the resolution of social problems without resorting to violence or physical force (Ojo, 2005).

National integration therefore denotes an arrangement through which pluralistic or multi-ethnic nations develop a sense of oneness and willingness to live, and work together harmoniously and share a common destiny.

Consequences of Communal Conflicts on National Integration in Nigeria

Without doubt, communal conflicts have knelt a serious blow on the national integration efforts of the Nigerian state. Consequently, Nigeria’s bid towards a properly integrated nation that would pave way for a meaningful socio-economic and political development has been greatly hampered. This study shall examine the following:

- i. **Threat to state and national security:** The persistence of communal conflicts in Nigeria has imposed greater security threats and challenge in the country. To a large extent, “security is one of the social indices that determine the wellbeing and safety of people and their property” (Alimba, 2014:194). It is an atmosphere in which the needs and cares of people are met and provided for in a society. Security is freedom from fear, anxiety or doubt and indeed a situation of well-founded confidence (Nwankwo, 2013).

In strategic studies, security has both objective and subjective context. Objectively, security measures the absence of threat to life, liberty, property and core values (Wolfers, 1954). At the subjective level, security measures the absence of fear, anxiety, tension or apprehension of being in danger of losing one’s life, liberty, property, and core values. The security of a nation is therefore measured with respect to its ability to secure the nation’s core values, life, property, liberty, and deter aggression or win war when it becomes inevitable. Values constitute those tangible elements considered by individuals and groups as crucial for their wellbeing. Consequently, when the people fail to meet their values, fear sets in and fear is an architect of insecurity.

The world over, human security which has to do with the overall security of the people is highly threatened by communal conflicts. Across the ethnic groups in Nigeria, the problems occasioned by communal conflicts have continued to threaten national security. Consequently, this has directly affected the behaviour, attitudes and orientations of some people in the sense that some wrong and unethical practices are being undertaken by them as survival strategies. As Abubakar (2004) argues, in addressing the survival of democracy in Nigeria, security issues and problems cannot be undermined as such have affected or are capable of affecting the

attitude, confidence and cooperation of all groups and segments that make up the country. Following incessant Boko Haram attacks and persistent communal conflicts in the North East, Nigeria between 2009 and 2015, an unstable climate was created in the area, leading the United States to enlist the cities of Jos, Bauchi and Borno states among other states in Nigeria as areas where their citizens should avoid traveling to or be involved in business or economic transactions.

The threat of insecurity posed by communal conflicts in Nigeria has often led the state and federal government to declare a state of emergency in the troubled areas with all its attendant consequences. This has occasionally been the lot of some states or cities in Northern Nigeria such as Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Maiduguri, Bauchi, Adamawa and Yola (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013). The desertion, dislocation and displacement of people from those areas that have records of communal conflicts have drastically reduced the pace of socio-economic and tourism development such places were hitherto known for.

ii. **Loss of lives and property:** Communal conflicts have generally resulted to high mortality rates, injuries, ill-health and severe psychological damage to those involved in the conflicts as well as others living in the war torn communities and displaced populations (Akpenpuum, 2013). Similarly, Babangida (2002:11) submitted that : “communal conflicts have resulted to waste of enormous human and material resources in ethnically and religiously inspired violent encounter, clashes and even battles, threats to security of lives and property as well as the heightening of the fragility of the economy and political process.

Communal conflicts have resulted to the death of many of the combatants and civilians through direct military action, famine and starvation. Others have also lost their lives following the inadequate medical care and the shock arising from fighting. Women, children and the aged are usually the worst victims. Those who often survive the conflict in most cases have permanently been deformed whereas others suffer other forms of physical and psychological scares.

iii. **Threat to Intra and Inter Ethnic Harmony, Mutual Co-existence and Migration:** Communal conflicts in Nigeria have constituted a serious threat to intra and inter-ethnic harmony, mutual co-existence and level of citizen’s inter-ethnic migration. The outbreak of conflicts have usually led to serious breaches in intimate communication and cordial relationship as people part ways and treat or see each other as rivals. In this case, disharmony ensues which seriously affect mutual trust or peaceful co-existence. On extreme cases, this is followed by the outbreak of violent conflicts which often lead to the dispersion of people from their places of location to other safer areas. For instance, some people of South East extraction were forced back to their region in year 2000 following the Sharia crises. Incessant communal conflicts in Northern Nigeria in recent times have also made some people to flee to their states of origin for fear of losing their lives (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013).

iv. **Entrenched Generational Animosity:** The losses and pains that result from communal conflicts usually last a long time, even after such conflicts have ended. In other words, the consequences usually outlive their perpetrators. The groups or individuals that feel they lost in the earlier conflict usually seek a revenge or retaliation at the slightest opportunity. This is partly responsible for the re-occurrence of communal conflicts in places such as Jos, Benue, Kano, and Bauchi States. In this situation therefore, the level of inter and intra-ethnic tension is usually high. In addition, the level of cooperation among the people usually goes down.

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v. **Increasing Cases of Internally Displaced Persons and Dislocation of Persons:** Communal conflicts in Nigeria have resulted to greater incidents of humanitarian problems such as internal dislocation and displacement of persons. As at 2014, communal conflicts in Nigeria led to the internal displacement of over 750, 000 persons (Olusola, 2004). In Jos alone, the estimated number of Internally Displaced Persons between 2010 and 2004 was over 220, 000 people. On December 2012, the conflict between the Gwari and Fulani nomads at Gwagwalada in Abuja produced over 1, 500 displaced persons from about 27 settlements (Alimba, 2014). In the same period, communal conflicts in Nasarawa state led to the displacement of 4, 500 people. Some of the Internally Displaced Persons were either forced out of their ancestral homes or had their houses set ablaze by rival combatants. The Internally Displaced Persons across the country have been faced with enormous nutritional, health and security challenges. Their health and rehabilitation have remained a serious challenge due to limited assistance from individuals, the government and non-governmental organizations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following options are hereby recommended:

- i. **Adoption of the pro-active or preventive approach:** The preventive approach involves the involvement of strategies that will tackle the conflict triggers and reduce the incidence of communal conflicts across the country. Efforts in this regard will include: proper demarcation of boundaries between communities by the relevant government agencies; provision of basic inter infrastructural facilities; proper zoning of political positions in communities; control of the inflow of arms, equitable distribution of resources, promotion of mutual respect and provision of level playing ground among the people.
- ii. **Development of early warning system in communities and adoption of peace education programme:** Every effort has to be made to minimize or fore stall the outbreak of communal conflicts as well as their escalation assuming they break out. In view of the severe consequences of violent conflicts, peace building efforts need to be intensified. There has to be proper peace education and enlightenment of the communities prone to communal conflicts on the consequences of such conflicts.
- iii. **Confidence building measures:** For a lasting solution to communal conflicts, victims of such conflicts need to be properly rehabilitated and fully integrated in the society. There has to be the provision of the necessary support to them and the regular policing of the warring communities, in order to ensure the safety of the vulnerable groups.
- iv. **Promotion of good governance:** Good governance ensures that the leadership adheres to the principle of accountability and the rule of law. Thus, the leadership at any level of governance should eschew corruption and misrule and be committed to fair play and integrity and above all, go above the ostentatious pomp of office. By this therefore, the citizens on their own will be under obligation to follow rightly, and be patriotic, pursue and practice those virtues that will promote national development.

Conclusion

This study has examined communal conflicts and the threat it has posed to national integration in Nigeria. It has been noted that conflict is inevitable in every human society. Functional conflict however can bring about societal progress, whereas dysfunctional conflict is

anti-theatrical to development. The persistence of communal conflicts in Nigeria has therefore remained a major threat to national integration and development.

Communal conflicts result from some socio-economic, political, ideological, cultural and ecological factors. Communal conflicts among the ethnic groups in Nigeria has resulted to severe consequences given the huge loss of lives, property and resources (tangible and intangible) that are usually recorded during such conflicts.

Communal conflicts have come second to ethno-religious conflicts among the factors that have derailed national integration in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the Nigerian state is yet to device appropriate strategies for the effective management of communal conflicts in Nigeria. The measures so far put in place by the state have failed to mitigate the potency of communal conflicts in the country. As the study has shown, a properly integrated state is one where the citizens demonstrate a high level of nationalistic consciousness, tolerate and accommodate one another and have little or no recourse to violence as a means of settling disputes.

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