

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT: A PANACEA FOR THE ACTUALIZATION OF NIGERIA'S VISION BEYOND 2020

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Abstract

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation that is blessed with a lot of human and natural resources sufficient enough to usher it in as one of the 20 largest economies in the world, able to consolidate its leadership role in African and establish itself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena. However, all efforts made to actualize these potentials are frustrated by conflicts among and between various interest groups such as militancy etc, causing insecurity in the nation. The researchers have observed over a period of time, the negative deprivation theory apparently being practiced in Nigeria over issues of ethnic agitations. Thus, this paper on conflict resolution as a strategy for Nigeria to actualize its vision beyond 2020, hinges on the dual concern model which assumes individuals' preferred method of dealing with conflict based on two underlying dimensions viz concern for self (assertiveness) and concern for others (empathy). Thus, the paper recommends the adoption of the conciliation or compromising conflicts style by the federal government in resolving the equity, employment, minimizing distortions and reducing poverty should be enacted and implemented among other things.

Keywords: Conflict, conflict resolution, militancy, sustainable economic development, vision 2020

Nigeria is a country rich in natural, mineral and human resources with diverse talents which, if properly harnessed, will enable the country develop economically thereby, meeting her developmental goal of becoming one of the 20 largest economies of the world. As a multi ethnic nation, the country is blessed with vast fertile soil and very pleasant climate suitable for agriculture. Nigeria is the largest crude oil producer in Africa and the seventh largest in the world. Osahon from the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) reported during an interview with news men at an Oil and Gas seminar in Abuja that, in 2014 Nigeria's oil reserves dropped from 40 billion to 35 billion barrels. This he attributed to reduction in oil production in the country due to vandalization and other unwholesome acts in the oil distribution process in the Niger Delta region among other things (Vanguard newspaper, 19 March 2014). With a population of over 170 million people, the largest in Africa, Nigeria has a pool of trained manpower capable of governing the affairs of this nation and managing the economy efficiently. In a nutshell, Nigeria has the potentials to build a prosperous economy, reduce poverty significantly and provide the basic social and economic services her populace needs.

As a country endowed with abundant resources, Nigeria should be a major player in the world economy. It regularly features as a leading performer in the West African region and indeed in the African continent particularly in the social, economic, political and financial spheres. According to the Statistician General of the Federation and Chief Executive Officer, National Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Yemi Kale, Nigeria is currently the largest economy in Africa and the 26th largest in the world with a rebased GDP of ₦80.22tn (\$510b) in 2013 (Ifeanyi and Oyetunji, 2014). These bring the country in the fore front of Africa's economic and social progress.

With all of these resource endowments, it is naturally expected that a country like Nigeria should be able to build a strong and egalitarian nation with sustained economic growth and development. It is however unfortunate that Nigeria is yet to realise these potentials as a result of poor governance for over 30 years, erratic and distorted policies, public sector dominance in production and consumption as well as untamed corruption with the view to amass illegal wealth from the public purse, among others. These have resulted to high incidence of poverty, high rate of unemployment, poor and collapsed infrastructure and social amenities, wrong value, poor attitudinal practices, and wide spread insecurity and crimes. All these have led to the emergence of militant groups such as, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa Youth Consultative Forum, etc. These groups in their various ways have put a lot of pressure and caused serious insecurity in the country which manifest in kidnapping, politically motivated killings, ethno-religious unrest, as well as the

incessant and often co-ordinated bombings in some terrorism infested states of northern Nigeria by the Boko Haram sect, agitating for their socio-economic, political and religious right.

Efficient and effective conflict resolution is paramount to the development of any society, but the present situation in Nigeria puts the country in a sorry state. The Nigerian amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups in 1914 has gradually shifted from a platform for peaceful coexistence to an arena of violence and gradual disintegration as a result of corruption, poor governance, and political instability among others. According to the US Department of State (2008), the rate of insecurity and threats to lives and properties in Nigeria has reached alarming proportions despite the increasing recruitment of the Nigerian state mobile police and military in the management of internal conflicts. Also, the International Crisis Group (2009) reported that about 50 episodes of violent conflicts, which culminated in the death of over 10,000 persons and internal displacement of over 300,000 people, were recorded in Nigeria between 1999 and 2003. In 2008, violent conflicts in Jos resulted in the death of over 380 persons and destruction of properties worth millions of naira (Adinoyi, 2009; Balogun, 2009; USAID, 2005). Therefore, in consideration of the increasing violent conflicts and the inability of the state to maintain peace and order in Nigeria, this study becomes very necessary if the country must forge ahead in realization of its vision beyond 2020.

Amongst other things, this paper aims at: finding out the strategy adopted by the Nigerian government in managing conflict; finding out the effects of this strategy on the economy and to suggest the way forward. The paper is divided into five sections namely: introduction, conflict in Nigeria, conflict resolution in Nigeria, implication of conflict management in Nigeria, conclusion and recommendations.

Conflict in Nigeria

There is no single definition of conflict. However, in defining conflict, the following factors must be considered: there must be at least two independent groups, these groups must perceive some incompatibility between themselves, and they must interact with each other in some way (Putnam and Poole, 1987). Thus, Wall and Callister (1995: 517) assert that “conflict is a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party”. In the same vein, Rahim (1992: 16) states “it is the interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities”. This means that whenever there is disagreement, disharmony, and antagonistic relationship between individuals, groups and communities, conflict will most likely arise and this tends to disrupt the smooth flow of activities between these individuals, groups and communities. Conflict is inevitable in any society as social interactions and relationships are bound to oscillate from agreement to disagreement and this results in

disharmony and in some cases, tension and antagonism. Francis (2006) in Iyoboyi (2014: 119) considers conflict as an intrinsic and inevitable part of the existence of human beings, defining the phenomenon as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. Deutsch (1973) in Ahmadu and Haruna (2014: 79) opines that the existence of conflict prevents, obstructs or interferes with, in addition to rendering another action or inaction ineffective. From the fore going, conflict usually occurs in one way or the other as a result of the scarcity of resources in a pluralistic society which makes people's interests and goals to clash.

The return of democracy in 1999 brought so much hope and expectations to the people. It is assumed that with democracy, people will be free to choose their leaders and representatives and hold them accountable for the rapid development and improvement of the general living conditions of the citizenry. This expectation is not misplaced considering that Nigeria has abundant human and natural resources. However, the reality on ground has shown that this expectation is yet to be achieved; thereby destroying the hopes of the people and today, what exists is conflict of various groups that have led to the destruction of lives and properties of the ordinary Nigerians. The origin and escalation of the activities of these groups are not disconnected from the government's will to exclude, marginalize and discriminate against the generality of the citizenry or some part of it. Thus, Nnoli (2006: 9) argues that the political exclusion, economic marginalization and social discrimination threaten the security of citizens to such an extent that they regard the state as the primary threat to their survival. In desperation, the victimized citizens take the laws into their own hands as a means of safeguarding their fundamental values and rights from the threat of unacceptable government policies thereby attempting to overthrow the government or establish an alternative state.

Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

Conflict resolution is a process that involves the facilitating of a peaceful ending of conflict. It refers to those strategies that eliminate the sources of the conflict and finds a level playing ground for all the parties involved. Burton (1990: 33) reiterates that conflict resolution is an alternative way of resolving rather than merely pacific settlement of disputes as a reaction to the limitations imposed by realist approaches to conflict analysis, management and resolution. Conflict resolution is different from conflict management even though sometimes they are used interchangeably. Conflict management refers to the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. This means that conflict is not totally bad since it has some positive effects. Posigha and Oghuvwu (2009) in Fatile and Adejuwon (2011: 275) see conflict as dysfunctional, destructive, and at the same time, as a catalyst for change, creativity and production. Hence, what makes the difference between good and bad conflict, is conflict management. Thus, a properly managed conflict will not

degenerate to violence. Since violence will not erupt without conflict as its cause, one can assume that many of the conflicts and insecurity in the country today are because their causes were not properly managed.

Nigeria has not adopted the strategy of conflict resolution; rather, the nation has spent so much in the management of internal security and violent conflict. Unfortunately, this seems to have been an exercise in futility in spite of the establishment of numerous security apparatuses as well as huge budgetary allocations to security agencies. In accordance with this analysis, a number of observers such as Usman (2010), Asuni (2007), Aghedo and Oarhe (2009) have convincingly argued that Nigeria's security management is bedevilled with misdiagnosis and very poor institution building. This is a clear case of misplaced priority as there will be unprecedented diversion of scarce capital in the national budget for the procurement of hi-tech equipment to the detriment of capital projects in the education, health, agriculture and constructions that will be more beneficial to the general society.

Despite huge spending on defence and internal security in Nigeria, wave of insecurity of lives and property continues unabated in different regions of the country. The vandalism of oil pipelines, crude oil theft, and hostage-taking of expatriate workers in the Niger Delta; the interminable incidence of kidnapping in the South East; the ferocious armed robbery in the South West; the ethno-religious crises and the Boko Haram insurgence in different parts of the Northern region have become threats to economic sustainability and the actualization of the nation's vision 2020 and beyond.

While the federal government and all the 36 states including the local government councils in Nigeria enjoy security votes, the enormous fund allocated to this vote has not translated into better and more secure environment that is supportive of sustainable economic development and the vision 2020. Consequently, there has been serious attack and criticism on the security votes very recently. The general public is in support of its scrapping on the ground that it is not economically sustainable considering the diverse challenges facing the nation. Therefore, for there to be peaceful resolution of violent conflicts in Nigeria, greater emphasis must be paid to the human components of national security. This involves the conscious formulation and effective implementation of policies and programmes that could accelerate the elimination of poverty, exploitation, disease, injustice, and the likes to their barest minimum.

Implication of Conflict Management in Nigeria

It is however clear that the management of conflict in Nigeria is not effective. The various roles played by the Nigerian Police, Military and other law enforcement agencies have made matters worse. Peoples' rights are in most cases, trampled upon; economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to health, education, and access to

portable drinking water and adequate standard of living remain unfulfilled for many Nigerians. This is more pronounced in the oil producing region of the Niger Delta and the main revenue generating region in the country. The deprivations of economic, socio-political and cultural rights of the people have resulted to unemployment, dysfunctional structural divide and discrimination at various levels of state and society. These are some of the causes of conflict in the nation and have degenerated to violent conflict because they were not properly handled.

Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Sears (1939) propounded the Relative Deprivation Theory as part of their efforts to link socio-political and economic inequalities in the society to rebellion groups. As individual and group-based theory of aggression, the relative deprivation theory argues that when expectation outstrips achievement regardless of the absolute levels of economic consumption or the provision of political right, frustration is generated. Thus, the collective frustration turns to anger and violence (Dollard et al, 1939:52; Davies, 1962:44; Feierabend and Feierabend, 1966:89). From the stand point of this theory, one can argue that the inability and failure of the Nigerian government to critically address the challenges of developmental issues in many parts of the country may be responsible for the internal violence by armed militia groups against the state. It can also be argued further that, conflict and instability sprang up in Nigeria because people are denied not only their biological needs, but also psychological needs that relate to growth and development. The theory emphasised that needs, especially basic needs such as food, water, shelter and health cannot be traded, suppressed, or bargained for; thus any attempt to do this leads to conflict. In some African countries, it is revealed that there is a very high correlation between poverty and conflict. In Sudan for instance, the acute poverty of the South compared with the North, as well as the feeling that the Northern based government was exploiting the region's resources, without any returns to the region, contributed to the outbreak of conflict in 1983 (Copson, 1991; in Ahmadu and Haruna, 2014: 84). Similarly, in Angola and Mozambique, the resentment of the rural people toward urban elite of partly mixed-race that controlled economic and political power contributed to the emergence of conflict in the two countries. Some researchers are of the view that the participants in many of Africa's violent conflicts and wars in recent years have been moved by the poor economic conditions under which they live (Draman, 2003). Thus, Copson (1991) argues that when guerrillas join a rebel group, they may obtain food and clothing as well as opportunities for recognition and advancement that are normally unavailable to them in an urban slum or a farming community. This seems to be the case in West Africa, where the numerous rebel movements have become sources of opportunity for unemployed youths. According to Aristotle, social strife and revolutions are not brought out by the conspiratorial or malignant nature of man. Rather revolutions are derived from poverty and distributive injustice. As the saying goes, "a hungry man is an angry man", therefore, when the poor are in the majority and have no prospect of

ameliorating their condition, they are bound to be restless and seek restitution through violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Nigeria vision 2020 (2010) states that by 2020, Nigeria will have a large, strong, diversified, competitive, technologically enabled economy that effectively harnesses the talents and energies of its people and responsibly exploits its national endowments to guarantee a high standard of living and equality of life to its citizens. This paper examined conflict resolution and development as a panacea for the actualization of Nigeria's vision 2020 and beyond owing to the fact that no socio-economic development can be achieved in any society where there is conflict and insecurity because of the direct implications for peace, stability, security and development. The paper therefore concludes that conflict in Nigeria is a consequence of marginalization, bad governance, deprivation of basic rights and the likes and therefore, recommends that greater emphasis should be paid on the improvement of well being of the citizens. In this light, the government is advised to adopt the dual concern model of conflict resolution which assumes that individuals' preferred method of dealing with conflict is based on two underlying dimensions viz concern for self (assertiveness) and concern for others (empathy) (Thomas, 1976). This model identifies five conflict resolution styles or strategies that individuals may use depending on their dispositions toward pro-self or pro-social goals. These styles are avoidance conflict style, yielding or accommodating conflict style, competitive or fighting conflict style, cooperation conflict style and, conciliation or compromising conflict style. Of these five styles, the researchers highly recommend the conciliation or compromising conflict style because this style entails mutual give-and-take interaction; it values fairness such that both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision. By this, policies promoting equity, employment, minimizing distortions and reducing poverty should be enacted and implemented among other things. The researchers further suggest that the report of the just concluded national conference be fully implemented because in that conference, the people had the freedom to air their grievances through their representatives in the national conference.

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