

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AS A SOLUTION TO ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria started long before independence but we were not much used in politics until the Babangida regime. Since then ethno-religion became the basis for policy making, resource sharing, economic decisions, employment and development. The main purpose of the paper is to showcase the multi-ethnic and multi-religious complexity and diversity of Nigeria, the needless domination and how entrepreneurship education can ammoniate the situation. The paper therefore focuses on the causes of persistent ethno-religious crises, the challenges of entrepreneurship in Nigeria and how entrepreneurship education can be used to solve the problem.*

Ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria are the most recurring issues in Nigerian body politic. These started since the colonial times and continued till this day without solution. The dominant and minority ethnic groups treat each other with suspicion and the different religious groups clash with one another at the slightest provocation. The character of the Nigerian state is responsible for the country's deepening ethno-religious contradictions. The country's early political structure that struggled for her independent was on the bases of ethno-religious bias. This plural nature originates a constant feeling of distrust between the component units and the fear of one ethnic or religious group dominating the other. This feeling of distrust and fear of domination as a result of ethno-religious bigotry led to the military coup d'etat of June 1966 and consequently the traumatic civil war between 1967 and 1970, the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election, the introduction of sharia law in 2000, the 2011 post presidential election violence, the Boko Haram saga and incessant ethno-religious skirmishes that are presently threatening the corporate existence of the country, (Lanre, 2006).

The current political cum religious battles is fuelled by certain quarters and individuals who benefits at the expense of the state and citizens. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDE, 2011) in Lanre (2006), numerous factors have a stake in the promotion of ethno-religious conflicts because the associated arithmetic of numbers underpinning the conflicts translates into jobs, contracts, the creation of states, local governments as well as representations in

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the state, national assembly and political appointments. The above brings to fore the fact that the real problems in Nigeria is not so much the level of ethno differences, security or religiosity but fear of political domination of one ethnic or religious group by the other. Many scholars Banabo and Ndiomu (2011) and Oduwaiye (2005), attributed the rampant ethno-religious conflicts to high rate of unemployment and poverty. As a result, successive governments in Nigeria have introduced palliative measures to the problem. The federal government in 1976, under General Olusegun Obasanjo introduced Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) which failed woefully. In 1985, the General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida administration introduced such programme like Mass Mobilization for self Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), and National Directorate of Employment (NDE) to address the problem of graduate unemployment but succeeded minimally. In more recent time, the Obasanjo civilian administration introduced the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) which is still in operation in the country till date. Oduwaiye (2005) concluded that all these programmes and measures so far have proved to be grossly ineffective in solving the problem of graduate employment which have assumed critical dimension, especially due to the proliferation of both public and private tertiary institutions. It is to this end that the majority of academic and entrepreneurs in the country welcome this development of teaching and developing entrepreneurial studies in the minds of the undergraduates to prepare them for the wider world of opportunities to create jobs and ultimately, become employers of labour.

It was therefore no surprise that the federal government of Nigeria, through the National Universities Commission (NUC), introduced entrepreneurship education (EE) which is aimed at equipping tertiary students with entrepreneurial skills, attitudes and competencies in order to be job creators and not just job hunters. This is to improve the economic, technological and industrial development of the nation, as well as to reduce poverty to its minimum.

### **Conceptual Discussion**

The concept of ethnicity refers to a social identity formation that rests upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology. International institute for democracy and electoral assistance (IDEA 2001) described the concept as a belief in common origins and a broadly agreed common history provide an inheritance of symbols, heroes, events values and hierarchies and conform with social identities of both insiders and outsiders. Ethnic culture is one of the most important ways in which people conceive of themselves culture and identity are closely intertwined. On the other hand, Hornby (2007), described religion as the belief in a super human controlling power that is entitled to obedience and worship. He went further to state that it is a particularly system of faith and worship that one is entitled to. Religious insecurity can provoke interminable conflicts that make leadership and democratic practice impossible.

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Conflict could be described as a situation or condition of disharmony in an interactional process. Banks (1984) in Lanre (2006) pointed out that a situation of conflict is one in which the activity of one is actually or forcibly imposed at an unacceptable costs, materials or psychic, upon another. For conflicts to occur, certain factors such as intensity and salience of the issue at stake, the status and legitimacy of the parties, and clustering of interest and coincidence of cleavages within the community must manifests into violence. Violence or violent act involves a threat or actual execution of acts which have actual or potential capacity to inflict physical, emotional or psychological injury on a person or group of persons. Violence also rises as every ethnic group or religious inclination sees the other as rival that must be out staged by all means. This has greatly hampered national integration and entrepreneurship in polity.

The word entrepreneur which is a French word means “one who undertakes innovations, finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations in economic goods”. Shane (2003) described entrepreneurship as the act of being an entrepreneur. He continued that the result of entrepreneurship may be a new organization or a part of revitalizing mature organization in response to a perceived opportunity. The most obvious form of entrepreneurship to him is that of starting a new business. However, in recent years the term has been extended to cover such areas as socio-cultural, political, and educational forms of entrepreneurial activity. As a result, when large companies venture into entrepreneurial activities within the organization, it is described as ‘intrapreneurship’ or “corporate spin-off.” In today’s world, anybody, industry or business leader within innovative and creative business abilities is described as an entrepreneur or someone who engages in entrepreneurship (Okpala, 2008). While the entrepreneur is the person venturing into the business or organizing and managing, entrepreneurship is the service rendered by the person who perceives a business opportunity and takes advantage of the scarce resources to meet with unlimited opportunities profitably. To this end, the entrepreneur is one who bears non insurable risks and he directs the human and material resources to achieve economic, social and financial goals of the enterprise. Adam Smith and Robert Cantillon in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively, observed that the entrepreneur is an actor in macroeconomics but the study of entrepreneurship was ignored theoretically until 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and empirically until a profound resurgence in business and economy in the last 50<sup>th</sup> years. The understanding of entrepreneurship was not clear until 20<sup>th</sup> century. This giant leap is credited to the works of economist Joseph Schumpeter in the 1930s and other Austrian economist such as Carl Menger, Ludwig Von Mises and Friedrich Von Hayek. Most credit definitely goes to Schumpeter who described the entrepreneur as person who is willing and able to convert new ideas or invention into a successful innovation (Schumpeter, 1942). Unlike most authors who described the entrepreneur as someone who bears risk, Schumpeter disagrees. The capitalist bears the risk. Drucker (1970), agreeing with Knight (1921) described entrepreneurship as being all about taking risks. He opined that the entrepreneur reflects a kind of person willing to put his or her career and financial security on the

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line and take risks in the name of an idea, spending much time as well as capital (wealth created in order to create more wealth) on an uncertain venture. Knight classified three types of uncertainties:

**Risk:** Measurable statistically

**Ambiguity:** Hard to measure statistically

**True uncertainty:** Impossible to estimate or predict statistically. It is noteworthy to observe here that the act of entrepreneurship is difficult to predict statistically because it involves a high measure of risk and true uncertainty. Hence would-be entrepreneurs must be equipped and willing to face the future with their limited resources, and be determined to come out of that venture a success. Entrepreneurship involves bringing something new to a market that does not exist before (an innovation). Even if the market already exists, there is no guarantee that the new product will survive the introduction stage of the product lifecycle, taking into consideration the teething competition.

### **Entrepreneurship Education Defined**

Entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students (especially those in tertiary schools) with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial studies in a variety of setting (European Union commission, 2010). The commission emphasizes that different aspects of entrepreneurship education are offered at all levels of schooling from primary or secondary schools through graduate university programmes. The growth of entrepreneurship as a recognized profession in the United States was visible in the 1990s. In that professional approach lays the secret benefit of entrepreneurship education, which is, to help decrease the chances of failure by stressing a consistent and proven set of practices. In modern entrepreneurship, the idea of professionalizing the process of entrepreneurship is another great commonality. Emeraton (2008) described entrepreneurship education as that which deals with attitudes and skills that are necessary for the individual to respond to his/her environment in the process of conserving, starting and managing a business enterprise. This implies that entrepreneurship education prepares the individual to be properly equipped to acquire saleable skills which could be used to manage his own business or that of other persons, (Oduwaiye, 2005). Entrepreneurship education is therefore that education which assists students to develop positive attitudes, innovation and skills for self reliance rather than depending in the government for employment. This will in turn, produce graduates with self confidence and capacities for independent through to discover new information leading to economic development (Emeraton, 2008). Entrepreneurship education is the type of education designed to change the orientation and attitude of the recipients and the process will equip them with the skills and knowledge to enable them start and manage a business (Agu, 2006). Agu agreed with Emeraton (2008), opined that entrepreneurship education aims at developing the requisite entrepreneurship skills, attitudes, competencies, and disposition that will

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predispose the individual to be a driving force in managing a business. Akpomi (2009) also holds the view that entrepreneurship education focuses on developing understanding and capacity for pursuit of entrepreneurial behaviours, skills and attitudes in widely different contexts. He continued that this type of education is open to all and not exclusively domin of the acclaimed business gurus. He concluded that these behaviours can be practiced, developed and learned therefore it is important to expose all students to entrepreneurship education. These authors hold the same view. Aig-Imoukhede (1988) has identified ten of the attitudes and skills that would-be entrepreneurs should develop. These skills and attitudes include positive attitudes:

- i. High aptitude for rational critical thinking and timely decision making
- ii. Clear vision, generation of progressive ideals, drive and passion of success.
- iii. Ability to convert vision in concrete reality
- iv. Creativity, innovativeness, courageousness and self confidence
- v. Ability to assume reasonable risk
- vi. Mercurial ingenuity, resourcefulness, patience and / or opportunities insight
- vii. Confidence and good judgment which involves taking decisions and making choices.
- viii. Prudence which means due care in the management of resources especially financial
- ix. Willingness to lean and should develop a disposition pick-up, store knowledge and use it
- x. Hard work which is an indispensable ingredient of successful entrepreneur.

### **Causes of Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria**

The causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are embodied in the basic foundations of the Nation-State. The character of Nigerian states is responsible for the country's deepening ethno-religious contradiction. This plural nature originates a constant feeling of distrust between the component units and the fear of one ethnic or religious group dominating the other. These contradictions have proved incurable especially as efforts to obliterate them have always been truncated aggressively by the custodians of power. Other causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are as follows

### **Ethno Diversity**

Nigeria as a nation is made up of different ethnic groups, each distinct from the other in terms of language, culture, attitude and way of life. During the colonial administration each ethnic group retained its distinct identities. Over 250 different languages and dialects are spoken in Nigeria within its borders and there is an important religious split, as the north is primarily Muslims and the south predominantly Christians, (Lanre, 2006). The first republic politicians that struggled for the independence of the country grouped together and formed their political parties on the platform of ethnic representation. The British Colonial Masters that administered Nigeria until 1960, like most colonies was not constructed for internal coherence, rather for the administrative conveniences of the British government. No wonder, Awolowo (1990) in Lanre (2006) pointed out that the notion of Nigeria as a mere

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geographical expression was engendered by the forceful packaging by the colonial authoritarian fiat of unwilling communities of diverse origin and culture under the same polity. Consequently, relations and political behavior of the peoples are characterized by mutual suspicion and invidious hatred since they are strange bed-fellows, who are only coerced into the nation-state via amalgamation.

### **Ethnocentric Politics**

Following the amalgamation of the unwilling people and ethnic political groupings, Nigeria got her independence from the British colonial government. Attendantly, ethnocentric politics, sectional solidarity and primordial interests became prominent features in the nation's political practice. Sectional and individual virtues and interest rather than collective virtues and national unity are advanced and exalted. Thus, communal orientation precluded any attachment to the state and the son of the soil syndrome took preference over merit and competence in the choice of policies and leaders. Nweke (1994) aptly expressed this ethnic challenge as follows: One of the most striking characteristics of Nigeria is its singular ethnic diversity, a demographic tapestry woven of more than 200 different ethnic groups, where except for the effect of migration are often geographically homogenous and often coincide with linguistic, cultural and religious groupings.

### **Military Incursion into Politics**

Another cause of persistent ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria is the persistent military incursion into politics. None the less the persistent military incursion into the Nigerian polity and government did much harm to the body polity as national issues were mostly tribalised and primordial issues extolled. The military regimes had primordial outlook and sub-regional mentality under which the Northern part of the country was favoured brazenly, on one hand and the southern part was deliberately dealt with in terms of appointments, contracts, location of government parastatals, political oppressions and repression as well as provision of social services and infrastructures, (Lanre, 2006). The persistent ethnic chauvinism exhibited by these regimes had effect on the psyche of the various ethnic groups to an extent that those groups that were favoured now lay claim to marginalization at every attempt to reverse the status-quo. The resultant effect is constant religious and communal clashes.

### **Ethnic Militia**

The long years of military incursion into the Nigerian polity and the imbalance in the distribution of national resources, development, appointment and government presence has brought about the formation of ethnic militia. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASOB) in the east, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the oil defending groups in the south-south, Oodua Peoples Congress in the west and Arewa Peoples Congress in the North. Each of these ethnic militia groups become the mouth piece of their group and employ different means and methods in their agitation including violence.

### **Poverty**

Poverty especially economic and moral or spiritual poverty among Nigerians is another cause of conflicts in Nigeria. The elite and the political buy over the poor or hire them to cause crisis of any type to achieve selfish political interest. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2001), rightly pointed out that both the colonial powers and the elites that succeeded them have used ethnicity for their own ends. Poverty combination with shortage of resources has sharpened ethnic divisions. As a result ethnic sectarianism has left a trail of destructive violence and even threatens the territorial integrity of Nigeria.

### **Deprivation and Marginalization**

The current wave of violent crisis in Nigeria is a by-product of an accumulated deprivation, destruction, marginalization, anger and frustration of the past. Thus, there is need for the government and governmental efforts to lessen the rate of violent attacks between ethnic groups in Nigeria. The implication of these persistent ethnic conflicts and rivalry is the insecurity of lives and properties which hinders foreign and national investments and discourages entrepreneurs in Nigeria. Observing this situation, Makino (2000), pointed out that we have offended one another and needs to forgive each other.

### **Inability to Distinguish between Religion and Politics**

The inability of Nigerians especially our religious and political leaders to distinguish between religion and politics is a single factor that causes ethno-religious violence in Nigeria more than anything else. The major event that opened the gate of religious antagonism was the decision of the Babangida administration to secretly upgrade the Nigerians observer status to full membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (O. I. C.) in 1986. This action of the regime marked the epoch of the intractable intra and inter religious violence in Nigeria. This pattern continued even after the Babangida regime. The decision of some Northern State governors to adopt the Islamic legal code – Sharia as the penal and criminal codes in their states during the Obasanjo administration and the post presidential election violence of 2011 were all politics of religion. The series of violent confrontation being witnessed at present is a demonstration of the fundamental problem of religion that has created acute insecurity.

### **Challenges of Entrepreneurship in Nigeria**

Nigeria as a growing economy is not exempted from the challenges peculiar with growing economy and nations. Entrepreneurs or small-scale businesses are normally faced with daunting and surmountable challenges which at times, are too much for many of them to succeed. Entrepreneurial ventures are saddled with lots of challenges such as:

**Insecurity:** Nigeria has a porous security system where lives and properties are not safe and thereby leave the citizens to live in perpetual fear. In recent times this

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insecurity has taken another shape ranging from kidnapping to ethnic and religious militia. Theft, stealing and broad day light robberies are on the increase.

**Lack of Stable Power Supply:** It is sad to note in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, for a country as blessed as Nigeria to still grope in darkness which has become a way of life. The epileptic nature of power makes business owners resort to alternative sources of power thereby contributing to the cost of business which is in turn passed over to consumers in form of high prices.

**Incessant Change in Government Policies:** There are political problems in all the geo-political zones of the country as a result of changes in government policies. No stability in the government policies, constant changes of government policies affect entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial spirits.

**Technological Problems:** Any nations that is not technologically driven lives at the mercy of other nations. Developed nations dictate what and how to produce depending on the needs of the nations and its targeted consumers as well as developmental policies.

**Infrastructural Decay:** Bad roads and other amenities that enhance business activities have all collapsed. This situation hikes the cost of transportation which in turn, increases the cost of goods at location thereby creating inflation.

**High Tariff/Inflation:** Another challenge of entrepreneurs in Nigeria is high tariff. Most states of the country in order to boast locally generated revenue, impose high tariff on investors. A good example is the advent of MTN Nigeria. The then Nigerian government heavily tasked the communication services providers (MTN) as operational permit and they in turn charged the consumers accordingly.

**Economic Problems:** Most business owners hardly can access loan facilities from banks and therefore left to raise money either by personal savings or sale of their assets. Moreover, corrupt practices of the banks by hiking the interest rates against the directives of the central bank affect entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

### **Entrepreneurship: A Strategy for Curbing Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

Entrepreneurship constitutes a vital engine for economic, political, social, practical and all round development of any country. Entrepreneurship has been identified by many both globally and nationally as a tool for a sustainable, virile and stable economy as well as solution to crisis and conflicts created by poverty. This is why successive governments in Nigeria attempted to strengthen relevant agencies in order to achieve this position. The government of today perhaps, looks more serious than ever in sustaining a few of the agencies such as NAPEP, NDE, and NEEDS. Buttressing this fact, Akpomi (2009) opined that no country can as a matter of truth, move forward technologically, industrially and economically without developing



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strong private partner initiated programmes in the creation wealth, poverty reduction and employment generation, with required skills. These skills include managerial comparative advantage, communication, technical, human and special skills to cope with the challenges of the future. Since entrepreneurship is vital to the sustainable advancement of any nation, entrepreneurship thus holds the key to curb with ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. It can achieve this through the following strategies.

#### **Transformation Centre**

Entrepreneurial skills and education can be used to transform the youths by training in entrepreneur skills centres. Entrepreneurship education and training centres serves as learning and training centres for the translation of dreams and ideas into successful ventures.

#### **Creates Jobs**

Entrepreneurship skills and education create more jobs per unit of invested capital and per unit of energy consumed. As people establish more business ventures, more people are employed. This places the economy in the hands of the people and relieves the government as the only employer of labour.

#### **Mobilizes Resources**

Entrepreneurs mobilizes resources that ordinarily would have remained idle in the hands of people and employ them productively and by doing so, capital formulation is encouraged and more jobs created which in turn, wipes out idleness and the tendency to commit suicide or being used by others.

#### **Technological Advancement**

Entrepreneurship leads to technological advancement. Necessity is the mother of invention. Investing in the local technology and copying the advanced technologies of the world will lead to perfection and boosting the economy. Bu so doing, entrepreneurship strengthens locally produced products for perfect competition.

#### **Reduces Poverty and Idleness**

Most of the conflicts in the country are as a result of idleness and poverty. Entrepreneurship holds the sway to engage both the youths and the adults in meaningful enterprise thereby, reducing the risk of conflicts. Entrepreneurship alleviates and eradicates poverty.

#### **Creates Employment**

The Nigeria's teeming population plagued with unemployment can drastically be reduced through entrepreneurial explosion. Research has shown that 70% of the entire work force is employed by entrepreneurial ventures.

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### **Provides Economic Linkage**

Entrepreneurship links up the various sectors of the economy and constitutes that market for agricultural extractive and industrial output as well as provide source of material and labour input for big industries.

### **Builds Skills**

Entrepreneurship builds skills such as managerial, human, technical, conceptual skills in the individuals by teaching and allowing them to start businesses with little or no money for themselves.

### **Conclusion**

Ethno-religious violence in Nigeria has created a constant feeling of mistrust among the different component units of the country and the fear of one ethnic group or religion dominating the other has hampered the progress of the nation. Ethno-religious conflicts were the resultant effects of poverty, deprivation and neglect and therefore if entrepreneurship education can be given a proper place in the country and entrepreneurship centres established to train and empower the youths and make the people the main drivers of the economy instead of the government, the ethno-religious conflicts and its attendant violence will be a thing of the past.

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