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## **Group Prejudice in Nigeria: A New Approach to Solving the Problem for Sustainable Peace for Economic Development**

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By

PROF. O. I. OLOYEDE

*Department of Economics Education,  
College of Education,  
Hong.*

**And**

A YUSUF J. TIZHE

*Department of Economics Education,  
College of Education,  
Hong.*

### **Abstract**

*There is no aspect of Nigeria's economic life that is spared of the severe blow by the increasing rate of insecurity caused by group prejudice. Presently, individuals, corporate organizations as well as all levels of government are spending sum of their budgets to security. The security sector got the lion share especially in 2012 and 2013. This implies that the huge allocation to security means that other sectors considered critical to the survival of the economy such as health, power, agriculture, education, science and technology and works suffered. This paper, therefore attempts to look at the existence of human groups time immemorial, prejudice in inter groups relationship, global effects of group prejudice, the menace of ethnic and religious group prejudice on economic development in Nigeria, some anti-prejudice which could serve as palliative measures for sustainable economic development and some recommendations were advanced.*

**Nigeria as a nation is made up of many groups that are ethnic, religious, cultural or political. These groups relate between and among themselves in one way or the other in order to derive eternal or external benefits which could be**

**negative or positive. However, in Nigeria and other parts of the world, inter-group relationships have left much to be desired as daily news reports are full of stories of bitter feud, rancor and intolerance leading to violence and bloodshed. The groups that have been at each others throat include religious and ethnic or tribal groups.**

There can be other reasons for inter-group formation and existence, but the most obvious and clear cut one is prejudice. The discussion in this paper therefore focuses on group prejudice and its harmful effect on global and Nigerian peace and economic development.

Abundant works of literature on the devastating effects of inter-group prejudice leading to violence , conflicts and human right violation have threatened the sustainability of economic development in Nigerian and many others parts of the world today (Albert 2004, Ogidi 2004 and Olufemig 2007). Every violent conflict carries in its trait destruction of vast human and man (Olufemig 2007). Peace is a vital infrastructure of sustainable development. On the other hand, sustainable development enhances peace.

### **Groups in Human Existence**

In an event, where two or more individual come together for a common purpose, they form a group. Thus, this can be regarded as two or more people working together to achieve a common goal, each member of the group is an integral part of such a group to the extent that what affects the group, is seen to affect every individual of that group. The strong feeling each member has for the group lead to a strong protection of the interest of the entire group (Caxton and Tunzunwang 2007).

A normal person belongs to one type of group or the other either by chance, by design or choice. For instance, a child is born into and brought up by a family group that exists within a community. The community belongs to a larger social group such as local government or State. Some other kinds of group that a person can belong to by chance include tribal, cultural, religious, political, economical, educational state or nation.

Since Nigerian is a pluralistic and a secular state, it means that, it is made up of several ethnic groups with different world views, religious tastes, social and multi-relationship.

The plural character of religions means that there are numerous religions of different origin, histories, doctrines, patterns of worship and system of ethic. Each ethnic religious groups hold varied views and disagreement. The unification of these

religious and ethnic groups is not readily possible, rather there were division that results to conflict and crisis situations as various groups of people exist in the same or different geographical location in Nigeria. Thus the groups as the co exist have conflicting interests that are difficult to harmonize.

A group whether religious, ethnic, political, regional, national, friendship, leisure or physical exercise for social club members serves very useful functions for individual and the society depending on the basics of its formation.

Sometimes, some groups may be a source of social problem in the society, especially when inter-groups relationship get sour as a result of one reason or the other, when there is a clash of interest leading to conflict. For instance, most tribal clashes are caused by land ownership disputes like the Modekeke / Ife and Urhobo, Itshekiri crises of 2000-2002, while international wars are mainly attributed to political ideologies, national pride or the defense of territorial integrity of nations and religions doctrines/ mode of worship governance. The cold war between the east and west worlds before was ideological.

The plateau blood birth of 2001-2004, the Boko-Haram insurgency in Borno and Yobe 2009 to- date religious and the Ombatse crisis in Nasarawa (Nigeria) 2013 were political. Inter-group misunderstanding can always be resolved if bone of contention is identified and resolved on, as the case with the Bakassi Peninsular issue between Nigerian and Cameroon which has to do with who should own a particular place. It imperative to note that the most difficult inter-group problems are those acrimonies and intolerance that are usually built upon such psychological factors as hate and prejudice because the aftermath effect does not sustain peace for economic development .

### **Prejudice in Inter-Group Relationship**

Prejudice is a feeling of dislike or distrust of a person, groups or thing that is usually based on fear or false information rather than on reason or experience, and which influences one's attitude and behaviour towards the objects of prejudice. According to Allport in Sydelle (2007), prejudice is a pattern of hostility in inter personal relations, which is directed against an entire group or its individual members; if fulfils a specific irrational functions. Such a group of its members are usually of a different racial, tribal, linguistic or religions origin. It is a negative disposition towards others which is dangerous for interpersonal or inter-group relationship.

Prejudice is not hereditary, but it is learnt in the environment during the process of growth, development, socialization or education (Osarenren, 2001). It is learnt by indoctrination or by imitating other people who can have influence on the child in his

environment as these people react towards the persons for groups prejudiced against. Such reactions usually involve calling the persons prejudiced against or labeling them and attributing certain negative characteristic to them. Because the person who is the objects of prejudice has been labeled as evil, he does not deserve any good at all. Thus he is hated, can be hurt, harmed or even killed or at best humiliated any how and made to feel inferior. This explains why ethnic and religious oppositions which are so common in Nigeria, easily result in violence and bloodshed because, they are rooted in prejudice.

It is natural that a victim of prejudice reacts by hatred back to his aggressor making the negative feelings mutual and cyclic. In Nigeria for instance, this appears to be the case in respect of tribal or ethnic, political and religious prejudices as each returns ill feeling leading to incessant inter-group violence incense and the killing and wounding of people.

### **Global Effects of Groups Prejudice**

Group Prejudice has had destructive effects that continues to threaten human survival over long times in history. For instance, according to Isogogo, 2010), the world has witnessed an average of 34 wars in a year. It is imperative to be noted that 30 of these happened in 1994 alone with more than 29.8 million deaths between 1945 and 1989. Between 1914 and today, the effects of armed conflicts resulting from prejudice cannot be quantified as they involved unprecedented loss of property, time , displacement of people creating refugee problems, pain and anguish, hunger, poverty, underdevelopment and more and more divisions among members of the human race.

At the national and international levels in the world some examples of very shocking experiences of violence of humanity, include: the crusades of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and beyond; the two World wars in 1914 and 1945; the anti- Semitism of the mid-forties which led to the decimation of the Jews; the 20<sup>th</sup> century horrors of the American – Korea America Iran, Iran-Kuwait, America – Iranq wars; the 2001 terrorist attack of New York and Washington DC; the America- Afghanistan violence of 2002; the perennial middle East or Israel- Arab mutual violent enmity; the Liberian internal strife of the 1990s; the Ruwandan Tutsi- Hutu ethnic bloodshed of 1993-1994; the Sudanese Dafur Region’s genocidal ethnic cleansing of 2003 to date; the Libya Tunisia , Egyptian, Turkey, Syria, Mali crises of 2012-date; the Nigerian Boko –Haram and Niger Delta militant attack of 2007- date; the current world-wide terrorist and suicide bombers scare (Al-shabab in Kenya 2013) and nuclear threats of our time and (Syria use of chemical weapons on prejudiced group 2013, the Kafachan Muslims and Christian conflict in Southern Kaduna - Nigerian 2013.

## **The Nigerian Menace of Ethnic and Religious Prejudice on Economic Development**

Nigeria had witnessed menace of ethnic and religious Prejudice, a situation that continued to threaten the peaceful existence of the country as a nation. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society with up to 400- 500 Linguistic groups and sub- groups ( Olatunde and Adegun 2005), and blessed with an abundant human and natural resources. However, despite the abundant human resources, human development index in Nigeria have shown a decline in the development of human resources (The money shows, 2013). This may not be unconnected to the multi- ethno- religious conflicts experiences in the country. The two dominant religions in the country are Islam and Christianity with more tribal groups in the north embracing Islam and more ethnic group embracing Christianity in the south. Thus, it is often difficult to separate ethnicity from religion in most conflict situation as what affects religion in variably touches the ethnic groups embracing those religions.

In Nigeria, after the civil war of 1966-1970, the country has witnessed one type of ethnic and religious related civil disturbance or the other. According to Isgogo( 2010) from 1980 to 2009, Nigeria has been involved in over 35 violent communal or ethno-religious conflicts, which have claimed over 75,000 lives and great of material property. Some examples of the ethno- religious conflicts that are aftermath of group Prejudice as cited by Gila and Yaro (2003), Sydelle (2007) Isgogo (2010), Abdulkadir (2011) and Ademonya (2013) include Religious crisis in Ilorin in Easter 1986, University of Ibadan Muslim and Christian clash, May 1986; College of Education Kafanchan Christian- Muslim conflict, 1986; Kaduna Polytechnic, 1988; Numan Adamawa State, 1986-1988; Ahamadu Bello University Zaria, 1988 and 1995; Okpoma Bayelsa Violence, 1990; Zango Kataf blood birth religious, 1992; Addoni Ogoni, Rivers, 1993-94; Obi Tata, Nasarawa State, 1995- 1999; Damboa in Borno, 1991; schools closure for religious crisis in Bauchi, Kaduna, Katsina State, 1991; Kaduna Polytechnic two religious disturbances, 1996; Warri crisis, Delta 1997- 2002; Ife Modakeke riots, 1981- 2002; Udi communicable clashes, 1999; Oro versus Yoruba muslim clash, 1999; Bodija Ibadan Hausa- Yoruba crisis, June 1999; Maitatsine crisis in Kaduna, Kano Maiduguri, Adamawa 1980, 1981-1983; Plateau ethno- religious crisis 2001- 2004, Jos Metropolis 2001- 2002; Langtang- Wase, 2002- 2004; Yelwa Shandom, 2004; TIV versus Kujun, 2001- 2002; Sharia riots in Kaduna 2002; Bin Ladin riots in Kaduna 2002; Bauchi, Katsina, Gombe and reprisal at Onitsha, Feb , 2006; conflict in the Niger Delta 2003- 2004; Boko Haram in North Eastern States of Nigerian 2009- 2013; Rivers State Houses of Assembly political crisis, July, 2013 and , Taraba/ Plateau ethnic crisis July, 2013. The crisis enumerated above continues to have its negative effects on Nigerian's unity or corporate existence, retarding its economic development and disrupting peace.

Indeed, no aspect of the nation's economic life is spared the severe blow by the increasing rate of insecurity caused by group prejudice. Currently, individuals, corporate organization as well as all levels of government are devoting a large sum chunk of their budgets to security. For instance, in most states in the north and Federal capital territory (FCT) Abuja, many churches, mosques eateries, banks, government secretariats agencies and embassies among others are paying heavily to retain the services of security agents.

The Federal government of Nigeria is no less scared. The security sector as observed by Okereocha (2012) got the lion share of # 921.91 billion. The huge allocation to security means that other sectors considered critical to the survival of the economy such as health, power, agriculture, education, science and technology and works among others, suffered. For instance, the ₦400.148 billion voted for education sector is said to be a far cry from the 26 percent recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural organizations,( UNESCO) . Also as important as power is the sector got ₦161.42 billion, while agriculture was allocated ₦78.98 billion. Other sectors got allocations far less than was allocated to security even when the country is not at war.

The prevailing situation in Nigeria, may have already witnessed the attainment of the much- touted vision 20:20; 20 goals goodbye. One may say that Nigeria's dream of becoming one of the largest economic in the world by the year 2020 can never become true, for no meaningful development can take place in the absence of peace as these situations continues to scare away internal investors and potential investors in the country.

### **Some Anti- Prejudice Measures for Sustainable Economic Development**

Based on the believed that inter-group feud and strife are caused by prejudice which is a product of ignorance, there have been various measures by the government at all levels and non- government organizations (NGOS) to reduce Prejudices between and among various group in Nigeria in order to sustain economic development. Some of these measures include;

- (i) Encouraging inter-religious dialogue and public enlightenment campaigns in the wake of such crisis by governments at all levels as well as the religious , ethnic or traditional leaders and non-governmental organization
- (ii) Taking of Palliative measures by civil society group and non- governmental organizations involving donations like the two hundred million naira given to widows by the Dangote groups in 2013
- (iii) Encouraging the formation of inter-ethnic and inter-religious committees, councils, alliances, and coalitions by patriotically minded people including non-

- governmental organizations, like the Plateau inter- Religious council and the national inter- Religious committee.
- (iv) Uniform Education at all levels using a National Policy on Education which allows religious groups to use religions to teach morality in schools.
  - (v) Federal Unity School which was introduced by the Federal government of Nigerian since in 70s, where Secondary school children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds live, eat, and study together.
  - (vi) Introduction of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC). Graduates of Higher Education do a compulsory one year service in states other than their own.
  - (vii) Students exchange Programmed. State owned schools accept students in exchange from other states so that such students study and grow up in states other than their own.
  - (viii) Universal Basic Education (UBE) of 1999 to reduce ignorance and illiteracy.
  - (ix) The introduction of poverty reduction, alleviation and eradication Programmes, for instance, the present National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy Skill Training, Wealth creation, job creation for self employment, sure – P, the national transformation agenda and the like aimed at reducing youths unemployment and poverty as well as making Nigerian youths to be labour employers rather than job seekers and also making the economy to be exporter rather than consumer economy.

## **Conclusion**

In the Nigerian society, groups prejudice is very common and has been expressed in different ways and it has affected the corporate survival of Nigerian as a United Nation. The problem has had its effects on societal peace and development. Thus, in the recognition of the danger, government and non- governmental organizations and individual have embarked on some measures to save the situation. From experiences, this measures have been useful but with limited successes since such measures have not totally prevented the reoccurrence of ethno- religious clashes since up to this time of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the Al-Qeada, Al-shabab, mujawad and Boko Haram terrorist groups are still intensifying their attacks the more then before. In Nigeria specifically, the Torok in Plateau, Ombatse ethnic groups in Nasarawa and the Niger Delta are militant groups. This shows that the measures taken by the government of Nigeria are actually surface addressed and do not attack the origin of prejudice.

## **Recommendations**

It is believed by some philosophers that every child is born naturally good until gets corrupt by the society. Anything that is learnt can be unlearned using appropriates and well- designed educational process. If every child in Nigeria can be given foundational education to love instead of hate his fellow Nigerian irrespective of ethnic,

religious or cultural origins, the country would not need to go far in the search for ways to peace and moral Education as a solution as the is case is today.

There is need to revamp the primary and secondary system circular to include training in the reduction of prejudice among the Nigerian children. Population and family living education and peace education should be compulsorily taught in schools rather than religious instruction which do not inculcate social morality or sense of corporate peaceful and tolerant co existence among Nigerians irrespective of the diversity in social, cultural and economic backgrounds.

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