

## **VIOLENT CONFLICTS AND CHALLENGES OF PEACE BUILDING IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The period we are in Nigeria is a unique time in history as a nation. The country has in recent times, witnessed an unprecedented magnitude of violence that has shaken the unity of Nigeria. The study therefore examined the challenges to peace building in Nigeria. . The study had adopted descriptive perspective in its analysis of the secondary data obtained for the study. The data obtained indicated that violent conflict from the ramous region and tribes of Nigeria is rooted in the conflict diversity of the citizens and bad governance structure. The study concluded that gives the present political and economic structure, the prospects of achieving peace are less probable, unless, the government of Nigeria would generate political will to address huge human capital development afflict, invest In infrastructure, and re-engineer political consensus on socio-economic and political development in the country.*

**KEYWORDS:** violent, conflicts, challenges, peace building, Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The period we are in Nigeria is a unique time in the history as a nation. The country has in recent times, witnesses an imprecdated magnitude of violence that indeed, has shaken the unity of Nigeria. In recent years, especially since the enthronement of democratic system of governance, 1999, the spate of violent conflict and proliferation of ethno-religious crises have threatening the security situation in Nigeria. In the wake of Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, joy, hope and optimistic future was what every Nigerian looked forward to. This optimism was predicated on the factthat democracy would healed injury inflicted on Nigerians by the long military administration. In other word, it was belief that democracy would guarantee freedom, liberty , equality, and above all enhance security of lives and property .Regrettably, this hope and optimism seems to be a mirage as the nation with its democratic rule is threatened by security challenges. The violent attacks by the various ethnic violent groups have been responsible for the death of many individuals and destruction of property in the country. The major flashpoints of the violent conflict in Nigeria involve the ethnic militias groups in the Niger Delta, ethnic-religious crisis in plateau state, sectional conflicts (Biafran agitation, oduduwa people's congress), and the recent phenomenon of Boko Haram and the herdsmen –farmers clash in some Northern states. The unrestrained attacks on individuals and institutions of the Government suggest that there is virtually lack of peace in the country. Through, a considerable effort to end the violent conflicts

have been made, but the achievement of desire peace seems far from realization, hence the basis of this study.

The paper is therefore divided into sections. The first section is the introduction, which is followed by the second section examines the concept of violent conflict and peace building. The third section focuses on the trends in violent conflict in Nigeria. Here the character of the states and prevalence of violence and challenges of peace building in contemporary Nigeria are discussed. The last section is the conclusion and recommendations.

### **Conceptualizing violent conflict:**

The concept of violent conflict is not alien and has been central even in primitive societies. This purpose of this section is to provide an explanation on that body of thoughts or ideas on the subject matter of violent conflict and situate it contextually. Despite its prevalence and day to day usage, conflict remains an exclusive concept and defies any precise or generally acceptable definition. In addition, some definitions of the concept are said to focus on individual perception, others on their objectives, and yet others on their techniques (stem,1999).

However, it is the result of a dynamic relationship between interested parties, struggling to gain control of valuable resources. In attempt to provide a lucid explanation on the concept, Otite(2001) maintains that conflict occurs when individuals or groups in a defined environment pursue divergent goals, interest and ambitions. Coser(1956) states that conflicts “is struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. In the same vein, schelling (1960) states that conflict occurs when competing groups goals, objectives, need, or value clash, and aggression, although not necessary violence in the result. Zartman (1991) conceives conflict as an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions and an expressions of the basic fact of human interdependent.

Another important aspect in the understanding of the meaning of violent conflict is provided by sandole (1993). He had identified stages of conflict, which include initiation, escalation, control maintenance, abatement and terminations/resolution. These stages form a process, and in that process, peace is the ultimate target of conflict or perhaps violence. This view come close to the focus of this study. This is because, peace building efforts are predicated on functionalism that sees society as a complex systems where part work together to promote solidarity, stability, cohesive system that provides concrete and realistic activities through which system of behavior, institutions and other pro-peace initiatives are put in place to enhance peaceful co-existence in human society

### **PEACE AND PEACEBUILDING**

In contemporary Nigeria’s security challenges, peace has been identified as the only ingredient that could promote unity, non-violence, economic growth, and human development. Peace is not static concept, and therefore, does not mean total absence of conflict but absence of all forms of violence. This is why kahn(2017) averred that peace is the presence of justice, love and not merely the absence of tension. Peace means structural integration. It is stable, true, sustainable, optimistic and preventive. It involves fair distribution of power and resources, it is devoid

of all form of discrimination, inequality and violence. It is built on cooperation, harmony, tolerance and mutual respect. It also involved improved human understanding through communication, peace education, international cooperation and dispute resolution etc.

The above analysis simply point to the fact that peace, like any other concept in the human language seem easier to understood, but mostly misplace understanding'. To a greater number of people, the word peace simply means depicts absence of violent, conflict, war or crisis and on the other hand, war or violent conflict in the absence of peace. It is logical and attractive to say this, but indeed to the political scientists and pro-peace workers, it goes beyond mere absence of war. Theoretically, it is sufficient to agree that peace is the absence of war. This is because the word 'peace' and its nature differs. This is why scholars defined peace in line with their ideological disposition. For instance, the instrumentalist defined peace as the means to an end and therefore averred that peace could be attained with the use of coercion. But to the functionalists, peace performs social function that serve the interest of the country's social institution. In this way, no social institution can function in the absence of peace, because it involves the presence of all objective factors that cause and sustain harmony among the individuals and groups which enable them continuous co-existence as an economic entity. This is why the contextual praxis of peace binding is essentially about the process of integrating all rational strategies to achieve durable peace.

Galtung (1975) who first coined the term peace building noted that, the process to achieve durable peace include the creation of structures and institutions that are peace-based and which survived on justice, equity and cooperation. This implies that peace-building consist of wide range of integrated activities, process, roles and functions that aim at transforming a society from intensive and prolonged conflict to a peaceful one.

It is therefore right for Annan (1988) to have reiterated that peace building objective factors should be inclusive to add to and re-orient peace and prevent reoccurrence of violent confrontation and create conditions conducive to reconciliation and recovery.

### **DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria today is passing through difficult security challenges engineered by various groups that have taken up arms against the state. There is violent conflict and turbulence in the land. This is the result of the unrelenting pressure and violence from group determined to accelerate the process of destabilizing the nation. Since the return to democratic governance, there have been series of violence conflict that continuous to threaten the survival of the Nigeria state.

The interplay and character of the violent conflict reflected ethnic, religious and resources-based dimension in some conflicts, actors are faceless and in others actors are known. Violent conflicts are mostly organized on ethnic basis in Nigeria because outright declaration of war on the state by any particular group is not only unacceptable but will be totally condemn by all. One feature of multiplicity of ethnic violent in the country is that, the various groups are more conscious of their sub group than at the level of national interaction. Though the diverse groups in a country are not bad, the fact remains that ethnicity in Nigeria is manipulated to becoming destructive forces. Ethnic based conflict exist in different parts of Nigeria Examples Oodua People Congress, Arewa People Congress, Indigenous People of Biafra, the Ijaw National Congress, Movement for the

Actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB), various Niger Delta Militant groups such as Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta people's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta MOSIEND (Fayeye, 2006; Asamu 2006). Another ethnic base violent conflict group is the Northern Boko Haram and Fulani conflict against farmers. The various ethnic base violent conflict is a means to an end as they all used ethnic sentiment to threaten the unity and peace of the country.

Thus, in political economic analysis, the emergence of these ethnic violent groups from the various regions and tribes of Nigeria was down rooted in the economic and political administration of this country by the various leaders in their different times. The relation of labour has been that of the exploitation and inequality in the distribution of labour outcomes. Although colonialism with its failed state building efforts lay the foundation but we nurtured it to a more prominent order and its bane of economic and political development. The hope of achieving peace in a country laden with ungovernable security is indeed, a farce.

However on a general notes, the violent conflict accessioned by the various violent groups have serious consequences on social, economic and practical matters in Nigeria. This is why the government tried to ensure peace, yet could not achieve it because of faulty strategies. The need for security necessitated the social contract in which people willingly surrendered their right to government. The security of the citizens is the primary duty of any government. The security of the nation is very paramount in ensuring social harmony and peaceful co-existence among its people. It is one of the responsibilities of a leader of every sovereign political entity to ensure the survival of his or her nation. This can be achieved through interactive peace building mechanisms. The Nigerian state has intrinsically leveraged on the use of coercion as preferred strategy for managing violent conflict, particularly those that challenged or had the potential of changing the legitimacy and authority of the state and its means of economic sustenance (Isaac, 2014) Beyond the force strategy, the government employed dialogue with the various violent groups, amnesty mechanism. In this case, government had plausibly adopted the military and non-military apparently to countering violent conflict in Nigeria.

The objective of this brief presentation is to share my thoughts on how we can cultivate the right approach to peace building.

All over the world, violent conflict is not countered by the exclusive embraces of negotiation or military /criminal justice approaches. it is always a combination of both and even more. What is however important and desirable is that while the government uses repressive force as a short-term approach to addressing incidences of violence conflict, it should also leave room for engagement as negotiation has always serve as a long term solution to such violence .This is particularly so, as most of the violence in Nigeria in usually predicated by deep rooted grievances.

### **CHALLENGES OF PEACE BUILDING**

It needs little telling that Nigeria is facing challenges in her effort to end effectively multifarious problems in the nation, . The tremendous diversity presented by the ethnic and religious composition, socio-economic structure and physical characteristics of the Nigerian state has far-reaching spatial consequences for the nature and spiral of violent conflict in Nigeria. This explanation form the basis for violent conflict not only in Nigeria but the entire Africa. what is

clear about Nigeria and post-independence African conflict is that they have generally been between difference ethnic group within a country (nkuruma 1970) even conflict that are apparently free of ethnic configuration involve factions and alliances build around ethnic lines for example conflicts in Burundi , Congo,Eretrea,Ethiopia and Nigeria Biafra war among others . while some multi ethnic states have successfully unified their multi ethnic configuration, others have not done so well .Nigeria is one of such states that are yet to unify her diverse ethnic groups, hence, Nigeria like other multi ethnic African states is today confronted with the issue of national cohension or integration, especially in the moments of in intense ethic religious, disagreement and misunderstanding. This situation is obvious because each group regard itself as distinct nationality with defined customs and territories. The contending desired to assert this distinctiveness collides with each others in the struggle for power and influence in Nigeria. This has been a major challenge to peace-building in Nigeria . The appeal to ethnic dynamics as mean of achieving durable peace is Nigeria, is not only faulty, but practically make peace building impossible.

Similar to the alcoves explanation is the despotic and over bearing nature of political leaders in Nigeria. The class of power mongers have deliberately created contradiction, just to concentrate power at the centre at the expense of weak economics performance (Ismanla, 2014). In this contradiction, the deepening economics crises, gave rise to emergence political and interest groups that question the basis of legitimation of these leaders. Schraeder (2014) found out that, low economic performance gave birth to civil society and emergence of civil unrest and conflict. The nature of leaders and poverty in the land suggest lack of functional political system and development. Peace building efforts in contemporary Nigeria, in a big challenge, because the state has failed to perform some of the basic functions. The inability of government to protect the citizens led to the creation of vigilantes groups that eventually developed into militias that have been perpetual violence against the Nigeria State.

Magstadt(2009) evidently noted that,dysfunctional States are wretched places where extremes are the norms, where government is either extremely repressive or too weak to maintain a modicum of law and under such circumstances the most violent elements in Society take over. A queue from the above shows that Nigeria State in weak and is gradually collapsing into a fail state; therefore in the face of high inflation, poverty, unemployment, it is obvious that Nigeria government is unable to meet the basic needs of the majority of the citizens. This situation propel people to violence.

We are all aware that we live in a country of unprecedented wealth and opportunity but one in which gross inequalities and unbalances of power sharing continue to deprive majority of the citizens of the benefits associated with resources of the nation. The unsustainable paradox between the rich and poor, unarguably challenge the moral basis of peace building. It is becoming painfully obvious that the gab between the rich and poverty-shaken majority is growing; and no efforts is put in peace to redress the gross unbalance. The state and its institutions are not properly developed and as such are open or susceptible to violent conflict organized by particular or specific segments of the country. The Nation's institutions are bereff to the core weberians themes of impersonality, impartiality and rationality, hence, it is held hostage by the powerful segments of the ruling class.



The poor quality governance in Nigeria has contributed in no small measures to the escalating incident of violent conflict in the country . The world bank (1994) has defined good governance as type of governance that is Predictable open and enlighten policy –making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law transparent process and a strong civil society participating in public affairs . Good governance has been equated to political institutional process and outcome that support the existence of legitimate authority by public institutions in the conduct of public affairs and management of resources, so as to guarantee the realization of sustainable human development in an atmosphere of due process, rule of law, and freedom from abuse and corruption. The political development in Nigeria are far from the norms of good governance defines above. The social and economic upheaval that accompany bad governance have continued to undermine national solidarity and cohesion needed to advance peace.

Consequently, the interplay of, economics crisis , social crisis and political instability expose the inadequacies of Nigeria and exacerbate the economics condition of people who fall further in deprivation and desperation .The people believe that the government no anger represents their best interest and therefore seek by all means to overthrow it .

Today , Nigerian cannot cope with peace building because of the personification of the state demonstrated by the use of the apparatus of the state for personal gain . The poor governance rent-seeking behavior, primitive accommodation and ostentation living of the leaders have continued to generate conflict and insurgent activities . There is a total absence of feeling of community and common conception of Nigeria state. .This explanation points to the dynamic interrelationship between Political, social, economic factors in determining peace and security. It will be wrong to classify a country like Nigeria, experience pervasive structural and violence conflict as peaceful. It will also be wrong to say there is peace in a country where the poor or ordinary people are daily brutalized by the powerful . that's is why ibeanu (2005) argued that it is possible not to have peace or security even though there is no war.

what one can deduce from the sampling of the various facts in this brief presentation is that the dynamic that fuel violence conflict is the failure of Nigeria government to integrate diverse social groups into effective political process .The various ethnic group see the political system as un just and in accessible to all. The lack of consolidation of national peace around commonly shared values and positions undermines effort at building integrative Nigeria . In this circumstances every body appear free to do as they deserves, a condition that generated violent conflict and also weakens the capacity of central authority to maintain effective control over the people .

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

By the way of a conclusion, we have tried to establish that the ethnic character of violent conflict in Nigeria, poses great challenge to peace building.We agree. Nigeria is no doubt a complex country given numerous ethnic groups with varies characteristics and interests. Problem of re-occurring violent conflicts in Nigeria is attributed to plural nature of the country which tended on the surface to deliver more of the violent conflict. This explain why government have not been able to establish viable peace building strategy . The realities point to the poor management of

public affairs, lack of broad public participation in the state affairs and above all poor governance structure, all these are intricate challenges that form the bedrock of ethnic base violent conflict across the country.

Thus, there is thus an urgent need to re-engineer political consensus on socio-economic and political development in the country. In this way Nigeria should evolve integrated planning that would initiate a process that opens the possibility of engaging one another in a manner that is profound and integrative. This will enhance peaceful co-existence and as well developed necessary conscience that would make the people consider national peace as their supreme responsibility. The people need to stick together to be effective in dealing with their common problem.

The government should strive to be on the side of the people by promoting the principle of rule of law across the country. This will be the antidote to the ills of ethnic manipulation and the impunity of political leaders that appeal to ethnic dynamics in their struggle for power, thereby sowing seeds of hatred and bitterness among Nigerians. On the whole, for Nigeria to build sustainable peace, we must agree that all ethnic groups despite its numerical strength, are parts of the profoundly inter connected holistic unity of this country. Psychology inform us that where ethnic and religious divisibility prevails, national consciousness becomes isolated. Therefore peace building in Nigerians requires fundamental restructuring to establish foundation for an enduring national peace.

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