Ethno-communal Conflict and the Local Government System in Nigeria: A Desideratum of Peace Building

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ABSTRACT

Ethno-communal conflict is a major bane of the Nigerian local government system. This paper examined the social and political conditions that predispose communities and groups to conflict, the impact of conflict on the citizenry and how it vitiates development. A descriptive research design was used. The study was conducted in Nigeria between February 2012 and March 2013. Being an ex-post facto research, relevant documents on ethno-communal conflict, peace building and the Nigerian local government were consulted. The critical study, analysis and evaluation of opinions, data and other information formed the basis for explaining and understanding ethno-communal conflict, its persistence and the failure of the local government to build peace. Relevant statistics were presented to substantiate the position. Using qualitative and quantitative content analysis, the findings showed that Nigeria local government system failed to mobilize for citizenship training, reduce poverty, social discrimination and build peace and security. Statistics showed that poverty increased among the rural dwellers in Nigeria. Out of a rural population of 65 million, 17.1 million live below the poverty line with 27.2% poverty incidence in 1980. In 2010, out of the 163 million rural dwellers, 112.47 million live below the poverty line and 69% poverty incidence. Other poverty indices used showed that food
poor =48.3%, absolute poor=66.1%, relative poor = 73.2% and dollar poor=66.3% for rural population, while urban population had food poor=26.7%, absolute poor=52%, relative poor=61.8% and dollar poor=52.4%. Causes of conflict included differences in access to resources, culture/identity and democracy participation. It was inferred that local governments are ineffective in ethno-communal conflict management because it lacked the resources and powers to do so. Conclusively, it was recommended that peace education should be introduced in formal and informal settings. Conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms should be established in the local government councils.

Keywords: Ethno-communal; ethnicity; conflict; local government and peace-building.

1. INTRODUCTION

The reason for creating a uniform system of local government as the third-tier of government in Nigeria was to achieve even and accelerated development irrespective of the peculiarities of the environment. This was to be realized through direct provision of services and implementation of people-oriented projects driven by the needs and desires of local communities.

The vision was that an effective local government will be able to mobilize human and material resources at the grassroots level through an effective communication channel that mediates between the local populace and higher levels of government. This required the building of pluralistic and egalitarian society characterized by a strong culture of participatory democracy. It must be underpinned by the primacy of the rule of law, accountability, transparency, viable public policy output through effective institutions that not only regulate behavior but assures optimal investment on human capacity-building.

The obvious fact is that the local government has not been able to reduce social discrimination and cleavages among the diverse cultural or ethnic groups neither has it been able to achieve political integration including opportunity for participation in decision-making and interest articulation as to confer a sense of confidence, trust and unity. Lack of or introverted citizenship training, exclusion from the political process, poor articulation of group interests, lack of transparency and corruption, etc. combined in disproportionate form to stunt development while accentuating rural and urban poverty.

The direct consequence of the dismal situation is the inability of the different ethnic and communal groups to transcend their primordial attachments. The belief is that the persistence of ethno-communal conflicts in Nigeria is attributable among other factors to the inability of the different groups to over-come inter-ethnic misperceptions and stereotypes which mutually reinforce the psychological and social distance between them [1]. The social perceptions or misperceptions, which can be real or imagined, are sometimes deliberately or artificially manipulated by shameless leaders to perpetuate social, economic and political inequality. This not only leads to strained and inflamed ethno-communal relations but predisposes the polity to conflict. In Nigeria, ethnicity is driven by the fear of domination over identity, values, religion, competition for scarce resources etc. These are all causative factors of conflict which arise when goals are incompatible. The local government, being the grassroots government, is caught in the web of ethno-communal conflicts. Most of them are constituted of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural groups often delineated in terms of their minority or majority status. There are cases where groups in one local government have their kits and kins outside the local government. The phenomenon of minority and
majority groups or indigene and stranger syndrome sometimes give rise to crises of relative deprivation or marginalization which has been implicated substantially as leading cause of intra-and inter-local government communal crises.

The question therefore is “how can the local government build enduring peace among the diverse ethnic groups and communities in Nigeria so as to achieve rural development?” This is salient when it is realized that the local government is the tier of government that is nearest to the grassroots people, and ideally, should feel their pulse or heartbeat.

It is further identified that the local government has not been able to perform above board as to spur rural development and poverty reduction because of poor and inept governance which, in turn is implicated in conflict. The third-tier government is indicted for failing to evolve effective and strategic approaches that can really make dent on poverty, foster a sense of unity among communities and reduce conflict. The objective of this paper therefore, is to examine the social and political conditions that predispose communities and groups to conflict, how conflict vitiates efforts at rural mobilization for development, and the capacity of the local government for conflict resolution.

The realization that the present local government structure is not fully empowered statutorily to resolve ethno-communal conflict created the desideratum for peace building. This should be vigorously pursued by the local government and complemented by all relevant stakeholders including higher levels of government as the only option that will assure durable and harmonious co-existence and development among all communities.

1.1 Clarification of Concepts

It is necessary to explain certain terms or concepts with the intention of making the context they are used here clear. They are:

**1.1.1 Ethnic**

The term “ethnic” refers to a socially defined group of people sharing common origin, culture or language and distinguished by the communal characteristics of their boundaries. An ethnic group refers to a nation complete with its own culture or world-view. Ethnicity as a social construct is used to explain the ingrained phenomenon persisting as attitudes and behavior of individuals as they interact with people of other ethnic groups. Ethnocentric behavior is used to explain the stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory tendencies to categorize or differentiate on the basis of in-group (we) or out-group (them). Where minor linguistic or cultural, occupational or class differences exist within the larger group, sub ethnic systems are delineated.

Here an ethnic group means a distinct group of people who share common culture including religion, language, values, worldview and who proffers a common ancestral descent or heritage that differentiates them from others.

**1.1.2 Conflict**

Conflict has an ontological basis in human needs and is therefore both inevitable and an intrinsic part of human existence. It is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups [2]. It is an expressed struggle between at least two inter-dependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in
achieving their goals [3]. For purposes of this paper, conflict is the dysfunctional multi-level relationship between two or more interdependent groups or parties for achieving mutually satisfying but incompatible and disproportionate goals.

1.1.3 Community

A community is a concentration of people whose major social and economic needs are satisfied primarily within the area where they reside through a network of relationships and organizations using available resources [4]. Schaefer [5] defined community as a spatial or political unit of social organization above the family that gives people a sense of belonging based on shared residence (locality) or on a common identity. An integrated community shares common values and interests, interacts frequently and closely and thinks of themselves as part of a group. The bases of social cohesion are the norms and values which develop in the course of interaction. Community, as used here means the geographic (local, neighborhood, sub-urban, towns, cities, municipalities etc), cultural (ethnic, religious, etc.) and organizations (kinship networks, professional associations, etc.) and other formal and informal groups that exist and constitute the local government.

1.1.4 Ethno-communal conflict

As a social phenomenon, conflict occurs in situations where a minimum of two actors or parties strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources [6]. Communal conflicts are violent and non-violent conflicts between non-state groups that are organized along a shared community identity. The parties use lethal force to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible or scarce resources. Being non-state actors, they don’t control the state and its appurtenances such as the armed forces, are not formally organized rebel groups or militias and are not pitched against the state but along group identities - communal, ethnic and religious, etc. Communal identity means subjective group identification based on common ancestry, descent or historical experience or background, culture or core-values. This is the basis of indigenes versus strangers or settlers syndrome as a causative and predisposing factor of ethno-communal conflict in Nigeria. In this context, ethno-communal conflict means the strained relationships between and among the ethnic and/or communal constituents of local government areas. They could be contained within a particular local government (intra local government ethno-communal conflict) or across local governments (inter-local government conflict). It could occur over differences in access to resources (grazing land, farmland, water, powers etc), along occupational lines (pastoralist versus agriculturalists) or values (cultural, religious etc).

1.2 Desideratum

Desideratum is a Latin word meaning a requirement or a necessity. In this paper it means a necessary and vital mechanism required for peace building in local governments.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

According to Karl Marx (1818-1883) conflict is an inherent characteristic of all human societies. Perhaps, this realization makes for the varying viewpoints that attempt to explain social conflict. Galtung’s [7] theory of positive and negative peace emphasis how groups, aggregates or collectivities can achieve harmonious relationships in well-structured and functionally integrated societies and restiveness in structurally flawed ones. The
structuralists believe that conflict is embedded into the particular way a society’s political, economic and social structures are organized and the extent such structures generate and handle the associated dysfunctional conditions as exclusion, injustice, poverty, exploitation, inequity etc. [8,9,10].

The psycho-cultural conflict theory which is adopted for this paper, believe that individuals belong to groups and can acquire or learn deep-seated and ingrained attitudes (positive and negative) which confer an identity on the individual. At a point, one’s ethnic origin and the identity so constructed may overtake the individual’s own self-identity and become the basis of social categorization (we and them). Every action is interpreted on the basis of the source and the person or people taking the action.

The tenets of the theory is that conflict arises when groups feel they are discriminated against or deprived of satisfaction of their material and psychological needs on the basis of their identity. Therefore, identity driven fear of extinction, domination, humiliation, oppression, victimization or any form of perceived degradation or denial springs negative dimensions of ethnicity. In most situations, passions overwhelm reason while the violent reaction is driven by unshakable sense of self-worth and the desire to establish group essence – a sense of security and safety to actualize long-term potentials.

The psycho-cultural conflict theory is used here to explain the remote and immediate causes of ethno-communal conflicts in Nigeria. The government is entrusted with the capacity to provide practically all public goods including security and protection of the particularistic interests of all groups [11]. However, the basic units of socialization are family, community, ethnic and religious institutions, and they assume greater salience in the formation, organization and expressions of attitudes and culture. This is the basis of acquiring deep-seated cultural attitudes that are reflective of one’s membership of the group. The resulting gap in social exchange or breakdown in communication fuels conflict. Ethno-centric behavior fosters prejudices and discriminatory tendencies mediated by the perceptions or misperceptions of social actors. The dynamic interplay of the people’s multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-religious values produces an incongruence that both accentuates and perpetuates conflict.

Ethno-communal conflicts are reinforced by the tendency of members to looking inwards to other group members for support thereby creating greater internal cohesion especially in times of perceived exclusion in political, economic and social processes [12]. Conversely, it increases social and psychological differentiation among ethnic group members in ideological, security and other spheres of interaction at community and higher levels [13].

The theory is employed as an analytical tool to grasp the issues, types and dynamics of communal conflict with a view to understanding and adopting correct intervention measures. It expounds the necessity for peace building as the means to addressing the remote and immediate causes of ethnic and communal conflict. By reducing or transforming cleavages or differences of attitude formed on the basis of ethnic nationalism, actions are interpreted on the basis of national rather than one’s group collective identity [14].
2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Purposes of Local Government in Nigeria

According to Ezeani [15], the local government has many potential roles to play in the development process. They include the inculcation of positive citizenship attitudes, provision of community services for social and economic well-being and mobilization and management of community resources for rural development. Olowu [16] had elucidated the rationale for the creation of local government and they include:

1. Political integration and nation-building – creating a fertile ground for political participation, dialogue and interest articulation to achieve consensus. This, it is believed, obviously improves intra and intergroup relations and builds trust and confidence for mutual co-existence.

2. Training in citizenship, political participation and interest articulation – instills correct behaviors and positive attitudes such as consideration, self-control, community responsibility, identity and accommodation. Participation and inclusiveness fosters a sense of unity and belonging while improving capacities for prioritizing local needs and alloting available resources. It also prepares citizens for selfless services in higher positions and responsibilities at the state and federal government levels.

3. Promotion of accountable governance:– It is hoped that the promotion of democratic self rule at the grassroots will be a prelude to open, transparent and accountable governance.

4. Promotion of claim-making on higher levels of government – Being a third-tier of government that is higher than individual and community interests, the local government is a credible stakeholder in the state in which it exists and the federal government. The local government makes claims and inputs on inter-governmental fiscal relations and other policies that though, made by over-arching or proximate authorities, and requires local expertise and knowledge for meaningful execution.

5. Reduction of social discrimination – the local government is constituted of ethnic and communal groups some of which share common cultural and historical antecedents while others are disparate. It behooves on the 774 local government areas in Nigeria to manage over 250 ethnic configurations often complicated by unclear ethnic and political boundaries. The local government is expected to provide effective mechanisms for conflict resolution, reduction of social discrimination or cleavages and elimination of relative deprivation.

6. Establishment of channels of communication - serves as a two-way channel of communication between the local populace and the higher levels of government. Apart from serving as a veritable tool in policy input, articulation and execution, it eliminates communicate blockade that can lead to prejudice, stereotype and conflict when government activities and not properly understood.

The above purposes were obvious derivations from the various perspectives which view the local government as instrument for democratic participation, provision of efficient services, machinery for development and means of authority devolution and localization [17].

The 1976 “Guideline for Local Government Reform in Nigeria” squarely placed the task of rural development on the local government which is required to
• Provide services and development activities according to local wishes and initiatives or as dictated by local environmental peculiarities; and
• Mobilize human and material resources for development;

These provisions were further strengthened by section 7 (1) of the 1979 constitution. Furthermore, section 7 (6) provided for fiscal federalism in local government funding through statutory allocation. The sources of revenue are:

• Statutory allocation from the Federation Account
• Statutory allocation from the state
• Grants and loans
• Internally generated revenue.

The fourth schedule of the 1999 constitution outlined the functions of the local government. However, Olowu [16] enumerated the administrative responsibilities and tasks involved in achieving the function and they include:

• Resource management
• Conflict management
• Resource mobilization
• Planning and goal setting
• Provision of services
• Integration of services
• Claim-making on the government

The question is “to what extent has the local government been able to achieve the lofty objectives of reducing poverty and improving the welfare of the people so as to minimize the incidence of conflict?” This is because there is an intricate relationship between poverty and conflict [18] and if the local government has not been able to mobilize for rural development in all its ramifications [17] then it has substantial blame for the preponderance of conflicts among the numerous ethnic groups and communities in Nigeria. According to National Bureau of Statistics [19], more Nigerians live in the rural areas and the incidence of poverty is on the increase (see Table 1).

Table 1. Relative poverty head count, 1980 – 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Poverty incidence (%)</th>
<th>Estimated pop. (million)</th>
<th>Pop. in Poverty (million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>102.3</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>126.3</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>112.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


26.7% of the urban residents and 48.3% of the rural residents suffer from food poverty respectively. Also, 52% of the urban dwellers as against 66.1% of the rural dwellers suffer from absolute poverty. Meanwhile, 61.8% and 52.4% of the urban residents suffer from relative poverty and live on less than one Dollar per day respectively. For the rural residents, it is 73.2% and 66.3% respectively (see Table 2). One is however piqued that the incidence
of poverty is on the increase despite the steady increase in revenue realization from the Federation Account and Excess Crude Account. It is not surprising therefore, that analysts score the local government low in terms of performance [20].

Table 2. Urban/Rural incidence of poverty by different poverty measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Food poor</th>
<th>Absolute poor</th>
<th>Relative poor</th>
<th>Dollar poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Moreover, a relationship can be established between poor governance, the preponderance of poverty and conflict. Nnadozie [18] alluded to the fact that poverty erodes and undermines the basic condition for peaceful co-existence between the various ethnic and religious groups.

Local governments in Nigeria are indicted for ineptitude when weighed against the Aggregate Governance Index [21]. The indices are used to measure voice and accountability including the extent of enforcement of democratic principles of fair elections, political and civil rights, political stability, absence of violence and government effectiveness – quality of public service delivery, competence and independence of the civil service. Others include the extent of enforcement of rule of law including protection of life and property from violence and the availability of institutional checks and balances that constrain kleptomaniac local government officials from diverting public funds for personal ends. On the aggregate, there seems to be a co-relational relationship between poor governance, poverty and ethno-communal conflict. According to the Police Annual Report (2011), there has been a steady rise in the trend of ethno-communal conflict in the past decade as can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Trend of ethno-communal conflict in Nigeria (2001 -2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houses destroyed</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives lost</td>
<td>4443</td>
<td>5472</td>
<td>5611</td>
<td>5787</td>
<td>6516</td>
<td>6634</td>
<td>7640</td>
<td>8925</td>
<td>10408</td>
<td>12,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of people displaced</td>
<td>2960</td>
<td>3240</td>
<td>3312</td>
<td>5,502</td>
<td>9,419</td>
<td>13,839</td>
<td>14,920</td>
<td>17,872</td>
<td>28,794</td>
<td>30,420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Police Annual Report, 2011)

2.2 Causes of Ethno-communal Conflicts in Nigeria

As social institution, the local government is a purposive organization that carries out specific functions. It is exposed to varying degrees of conflict ranging from mild disagreements to terminal or exhaustive phases. The overall effect of the attrition on the performance of the local government is that the achievement of objectives is vitiated. Nigeria is constituted of over 235 ethnic groups of various sizes. The decentralization and devolution of power and authority to sub-national governments were intended to cater for the interests of groups disadvantaged by their size and geographical location. However, the creation of states and local governments seemingly encourages violent group mobilizations along ethnic and communal lines that actually accentuates rather than assuage conflict.
Several reasons have been advanced for the pathological relationship among and between the constituting groups of local governments. According to Asiyanbola [22] conflict occurs when there are prolonged and persistent background or historical grievances and differences that breed mutual suspicions and distrust. Nnoli opines that conflict becomes a salient aspect of ethnicity when inter-ethnic competition for scarce resources is the rule particularly when inequality is accepted as a given condition. The Nigerian state assumes primacy over the production and distribution of resources using the different tiers of government. This makes the struggle for power as an instrument of domination, appropriation and expropriation very intense [11,13]. The 1979 constitution further compounded the already precarious situation by its “indigeneity” proviso that introduced a distinction between natives or indigenes and settlers or strangers as basis for discrimination. The consequence was the spontaneous eruption of deadly ethno-communal confrontations over citizenship with each party trying to twist and turn history while contesting identity and claims [11]. The Human Sciences Research Council (2008) cited in [23] grouped conflicts into three major classes namely:

- Resourced-based conflict
- Culture and identity based conflict
- Democracy and participation based conflict

Incidents of ethnic and communal conflicts include Shagamu (Ogun) between Yoruba and Hausa, Zangon-Kataf (Kaduna) between the native Kataf and Hausa/Fulani, Tiv-Jukun in Wukari (Taraba), Ogoni-Andoni and Eleme-Okrika (Rivers), Chamba-Kutub (Taraba), Itsekiri-Ijaw/Urhobo (Delta), Aguleri-Umuleri (Anambra), Ijaw-Ijaba (Ondo State), Basya-Egbura (Nasarawa), Hausa-Fulani-Samaya (Bauchi), Fulani-Ungwe and Yelwa in Shendam (Plateau), Hausa-Yoruba (Lagos), Ife-Modakeke (Ogun), Igbakwu- Omor (Anambra), etc.

In all the cases, the local government councils, being the nearest tier or grassroots government were deeply enmeshed and embroiled in the crises. For instance, the 1992 Zangon-Kataf imbroglio sparked when the local government chairman, a Kataf attempted to relocate a market dominated by the immigrant Hausa-Fulani Muslims. That was the immediate cause but the remote causes included deeply ingrained feeling of domination that perpetuated socio-cultural and economic inequality [24]. The crises quickly assumed a religious undertone when the Muslim majority outside the local government who controlled Kaduna State government, through certain actions and inactions seemed to favor their Hausa – Fulani affiliates.

In the Ife-Modakeke crises, the politicization of ethnicity in the process of the creation, location and relocation of Ife East Local Government headquarters fueled cycles of violence between 1997 and 1999 [25]. In the protracted Warri crisis, the struggle for the domination and control of the city is economic but couched in politics. The failure of the Federal Government to recognize the historical-political differences and grievances, challenges and intrigues between the Ijaws, Urhohos and Itsikiris in creating and sitting local government headquarters exacerbated violent conflicts. The remote causes include relative deprivation, poverty, and criminal neglect of ecological and environmental degradation by the Multi-national oil companies [26].
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Local Government and Conflict Resolution

Here, what has been the local government’s strategy or approach towards conflict resolution is examined. The local government uses the official state security apparatus- the criminal justice system especially the Judiciary, Police and Civil Defense Corps as intervention measures for peace keeping. The Police and Civil Defense mainly serve as a stop gap method of conflict management by separating the parties in conflict and stopping further immediate violence. They, in conjunction with the local government may use the alternative dispute resolution methods to reach amicable settlements in informal settings. The courts also apply the judicial processes to adjudicate cases. The major shortcoming of the judicial approach is its complexity and over-dependence on technicalities. It does not therefore actually serve as very useful organ for resolving the underlying causes of communal conflict. The local government also mediates in inter-and intra communal conflicts either directly or through intermediaries. As an alternative dispute resolution approach, mediation is a voluntary and informal method of conflict resolution which outcome is non-binding. The local government intervenes either as authoritative or independent mediator often with a view to bringing the parties to the round table for dialogue. Parties to the conflict can accept or reject the outcome of the mediation process.

The local government sometimes uses traditional rulers and other communal institutions such as the Oba, Emir, Igwe, Kings, etc. depending on the nature of the conflict and the parties involved. This has the advantage of using the laws and customs of the people as they relate to their cultural values and norms. As custodian of traditional institutions, the monarchs are better placed to know the historical and political antecedents of the parties. The major problems associated with the above approaches include:

- The conflict may be already existing or perceived to be in existence and in some cases have actually escalated.
- The local government officials are sometimes sympathetic to one of the parties in the conflict since they are essentially communal. This brings in the elements of bias, suspicion and mutual mistrust. In most cases, conflicts become explosive when government officials, through their actions or inactions are perceived to favor other parties to the conflict.
- The law enforcement agents and other so called peace makers are susceptible to taking sides especially when there is pecuniary inducement.
- The implication is that the local government, as presently structured or constituted, lacks an integrated and functionally related strategies or approaches to conflict resolution. There is no specialized unit or department and experts to handle issues relating to conflict. The present approach is haphazardly carried out. Even when investigative panels are setup, the reports are often not released while the recommendations are hardly implemented. Moreover, conflict merchants or entrepreneurs who spur ethno-communal conflicts for the personal benefit they derive from the chaos, often frustrate such ad-hoc or quick fix arrangements. There are instances where peace committees have been set up, but they are conflict situation-specific; the membership are essentially based on political patronage, lacking the requisite skills for conflict resolution and are easily influenced. This adversely affects the outcome and accounts for the resurgence of communal conflicts.
3.2 Effects of Ethno-communal Conflict on Rural Development on the Nigerian Populace

It is noteworthy that ethno-communal conflicts take place in both rural and urban environments. In all cases, communal violence results to loss of life and property, social dislocation, impoverishment, destruction of infrastructure and underdevelopment. It constrains the government to divert funds needed for development purposes to rehabilitate victims of violence and to repair social infrastructure. Ethno-communal conflicts disrupt economic and social activities.

A persistent feature or characteristic of ethno-communal conflict is the indigene/non-indigene syndrome and the problem of citizenship. In most of the cases, cleavages occur along the natives or original sons of the soil and strangers or non-indigenes. Asiyangbola [22] found that in post-conflict communities, there is high intra-ethnic attachment and low inter-ethnic relationship; a negative relationship between ethnic attachment and inter personal relationship and a positive relationship between inter-personal relationship with affiliates (e.g. by marriage from the other communities). It may then be concluded that the inability of the local government to foster intra and inter-communal relations among communities invariably results to negative competition and conflict.

The phenomenon of indigene/non-indigene sometimes lead to domination or exclusion from participation in the political process, discrimination in jobs, land allocation, educational institutions, business and distribution of welfare. The dire consequences of this exclusionist and divisive system are citizenship alienation and apathy.

Poverty, which is the major hindrance to rural development, is attributable to lack of inclusiveness and denial of opportunities for growth, is often defined by ethnicity which heightens competition for scarce resources and conflict. Conflict especially in its exhaustive stage causes human sufferings through death, destruction of livelihoods, internal displacement of people and insecurity. It disrupts the production, distribution and utilization of services and causes diversion of resources for development purposes to repair decapitated infrastructures. Ethno-communal conflicts therefore not only perpetuate misery and underdevelopment but also mutually reinforce cyclic poverty. The political elites also perpetuate cyclic poverty by denying the poor masses the basic necessities of life such as water, roads, electricity, schools, employment, etc. They loot the public treasury while exploiting the dependence of the people on hand-outs. It is not surprising therefore those politicians manipulate the parochial interest of communities by bribing and even intimidating them. As a consequence, voting in local government and ward elections became mere rituals and a metaphor for powerlessness, exploitation and subjugation.

3.3 Local Government and Ethno-communal Conflict: Desideratum for Peace Building

The psycho-cultural theory of social conflict contends that the pathological dimension of ethnicity drives a passion for self-serving bias that can overwhelm reason resulting to violence in identity based conflict. (Faleti, 2005). The position here is that the identity was constructed within the social milieu and that a new and accommodating mind-set can be acquired by society members through socialization.
The point is that ethno-communal conflict can be overcome by building an enduring and durable peace. As a universal concept, peace connotes many things and has been interpreted from the instrumentalist and functionalist perspectives [27]. Philosophically, peace refers to the natural, perfect and original state of creation by God while in sociological view, it is a condition of social harmony in which there are not social antagonisms. In this context, the absence of conflict enables individuals and groups to meet their needs and expectations with hindrance or interference. Peace can also refer to the institutionalization of political values and structures that makes justice possible. The viewpoints conceive peace as an absolute condition that exists in definite gradations or packages across societies. However, peace is also seen as an ever evolving process that includes all the activities that are directly or indirectly related to increasing development and reducing conflict [27]. When viewed from this perspective, peace and development are the means and the end along the same continuum in a complementary manner. Contrary to the conflict – peace polarity, peace, development and security are synchronous. Ibeanu [27] further posited that development is a process of improving people’s well-being by progressively eliminating conditions that alienate people in society.

Galtung [7] identified three types of violence that are evident in Nigeria and they include (a) cultural violence – norms and practices that create discrimination, injustice and human suffering (b) structural violence – the existence of deliberate policies and structures that predispose people to suffering, death and harm; and (c) direct violence – physical, emotional, and psychological violence. Galtung [28] further posited that there are two dimensions of peace namely positive peace and negative peace. Structural violence is perpetuated by particular forms of social organization and processes in Nigeria that in turn exposes ethnic and communal groups to negative peace. The lack of proper mechanism for the resolution of the inherent latent conflict results to direct violence.

The different levels of government particularly the local government are bedeviled by imbalances that are at the root of structural violence. The consequent strained relationships among the groups bob up intermittently as physical violence or crises along ethnic and communal lines. The question is “how then can the local government be repositioned as to be in the vanguard of building durable, enduring and sustainable peace?” The task therefore is how to achieve positive peace by dismantling unjust structures that breed unequal relationships while engendering equity, development and individual self-fulfillment.

Peace building broadly includes all activities related to preventing outbreaks of violence, transforming armed conflict, finding peaceful ways to manage conflict and peace [29]. Peace building is actions or efforts to prevent the resurgence of conflict (in post-conflict situations) and strengthening structures and practices that solidify peace [30]. Preventive peace building includes a broad range of long-term political, institutional and developmental activities intended to address the proximate and remote causes of conflict. Conflict and violence are perpetuated by structural, political, socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors manifesting as domination, exclusion, deprivation and poverty and which are rooted in the manner Nigeria is structured. These later factors have been identified as the root or remote causes of conflict [31]. Peace building involves:

Comprehensively identifying and supporting structures which tend to consolidate peace and foster sense of confidence and well-being among constituent groups in society.
Mobilization of resources (political, social, economic, psychological, legal etc) to build a full range of capacities including security, human rights, education, employment; financial and gender empowerment.

The prioritization of the needs of the people based on local environmental peculiarities, matching needs with available resources and striving towards people-driven actualization while ensuring local involvement and ownership.

If accomplished, the development projects should not only assure all-inclusive capacity building, choice optimization and utility, it also provides the lee-way for accountability, probity and transparency in the application of public resources. Establishing strong institutions that reinforce each other will also regulate behavior; improve policy output while enthroning an all-inclusive and participative process. It points out areas of need to be prioritized, assure open communication channels, reduces corruption and mismanagement by making for open transaction processes that foster responsive governance. The over-all gain is that peace building helps to articulate and address imbalances and cleavages relating to the diverse needs and interests of constituent groups.

It is advocated that the local government should establish mechanisms for peace building with emphasis on the following areas:

3.3.1 Security
Security deployment of effective state, community and inter-communal policing apparatus.

3.3.2 Social safety net
Social safety net to deal with poverty reduction and improved well-being of the people through job creation, healthcare, education, capacity building, provision of social infrastructure, etc.

3.3.3 Political action
Political action institution building, good governance, promotion of democratic principles, etc.

3.3.4 Human rights
Human rights rule of law, equality, equity and fairness in resource distribution, etc.

3.3.5 Economic and social development
Economic and social development empowerment, efficiency in resources mobilization and utilization, etc.

Security is a crucial element of development and security is not sustainable without development [32]. The synergy between security and development in the rural communities is bound in their relationship with poverty, unemployment, inequality, disease, illiteracy, etc and the predisposing effects to conflict and underdevelopment.

Secondly, the major adversity of conflict is the perpetuation of cyclic poverty and underdevelopment. This underlined the 1976 local government reform that tasked the local
government to mobilize resources for rural development and provide the impetus or enabling conditions for development. The provision of job creation schemes was intended to engage restive and irate youths in productive activities and build their capacities for higher national responsibilities as leaders of tomorrow.

Thirdly, it is a truism that ethnic politics at the federal and state levels of governance permeated the local government system. In some instances, the motive force for the creation of local governments are enmeshed in the politics of domination, exclusion, deprivation and subjugation and as such, has been a source of ethno-communal conflicts. The local government should be repositioned to foster the building of institutions that reinforce each other in promoting democracy and good governance. This will assure equitable distribution of resources and opportunities and where the conditions for the development of one individual or group, will be the condition for the development of all other individuals or groups without exception. Building a culture of democracy at the local government level will surely translate to the evolution of a culture of peace, discipline and self-control which are crucial elements of nation-building.

Fourthly, most Nigerians experience flagrant abuse of their fundamental human rights covering civil and political; economic, social and cultural, minority and group as well as environmental and other rights [33]. Most local government councils have been hijacked by political godfathers and other powerful figures that call the shots without recourse to the rule of law. Free and fair elections are a mirage since candidates are selected often to the disadvantage of some other groups or communities. To build peace and achieve an egalitarian society, everyone must have a say and a stake in the way public affairs are handled. Honesty, openness, transparency and accountability should ever be the watchword. This will eliminate or reduce to manageable level, social discrimination, cleavage and conflict.

Finally, accountable and inclusive governance where decisions are taken in the public realm is better able to articulate the collective interest and will of the people. When there are appropriate social indicators, the local government will be able to identify areas of need and earnestly channel available resources in the most rational manner to achieve set objectives. Such measures, when properly designed, assures the alleviation of economic and social injustice while creating the condition for good governance, development, and ultimately, a society that is at peace with itself.

In making the above proposition, the paper recognizes the difficulties associated with the local government. The chairman, who is regarded as the chief security officer of the local government does not control the security apparatus of the state. Sometimes, there are incongruent authority delineation and exercise between the security agencies and the local government. For instance, there have been accounts of the security agents supporting one side or party to a conflict when they are supposed to be impartial or neutral. Second, most local governments complain of lack of funds to undertake crucial projects and in some cases too, the state governments are indicted for meddling with statutory local government allocations because of lapses in constitutional provisions. This undermines the capability of the councils to accomplish set or expected objectives. Conversely, the local government councils have been described as fortresses of corruption because of the stench of graft and prebendal or kleptomaniac behavior of officials [15]. Third, fiscal federalism and the provision for claim-making pitches the over-arching federal and state governments against the local government in continuous struggle over resources and power distribution often resulting to interference and erosion of financial autonomy [20].
3.4 Building Capacity for Ethno-communal Conflict Resolution

It is advocated here that, considering the magnitude of the perversity and devastation caused by ethno-communal conflict, the local government should be repositioned to engage in crises prevention and peace building at the grassroots. Grassroots development, is a participatory process that addresses a wide range of social, economic and environmental problems or needs within the local government.

The local government ab-initio was given the responsibility to mediate cleavages and resolve issues of crises of interests at the grassroots level. It is however, observed that no department or unit was created within the organizational structure as statutorily delegated or assigned the function to specially deal with intra- and/or inter-local government conflict. It is therefore contended that Peace and Conflict Resolution Unit/Department be created in all local government councils through legislation. The operational guideline should be clearly spelt out but with flexibility to accommodate the peculiarities of the local environment and the nature of the conflict. The personnel of the unit/dept should be specialists in peace studies and conflict resolution with requisite skills in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) techniques and advocacy that include mediation, negotiation, collaboration, conciliation, communication, good governance, arbitration, adjudication, crisis management, grassroots community-based activities, etc.

Furthermore, there is need to build a culture of peace among all Nigerians. This can be achieved through ethical re-orientation of values, perceptions attitudes, behaviors and ways of life based on non-violence, respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights, equality, accommodation of cultural diversity etc. The local government system must therefore, embrace participation, inclusiveness, dialogue, co-operation etc while jettisoning exclusion, deprivation, domination, exploitation and subjugation. To achieve this, peace and conflict resolution studies should be formally incorporated into the school (primary and secondary) curricular as integrated peace education for children and adults on a long-term basis [34]. It should also be designed as focus activity in informal settings in communities, family, workplace etc. The over-all aim is to socialize citizens on the virtues of peace and accommodation through the transformation of relationships, behavior, attitude, knowledge, skills etc. Since there is an inexorable and inextricable nexus between peace and security, one cannot talk about peace without talking about one's feeling of safety from danger or threat to core values. As an elusive public good peace needs to be securitized that is, defended, protected and preserved. The absence of peace inexorably means the absence of security. The relationships between the Nigerian Police, other security agencies and the local government should be strengthened to make them more responsive in times of conflict. The aspect of community or neighborhood policing involving the police force, community vigilante and other partner agencies mediated by the local government should be encouraged. The local government should be sensitive to conflict inducing situations by installing mechanisms to respond timely to early warning indicators by detecting grievances and resolving them. The civil society groups such as human rights advocates, the media, women organizations, labor unions, NGOs, religious community, student activists, traditional institutions as well as the government (state and federal) must partner to give more voice to peace building. It is also worthwhile to establish peace and security committees in all local government councils comprising of people of impeccable character drawn from the communities to douse communal bitterness and passion, dissipate ethnic polarization and cleavages and checkmate marauding gangs, thugs and other miscreants often pay-rolled and protected by powerful politicians. The idea is that the people should conceive peace as
an elusive public good, own the peace initiatives, see it as their own and protect it as a legacy.

4. CONCLUSION

The paper is concerned with the problem of persistent ethno-communal conflicts and the expected role of the local government in resolving them. It is identified that Nigeria is a plural society bedeviled by ethnicity that creates incessant dysfunctional relationships. The psycho-cultural conflict theory was used to explain how identities constructed along ethnic lines form the basis of evaluation especially of perceived or existent denial of needs. Juxtaposed against the purposes and functions of the local government, the third-tier government was indicted for failing to functionally integrate and bridge the divide among ethnic and communal groups at the grassroots.

It is advocated that mechanism for peace building which encompasses all the activities that generates and sustains the full array of processes and approaches needed to prevent conflict or transform exhaustive ones towards more sustainable, peaceful relationships be installed within the local government organizational structure. The emphasis should be on the major tenets or pillars of peace building which include security, capacity building, democracy, institution building, good governance, human rights, and economic and social justice. The recommendation is that peace and conflict resolution units or departments under professionals should be established in all local government councils and that integrated peace education is taught in formal and informal settings like schools, offices, family, communities etc. This is to build a culture of peace across ethnic, religious and communal divides.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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