IMPACT OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISES ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN WUKARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Nigerians have lost their lives and property in ethno-religious crisis that have bedeviled the country since the enthronement of democracy in 1979. Ethno-religious crises simply occur as a result of religious intolerance. The situation is such that the religious crises tend to reinforce ethnic cleavages and rancor in the country. At time it becomes difficult to categorize any crisis as ethnic or religious. Analysts attempt to overcome this difficult by referring to such crises as ethno-religious. This type of crises is the direct result of the pattern of spread of Christianity and Islam. By way of flash back Christianity was introduced from the coast before it began to spread northwards whereas Islam entered the Nigerian territory from the north across the Sahara desert and began to spread Southwards. The result of this scenario is that most of the ethnic groups in the south are Christians while most of them in the north are Muslims. The stark reality is that where particular ethnic groups are associated with a particular region, ethnic conflicts be it political or economic assume the status of religion. The focus of this paper is on ‘impact of ethno-religious crises on socio-economic activities in Wukari Local Government Area with a view to proffering useful recommendations as a way forward. The findings are corroborative of the fact that ethno-religious crises have indeed impacted both positively and negatively on socio-economic activities in Wukari. Qualitative approach was adopted as method of data collection. It is recommended that elites at all tiers of government should consistently implement policies aimed at reducing the link between ethnicity and access to political, economic and social resources.

Keywords: Ethno-religious, Crises, Christianity, Islam, Economy, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a complex nation-state with diversity of culture, religion, language and ethnic groups amounting to about 395 [Hamman, 2003:9]. These ethnic groups rather than nurse or nurture unity tend to bread crises such that conflicts have become part and parcel of our existence as Nigerians. Most conflicts whose causes are traceable to social, political and economic factors are tagged ethno-religions crises. The reason for this eccentricity is due to the religious cleavages bordering on Islam and Christianity. The two religions aforementioned rank high among other possible factors in giving Nigerians an identity. Thus, the relationship between ethnic nationalities in Nigeria is mostly guided by Islam and Christianity. Therefore, this understanding is the main reason why analysts tagged most crises in Nigeria as ethno-religious. So, ‘’impact of Ethno-Religious crises on socio-economic activities in Wukari local government area will be x-rayed with a view to proffering some recommendations to fore-stall future occurrence. It is in view of the significance attached to the subject matter under investigation that TETFUND in Federal University Wukari, considered it necessary to sponsor the research as part of the university corporate social responsibility to Wukari as the lost community.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Generally, violence can be viewed from two perspectives, the micro and macro level violence. Macro level violence sees violence as a result of adjustment to the ethnic map while the micro level attributes violence to hostility between neighbours of different ethnic group (Weidmann, 2012). Yet as a social phenomenon, ethnicity can be regarded as a gloss of ethnic identity, sharing the same cultural and historical antecedents (Adebayo, 2010).
Ethnicity can be defined as a social formation predicated on culturally specific practices and unique symbols (Osaghae, 1992). What this means is that ethnicity is a situation in which individuals in a particular ethnic group consider themselves or are considered by others to have common affinity which distinguish them from other groups in the society. Furthermore, distinct cultural behaviours are usually developed; all groups can be identifiable through religion, politics, occupation or language. Ethnicity could be linked with an affiliation resulting from racial or cultural ties; ethnicity has a strong influence on community status. Ford (in Aleyomi, 2012) opined that ethnicity is a complex social construct that influences personal identity and group social relations. Even in the United States of America, social stratification persists differently influencing the well-being of ethnic groups. From the foregoing, ethnicity can be summarized as the discrimination by members of a particular ethnic group against the other in the process of competition for certain values in the society (Oyediran, Nwosu, Takaya and Agbaje, 1991).

Religion is a kind of belief centered on what people take as purity and add value to. Religion can be termed by reference to what is known as extent of purity and impurity (Shabi and Awe, 2001). Religion is a cultural institution and like other institutions, it is a means and instrument for the satisfaction of needs. Religions are belief systems and may be charged by emotions (Ojite and Ogiiowo, 1999). This means that all religions are human institution which can be differentiated from other social institutions of the sacred or supernatural forces embedded in it. Mbati (1999) emphasized that religion is a strong element in the traditional backgrounds and exerts the greatest influence upon the-thinking and feelings of the people concerned. Religion as an institution cannot stand as a thing or unto itself; it is part of the society. It has been argued that one's religion is what makes one a complete whole, this assertion may not be correct because not all people practicing a religion would agree that they depend on their religion to be a complete whole. This may be true of most religions but not of all religions. Religion has two distinct functions. The first is the comprehensive system of symbolic meaning for understanding the nature of reality, while the other function is the system of value to enforce complete devotion. Basically the two major religious practice in Nigeria are Islam and Christianity. While Christians believe in one God, the Muslims believe in Allah, yet we have African Traditional Religion. These differences in beliefs have given rise to the religious conflict we are experiencing worldwide.

Conflict can be described as a situation or condition of disharmony in an interactional process. Conflict is when two or more values, perspectives and opinions are contradictory in nature and have not been aligned or agreed upon yet (Bagaji, 2012). In order to understand the concept of socio-economic activities, it is imperative we define development. Generally, development is defined as a state where something moves from an unpalatable situation to palatable situation. Development also could mean the improvement in people's lifestyle through improved education, incomes, skills development and employment (Adeniyi, 1993). It is the process of economic and social transformation based on cultural and environmental factors. Socio-economic development therefore is the process of social and economic development in a society. It is measured with indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment (Okonjo-Iweala and Osafo-Kwaako, 2007). The need for a religious tolerance among the different religious adherents is and remains relevant in the sustenance of the socio-economic development of the country. Without peace there could be no meaningful development that is why government at all levels should make concerted effort to abate the level of crises in the country to its barest. The fact remains that good governance and accountability are sacrosanct as it engender the country socio-economic development and promote the level of economic activities.

The plural society approach is found relevant in analyzing the issues of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. This approach was founded in the 17th century by John Smith Mills and was developed by British economist, J.S Furnivall. This approach argued that in an ethnic fragmented society where different groups live in close proximity, but separately from each other, intercommunal relations are characterized by unchecked economic competition. It went further to explain that because the relationship between the various groups remained confined to the market place, these societies failed to develop a sense of common loyalty that would overcome the cultural and ethnic differences between the various groups. Unstrained competition and competing nationalism between different cultural groups that follow cause society to fragment (Raymond and Rajat, 2002). The Nigerian state is a multiplicity of different ethnic groups made up of over 350 ethnic nationalities with diverse cultural background, norms and religious differences (Shabi and Awe 2001). The notion of communal relations is not rooted among most of the communities in Nigeria. The plural nature of the country has planted seeds of mistrust, discord and the fear of domination of one ethnic or religious group over the other.
GROWTH AND FOUNDATION OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN NIGERIA

The growth of ethno-religious crises in the country has its foundation on the activities of the colonial government in Nigeria. In 1861, the British officials annexed Lagos and continued and defeated, the Sokoto caliphate in 1902. Colonialism promoted Christianity and gradually acculturated the ethnic groups that made up the present day Nigeria. The Christian missionaries preached against the religious doctrine on ground in the country. Therefore, they presented African traditional religion as the act of idol worship, while at the same time imposing their Christian tenets on the caliphate and parts of what we know today as Nigeria using the strategy of persuasion and force.

When Britain successfully acquired and occupied the Niger territory and amalgamated the North and Southern protectorates [Akinola, 2015:14], the western culture was imposed on the people’s traditional cultural values. Soon, the British officials in their quest to engage in maximum exploitation of the nation began to play one religious group against another, through ethnic-politics as posited by Akinola, [2015:3]. The British officials continue to sow the seed of discord and disunity among Nigerians using their divide and rule policy. The colonially motivated land and native right ordinance of 1910 [Akinola, 2015:3] which was aimed at separating the Northern ethnic groups from the Southern counterparts discouraged the movement of southerners to the Northern parts of the county. Akinola (2005:3) showed that the polarization of the territories that became Nigeria actually began with the country’s creation and administration as two separate colonies, namely Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. A somewhat romantic interest in the north, especially in the Sokoto caliphate and its institutions seems to have induced the colonial administrators in the north to give the colony some special treatment. Thus, every effort was made to advance its territorial and political interests.

The immediate implication of the ordinance backed by the Muslims’ desire to confine themselves to an environment where their religious practice and obligations would not be influenced by the Christian culture gave birth to the rise of Sabon Gari patterns of settlements in northern Nigeria. The north was also to become to prototype “native” state operating its own indigenous institutions, while being protected from all external influences, especially Christians proselytizing and educational enterprises [Akinola, 2005:6].

Even resident immigrants from southern Nigeria were to be restricted to the Sabon Gari. Albert [2002:20] showed that in 1911, Sabon Gari was created in Kano which made it imperative that those coming from the southern part of Nigeria would settle in that separate part of the city, different from where the Kanawa were settling. Gradually, the culture of establishing Sabon Gari residents’ area for those coming from southern Nigeria spread to all parts of northern Nigeria. Albert [2002:20] went on to assert that whatever the case may be, the residential segregation of the Kanawa to the Northern Nigerian immigrants engendered hostility between members of the two groups.

This hostility was intensified by two main factors; the first is wide gap in the speed of development amongst most of the Sabo Gari areas when compared to the areas settled by the Kanawa. The second was the doctrinal and normative difference amongst the religion and culture of the two people. Most of the educated southerners that worked for the colonial government found themselves and their family members settling in this newly created settlement setting. They developed their economic potentials by engaging in many forms of small and medium scale enterprises that have been largely neglected by their host. Their business began to grow and flourish thereby generating ill feelings amongst many of the host population that lived in abject poverty. The fact that the settlers in Sabon Gari were prospering in their economic activities made them to pay little or no attention on the cultural and religious practices of their host communities. Usman and Bako [2004:14] while writing on the Yoruba people in Sabon Gari setting in Kano, stated that a “business interaction in Sabon Gari could not allow for a proper understanding of the sound cultural orientation of the Kanawa.

Equally in the southern Nigeria, the Hausa people who were initially living amongst the Yoruba people in pre-colonial times were soon resettled into the Sabon areas in line with the colonial policies of ethno-religious divide and rule. Akinola [2005:8] has shown that in 1928, the Hausa people who were living happily in the midst of the Yoruba, were ordered by Ooni Ademiluyi Ajagun to relocate to the Sabo quarters which was created for them in line with the directives of the British resident in Oyo who instructed that the Ooni and obas should resettle the Hausawa people in one place. Today, most part of the Yoruba land has the Sabon quarters.

On the other hands, the Igbo people established Gariki for the Hausawa people to settle in different parts of Igbo land. This was an attempt in line with the colonial culture of the time to prevent the integration of the Hausawa linguistic and cultural group into the mainstream Igbo society. Linguistically, the word Gariki implies a place where
livestock sleeps. Hence, the Gariki settlements in Igbo land could be seen in the light of a setting created for the Housawa and Fulani cattle merchants to duck their livestock, while waiting for its subsequent purchase by Igbo livestock traders and consumers. Today, Gariki and Ogbe (Hausa quarters) are found in almost every state of Igbo land.

Consequently, Nnoli [1978:20] has shown that the form of divide and rule administration that was instituted by the British, promoted not only their maximum exploitation of the Nigerian state but also the promotion of ethno-religious and cultural differences. Hamman [2003: 11] argued that the British colonial policy fuelled and poisoned inter-ethnic relations amongst Nigerian. Thus, before the attainment of independence, the colonials government have not only laid the foundation of religious conflict in Nigeria, but it had also created permanent mistrust and suspicion among the different people and ethno-religious groups in Nigeria. It was that mistrust and misconceptions that often created the conflict situations, which escalades into religious violence.

THE ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISES IN WUKARI

In August 2010, conflict between Muslims and Christians occurred arising from controversy over construction of a Mosque at the Wukari Police Divisional Headquarters. [Sa'as 2010:4]. Violent confrontation between the antagonistic religious groups—Muslims and Christians broke out just a few days before the planned visit of the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa‘ad Abubakar III. The incident recorded mass destruction of lives and property.

On February 23, 2013, a disagreement among youths over a football match provoked one of them to kill his mate not long after; the town of Wukari was thrown on fire with lives and property destroyed [Sa'as 2010:4]. Thus, business within the town was put on hold for some days.

A funeral rite of a Late Jukun traditional ruler, third in command to the Aku Uka of Wukari gave vent to a violent confrontation among the indigenes and Muslims in Wukari. [Sa'as 2010:4]. A group of mourners of Jukun extraction were said to be on funeral procession of the late ruler, a rite which the Muslim in town resisted alleging that it obstructed the preparation of Juma’at prayer as the event occurred on Friday, 10 May, 2013. Within a short spell, the misunderstanding between the parties involved culminated in a violent class, that once again resulted in massive destruction of lives and property. Commenting on the complaints arising from the crises, the executive secretary of State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) Mr Nulvaga Dan Habu, said ”...there are about 13 Internally Displaced Persons Camps (IDPS) currently at Wukari "with some of them hosting as much as 400—500 persons” [Sa'as 2010:4]. However, to checkmate the crises, the state government promptly imposed 24hours curfew and dispatched security personnel to enforce the curfew.

CAUSES OF THE CRISES

The struggle over land is a basic factor responsible for ethno-religious crises in Wukari and Nigeria as a whole. For instance, majority of the indigenes in Plateau and Wukari, Taraba State are Christians whose major occupation is farming while the minority Muslims are Hausa farmers and cattle rearing Fulani. The land thus remains as important factor to regions that are predominantly inhabited by peasant fanners and cattle herdsmen. Thus,

> Land which used to be available to those who used or needed it became a prized possession. Both the host communities and settlers alike began to rationalized their inability to acquire and posses land to the presence of the other group, thereby undermining the imperative of their coexistence and the basis of consensus and confidence building [Hamman, 2003:8].

Therefore, land is central to the survival of the people, so conflict often occur over access to pastoral and arable land. Differences in ethnic and historical background, religion, and otherwise between Muslims and Christians only serve to compound the conflicting interests over land.

Attempt at establishing indigene—settler status in most parts of Nigeria has given birth to conflicting relations between ethnic nationalities and between different religious groups in the country. The histories of migration and settlement patterns for the purpose of exacting exclusive claims and relegate the claims of the others considered as settlers over political, economic and social rights. The reality is that indigene—settler distinction negates contemporary patterns of integration and the cardinal political objective of promoting unity which is central to nation building. Religion in Nigeria has provided a tangible element of easy identification such as language, dress code, names, music, food, marriages and burial rites. Religion is a basic factor for gaining recognition and advantage in the competition for political and economic values in Nigeria. Therefore, religion is one of the factors militating
against social interaction and national unity as evident by constant friction between Muslims and Christians in Wukari and the country at large.

IMPACT OF ENTHO – RELIGIOUS CRISES ON SOCIAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN WUKARI

Ethno-Religious crises has presented many challenges some of which border on security. Transfer of aggression from one grievance to innocent Nigerians is what manifested itself in ethno-religious crises. The crises in Wukari have served as a clog to national unity where the Muslims has been pitched against Christians thereby intensifying hatred, bitterness and acrimony between the two interacting groups. Lamenting over the situation an indigence, Audu Sanfo Said

"Violence has reached an alarming level and scores of people have been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes and business premises due to the crises. Businessmen lost billions of naira and properties worth billions of naira have equally been destroyed. Schooling for Children has equally become unsafe venture (Adu, 2016)."

In Wukari the Muslims settled separately along the old market area. Investors have fled from Wukari and prospective investors feel insecure to visit Wukari for investment purposes. The resultant impact is that Wukari Local Government that was booming because of the conducive atmosphere created for investment is deserted as a result of frequently outbreak of ethno-religious crises.

Both Taraba State and Federal Government of Nigeria are bearing the burden of huge expenses in managing the socio-economic consequences of the collapse of securities and the break-down of law and order. Whenever and wherever crises occur within the area of study troops are mobilized to ensure cease fire between the warring factions, relief materials provided to the war victims in refugee camps among several other measures to contain the crises. Losses in terms of property such as goods, houses and business promises are unquantifiable. Some people who survived the crises have permanently lost all that they laboured for years. The situation has increased the magnitude of employment and destitution in Wukari enclave

Victims of entho-religious crises are forced to abandon their economic activities to take refuge in the refugee camps for a long time before they could find a conducive environment to settle. Commenting on the complaints arising from the crises, the Executive Secretary of State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), Nulvaga Dan Habu Said,

"There are about 13 internally displaced Persons camps (IDS) currently in Wukari with some of them hosting as much as 400 – 500 persons” (Lukpata: 2015:234).

Despite the importance of housing to human existence and the seeming inadequacy of housing for man use the primary object of attack in ethno-religious crises is houses. This is because housing is one of the most valued material assets in Nigeria as Nigerian place high premium on home ownership because it is a legacy that individual aspire to bequeath. Therefore, destruction of the home of a perceived enemy amount to rendering the enemy not only homeless but useless. In Wukari the old market and its environs where the Muslims settle is wearing a sorry sight as the destruction of houses is visible, monumental, unquantifiable and regrettable. The consequences is the creation of reduction in housing supply with its attendant increase in the number of homeless and internally displaced persons in the locality

In recent times, there have been escalations of attacks by Fulani herdsmen in Wukari Local Government Area who brutally killed natives of the invaded farming communities including women and children. The Fulani herdsmen armed with sophisticated weapons usually attack their targeted communities at the time they are most vulnerable such as mid-night or on Sundays when they are in their churches, killing people indiscriminately, burning houses and looting property. The conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and the farmers usually arise when the Fulani herdsmen invade community farm land with their cattle and let them graze without restriction both on cultivated and uncultivated land and by so doing destroying valuable food and cash crops which are the mainstay of the economy of the host community, Wukari. The attendant impact of this situation is a fall in food production, hunger and increase in the poverty level of the people.

CONCLUSION/WAY FORWARD

This paper examined the effect of ethno-religious crisis on the socio-economic activities in Wukari Local Government Area. The state of insecurity in the Wukari has become so enormous and has attracted the attention of
international community. The nation has continued to come under series of violence, thousands of human lives are lost and properties destroyed on daily basis. The, paper argued that there is high level of religious intolerance, in the country especially in Wukari due to high level of illiteracy and poverty with unquantifiable impact on social-economic activities. Therefore, the following suggestions are proffered as a way forward:

Constitutional change is very important to defuse indigene-settler conflicts that are negatively affecting the security of the nation. Elites at local, state and federal levels should consistently implement policies aimed at reducing the link between ethnicity and access to political, economic and social resources. Impunity clause should be deemphasized by prosecuting those responsible for the crises in Wukari Local Government Area and its environs.

All over the world the youths are vital and constitute important segment of the society, the youths in Nigeria (Wukari inclusive) constitute over 65% of the population. If these youths are not productively engaged could be used as instrument for ethno-religious crisis. Therefore, government at all levels should meaningfully engage them and bring out the best in them. A disciplined and law-abiding youth can create a brighter future for Nigeria, while a lawless, violent and indulgent youth potent grave threat to national security and socio-economic development.

Government at the federal level should resist the high military/police offensive methods that risk encouraging violence and extremism; address the issues of bad governance and systemic corruption; address sustained economic hardship, rising income gap, and social frustration by strengthening anti-corruption agencies, and ensure their efficiency at state and local levels; (Wukari inclusive) address the causes of radical Islamic and ethnic militancy by developing and implementing a commission with a mandate that coordinates anti-desertification campaigns, develops large-scale irrigation, agriculture, power, and road projects, and promotes small businesses that create jobs for youths.

The State government in collaborative efforts with its development partners should continue to build bilateral and multinational security networks in Wukari. They should embark on robust patrols at all nook and crannies at Wukari to restrict the movement of armed groups and criminals. Increase the exchange of intelligence information. Support programmes and policies at all levels of government that address poverty, and youth unemployment,

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