CONFLICTS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA: CAUSES, CONCEQUENCES AND PROSPECTS

Afegbua Issa Afegbua
Department of Public Administration, Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria
E-mail: prejossha@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The paper examines conflict and political stability in Nigeria: Causes, Consequences and Prospects. It observes that the occurrence of conflicts in any society could be more violent, leading to wanton destruction of lives and properties. It notes that conflict hinders sustainable national development. The paper observes that while a situation of absolute stability may be attained in Nigeria, relative stability for the country is vital for it to achieve its   desired ends. It is the views of the paper that in spite of the structural deficits and some other problems, the country still holds a better prospect that accentuate instability to be completely attenuated.

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are common and unavoidable in all human society. All over the world, conflicts occur because society is made up of people with differing interests and values. In most societies, conflicts occur when parties in a state of independence perceives divergent views or believe that their aspirations or goals cannot be achieved simultaneously. Therefore, it is only natural that where there is inequality in access to the control of natural resources and political power for instance, there would be discontent, opposition and controversy.

Africa is a vast continent with different peoples and cultures. There has been increasing number of violent conflicts in Africa, especially during the end of the cold war. A number of violent conflicts have erupted in both developed and developing countries, inflicting sufferings and pains on the people and placing enormous stress on the environment (Gyabaah: 2006).

African countries are plagued by the crisis of Perverted religion, sectional and political upheavals. The consequences of the above are Unimaginable for a country like Nigeria, where these three devils have existed unchecked. Nigeria, being a multi-religious and ethnic society, had experienced massive ethnic, sectional, religious and political violence that has led to grievous socio-economic and political consequences on the psyche of the nation. These conflicts have led to the destruction of lives and property and also brought untold sorrow on the people in the last fifty years of our nationhood. Today, there is a tragic extinction of credible and charismatic leaders at all levels in every geo-political configuration as a result of violent conflicts and political instability in the political system which has made the country lack nationalistic and patriotic leaders who have the interest of the people at heart.

This paper examines religious, sectional and political conflicts in Nigeria. This work is divided into six sections. First, the paper starts with conceptual underpinning. Second, it examines the various dimensions of conflicts. Again, we look at the reason why conflicts re-occur in Nigeria. Fourth, is the examination of the issues of globalization and localization of violence. Finally, the paper examines the implications and costs of conflicts on the country's quest for sustainable national development. Sixth, delves ways of conflict resolution and management in the country. Finally, focuses the way forward.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There have been numerous efforts at defining conflicts and description such as "armed conflict" violent conflicts abounds in development literature. More generic definitions often overlap with violence and present conflict as hostilities leading to the use of physical force or power, threatened action against another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. (Wito, 2000).

Imobighe (2003:20) argues that conflict represents a condition of disharmony within an interaction process usually as a result of a clash of interests between the parties involved in some form of relationship. Burge (1921:272) argues that conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism (and achieve) some kinds of unity even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties.

Scholars like Wilson and Kolb (1947:714) sees conflict as a negative totality as dysfunctional or destructive process and the breakdown of communication. Stedimon (1991), notes that conflicts result from human interaction in the context of incompatible ends where one's ability to satisfy needs or ends depends on the choices, decisions and behavior of others. Zartman (1991: 300) sees conflict as the violent exhibition or expression of incompatibility" though conflicts may become violent according to sedman (1991:370) violence is not an inherent aspect of conflict but rather a potential form that conflict may take". Jonathan et al (2003) defined conflict as a contested incompatibility that concerns government or territory of both where the use of armed forces between two parties results in at least battle related-deaths.

Dudley (1999:9) also came up with a similar observation of conflict. According to him, conflict is an inescapable part of our daily lives, an inevitable result of our highly complex, competitive and often litigious society. Nnoli (2003:1) opines that conflict refers to contradictions arising from perceptions behaviours, phenomena and tendencies. Mialli (1992), enriches this view by projecting that conflict emerges where a clear contradiction exists or is perceived to exist between the participants who view the outcome as extremely important.

From the above analyses, it is clear that conflict is a behavioural pattern involving two or more individual ties, which can be inter-personalities, inter-groups, inter-organizations and inter-states.

Another concept central to this discourse is sectionalism. The attribute of sectional behavior is exclusiveness and the pursuit of parochial interest. Here, there is an intense struggle for separateness. This may lead to discriminatory practices in all facets of life.   Since conflict itself cannot be ruled out in a society, the coming together of different ethnic groups brings conflict.

DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICTS

Nigeria as a heterogeneous society in terms of ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism is prone to conflicts. (Agagu: 2004).   Over the last 50 years of Nigeria's   political independence, the country has been confronted with varied crises and violence.   These conflicts have affected the foundation of Nigeria unity and corporate existence. In Nigeria, there are three dimensions of conflicts.   These are political dimension, socio-cultural/Religious dimension and Economic and Industrial dimensions. (Odunniyi: 2004)

POLITICAL DIMENSION

This dimension of conflict is endemic in Nigeria and it includes: issues such as electoral crisis, inter-governmental relation crisis over resource sharing etc. Nigeria has a history of electoral crisis. The 1964 electoral crisis marked the watershed in the nation's political history. The political and electoral manipulation in the old western region escalated to other parts of Nigeria and led to a National crises which eventually became part of the problems that culminated in the first military coup in 1960, which terminated the first Republic and later led to the Nigerian Civil War: While the First Republic collapsed as a result of factors arising from regional intra-party crisis, the second Republic too collapsed under the same circumstances. (Otite: 1999)

SOCIO-CULTURAL/RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

Inter-religious confrontations and the proliferation of sectional groupings in the last 50 years of Nigeria's   nationhood are other sources of tension and instability in the polity. Religious extremism, fanaticism and intolerance in some parts of the country, becomes an extension of inter-ethnic, inter-communal conflicts.   Inter-ethnic struggles over issues that borders on Public Office and resource sharing take another colouration in the formation of ethnic militias. For instance, the OOdua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa Youth Forum (AYF), Boko Haram, Bakassi boys, Egbesu Boys, The MASSOB in the east and the sub-nationalities in the Niger Delta region had resurfaced over the years. Their formation and goals merely reinforced the primordial ethno-political agenda of the ethnic groups they represent.   These sectional groups instigate violence and abuse human rights including illegal arrest, detention and execution of innocent citizens.   These sectional groups engage security forces in armed confrontation, leading to the causality and destruction to property (O'Neil, 2004).   These sectional militia's incessant confrontations with security agents since about 1995 have turned the Niger Delta region to a permanent battle ground.

(Agagu: 2004) Religious uprising in the northern part of Nigeria, especially since 1981, when the country witnessed matasini religious uprising, notably Kano and Kaduna.   Many other religious riots have taken place in other northern towns such as Zaria, Kafachan, Maiduguri

and recently Jos. The latest incidents in 2010, in Plateau and Bornu states, where a group of religious extremists, who claimed they are against Western civilization, broke into prisons and released prisoners, is the height of lawlessness in the 21ˢᵗ century Nigeria.

Economic and Industrial Dimension of Conflict is caused by the Incessant Industrial resentments by labour over unfavourable government's economic and industrial policies has been another major source of disharmony in the system. Contentious issues have always been those concerned with situation of service and official economic policies, since 1999, no year has gone by without a major industrial conflict. The governments at all levels have very poor records of managing industrial disagreements and unrest, between it and labour unions in the country. The government, even under a democratic dispensation, lacks proactive strategies and skills in managing such crises until they escalate into uncontrollable violent levels. (Ola, 2004).

IMPLICATIONS AND COSTS OF CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA
The implications and costs of conflict across the country are multi-dimensional. The outbreak of violent conflicts in the last 50 years leaves much to be desired in Nigeria. The following are some of the implications and costs of conflicts in Nigeria.

First, loss of revenue, the Nigeria's government losses sizeable Chunk of revenue wherever there are crises in the country. For instance, tax charges and rates on varied items by local governments cannot be collected during violent crises, implying loss of revenue for development purposes. (Ajakaiye: 2000)

Government's revenue generation capacity is been affected mostly during industrial unrest. Incessant Industrial Strikes are major characteristics of the nation. For instance, the 1993 strike by Civil Servants across Nigeria, respectively cost the state and Federal Governments between N4 million and N720 million in terms of service (Adeniyi, et al, 1993)

Another implication of conflict is the loss of lives. Violent crises in Nigeria have resulted in a number of causalities. The Civil war 1967 – 1970 had produced the largest causality in which an estimated two million lives was claimed by the hostility. Other minor wars in the country have also recorded loss of human lives.

Loss of human lives has implications for the nation's economy as the killings have effects on the agile workforce. The Niger-Delta violent conflicts have claimed the lives of hundreds of oil workers and expatriates. (O'Neil, 2004).

Third, is discouragement of Foreign Investment growth in the country. Violent conflicts in Nigeria have also retarded foreign investments in flow and growth. No foreign investor will be encouraged to invest in an unstable economy like Nigeria. The presence of relative peace, security and stability is a cardinal motivational factor for foreigners. Continued insecurity and instability in the country has not only discouraged transnational corporations

to invest in the Nigerian business climate, but has also caused the established ones to divest by way of folding up their business. (Ajayi 2002).

Again, religious, sectional and political conflicts in the country, has led to the influx of refugees and displaced people. Inhabitants of the war affected zones had to flee to either the neighbouring states, or communities as internally displaced people (IDP) or to neighbouring countries as refugees. Besides the economic implications to the nation, the refugees and IDP constitute unexpected strangers in their new places of abode with the consequent increased pressure on social amenities such as housing, water supply and hospital facilities and constituting security risks to the new environment. (Nnadozia 2004).

The allocation of natural resources for trouble shooting instead of development purposes is another implication of conflicts in Nigeria. The Police and the Military have had enough internal inter-ethnic, inter-communal, sectional and inter-religious groups – government hostilities to contend with within the last 50 years of Nigeria nationhood. The implication of violent conflicts in the voting of more financial and material resources for trouble – shooting and beefing up security nation-wide and equipping the police with modern sophisticated weapons and more logistic facilities, such as power bikes, helicopters for aerial parade, amoured vehi3cles etc. for trouble-spots and subsequent deployment of men and materials to affected areas. This extra financial spending on incessant trouble-shooting in the country can rather be spent on education, energy, roads, water supply, telecommunication, employment opportunities, establishment of new industries, etc. (Olaniyan : 1998).

GLOBALIZATION AND LOCALIZATIONS OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS
Asaju (2004) says that virtually, every country is tormented by one form of violent conflict or another. Violence is not restricted to developing countries alone; the so-called countries of America and Europe are also caught in the web of violence.   These developed countries that hitherto notable for peaceful existence and security, are today scared of terrorist attacks
the culture of violence pervades all countries. This culture of violence has invaded our living rooms and public arena. Most countries, through the print media, electronic media and internet service, have globalized access to violent world. The following forms of violence in high and low places can be identified globally and locally.

First, is cultic violence, Cultism is a means of subtle violence against the collective will of the people who do not belong to the cultic clique. Cultism is no longer peculiar to our Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutions, where the lives of young scholars are terminated in very gruesome manner, but it is clearly manifesting itself in our political system, where leaders are members of secret cults.

Again, economic violence also exists in most countries. This violence is the unbridled exploitation of the poor by the rich. It is the economic maneuvering of economic resources of the state into the pockets of capitalist.

Third, Armed brigandage and ethnic militias has developed in most countries. Conflicts in the Niger Delta have taken a different dimension, even with the Amnesty put in place by Government, the problem of armed brigandage still exists and persisted in the Niger Delta and Peace is yet to take place in that region.

Fourth, the issue of hostage-taking, kidnapping and ritual violence across the globe is a common phenomenon. In Nigeria, lives are becoming more unsafe by the day, cases of kidnap and ritual killings in the south eastern part of Nigeria, is yet to be checked by both the state and Federal Governments.

Politics, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, is full of violent killings and clashes. Ethnic conflicts in most parts of Africa usually have political undertones and colourations; there have also been terrorism across the globe. Countries across the globe have experienced institutional, authoritative, psychological violence, epidemiological and homicidal violence persists unabated.

REASONS WHY CONFLICTS RE-OCCURS IN NIGERIA

The pertinent question in this section is why do we have the re-occurrence of violent conflicts in the country? Why is it difficult for all the stakeholders in government and outside government find a lasting solution to this perennial problem that has thrown the country into a state of chaos and political instability in the last 50 years?

Imobighe (2003:29) says conflict seems insurmountable in Nigeria because Nigeria is pre-occupied with chasing shadows and not the fundamental causes of conflicts in the country. The government at all levels of governance has not preoccupied themselves with the fundamental issues and objective conditions of the Nigerian polity, which were the root causes of these conflicts. Consequently, the needed regular system of re-examination and correction, which are part of the vital ingredients for conflicts mitigation, within a given polity are yet to form part of the Nigerian political culture. (Imobighe: 2003).

Another reason why conflict persists and keep-on-reoccurring in the country is that the master minds, which instigate, mobilize, sponsor and even armed the rioters, are allowed to go scot-free. They are never prosecuted or tried in any law court, and if found guilty sentenced to a long term of prison sentence. Some of the people, who sponsor violent conflicts, are the elites and powerful members of the society. The feeling is that these people are untouchables and their followers see them as such. Many of these masterminds go back to plan another rounds of n such conflicts and violence, since they are never been brought to book for their heinous crimes.

The Police and other security outfits have not been adequately trained to manage crises. The use of police and other security outfits has left much to be desired. In most cases, the rioters are "too hot" for the untrained and unsophisticated police to handle in times of violence outbreak. The rioters are well equipped and carry sophisticated firearms.

The judicial and other panels of enquiry on civil disobedience and violence never had their recommendations implemented by government. This is another reason why conflict persists and keeps on reoccurring in Nigeria.

Another reason why conflicts reoccur in Nigeria is the too much reliance on the official action with little assistance from the civil society groups in the country. There must be a bottom to top approach to conflict management than the top to bottom government approach. To prevent the reoccurrence of conflicts and violence in the country, the government must go into partnership arrangement with civil society and community leaders throughout the country. (Deng & Zartman, 1991).

THE WAY FORWARD
Conflict is generally perceived as unwholesome because of its destructive manifestations in terms of killings, maiming and wanton destruction of property, its impact on human and national development also makes conflicts unpalatable.

Nigeria, with diverse ethnic, religious and political groups should learn to embrace a culture of dialogue in managing, the endemic disputes that pervades the country. The country's political leaders at all levels of government have a spearheading role to play. They should stop making inciting statements that will disunite us as a country and plunge the country into crisis, but rather they should focus their attention on those things that unites us and promote peaceful coexistence among the citizenry. The present crops of leaders in the country have failed in the above role and instead they constantly promote tension in the system, thereby consistently over-heating the polity.

These political elite deliberately fan the embers of violence in order to promote their private interest. These leaders sponsor ethnic and religious violence across the country. They finance militant groups for hidden personal interest. The elites are behind the outbreak of most of the crises in the country. Again, the government must provide jobs for the jobless and restive youth across the country. There is the need for a national youth rehabilitation programme at all levels of government. Most youth engage in violence because they are jobless.

These groups of people are idle and they need to be assisted by government to kill boredom and inactivity. It is therefore reasonable for government to engage them positively, by providing jobs for them. Providing jobs for them will re-direct their energy to productive activities that can enhance the development of the country's economy

Again, government needs to redesign the strategy in managing crises in the country. For instance, the use of military operatives to quell crises or to trouble-shoot internal civil disobedience should not always be seen as the only best way to manage internal crises. This method will merely compound and aggravate the problems, military solution to manage crisis will only increase the number of causality perpetuated untold hardship. It will lead to what

the late Fela Anikulapo described as a situation of sorrow, tears and blood in the lives of the rioters.

The Public should learn to have confidence in the judiciary. Groups, individuals and even governments must learn to embrace the tradition of judicial settlement of disputes. The judiciary is first and foremost established to arbitrate conflicts between individuals, groups and government institutions. The public and government at the three tiers of governance should give the judiciary the needed support to be able to perform its duties objectively, effectively and without any partiality.

Again, the National Assembly in conjunction with the Executive arm of government in the country needs to work out an enduring crises management and resolution. There should be a need for committees on conflict management and resolution in the National Assembly. There must also be a department or unit in the presidency that will be in charge of conflict management and resolution. Our leaders need to create avenues for discussing and designing a popularly accepted non-violent national strategy for managing conflicts in the country.

REFERENCES

Abia V.BE (2008), "*Understanding Nigerian Government and Politics*"" Lagos: Gofaflash Publications

Abdullahi W (2004*),"Beyond the Yobe Taliban War The comet",* Lagos April 29

Agagu A.A and Ola R.f (eds) (2004*),"Dev Agenda of the Nigerian State"* Lagos Flag Publishers.

Ajayi .A (2004, *) "Afenifere to Revive NADECO against Obasanjo"* Nigerian Tribune, Ibadan 2 April.

Ajayi. K (2002Conflic), Management *in Nigeria: The search for a national* strategy Conference Journal of management "volume 2 No 1 December.

Barratus, F. (1969), Ethnic *Groups and Boundaries,* Beston: Little Brown & Co.

Ekiyor H.A. and Lawal, M. O. (eds) (2006*)" Studies in Nigerian Development"* Lagos, Irede Printers Limited.

Dudley B. (1988), "Nigerian Government and Politics" London Macmillan.

Nioli, O. (2003), *Communal Conflict and Population Displacement: An introductory Note*"" in O. Nnoli (ed) Communal conflict and population Displacement in Nigerian. Enugu, Pan-African Centre for Research.

Odunniyi, M. (2004), *"federal Government moves to halt unrest in Niger Delta"* Thursday, Lagos, April, 2010.

Ogunmakin, O. (2003), " *Cdossal loss to airlines, parastatals.* The Punch, Lagos, July, 9.

O'Neil, S. (2004) "Five killed in Delta gun battle" The comet, Lagos, April, 29

Otite, O. (1999) *"On Conflicts, Their Resolution, Transformation, and management"* in O'otite and I. O Albert (eds). Community Conflicts in Nigeria, Ibadan Spectrum.