

Conflict Resolution and Crisis of Governnace in Africa: The Case of Nigeria

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, everyman desires on the conviction that it is the secret of development, and self attainment. Yet, societal relationship elicits unprecedented contest which sometimes degenerates into violence at individual and communal levels. Man is therefore faced with the contradiction of desires and reality. The adequacy of a modern government could largely be measured by her immediate response to these situations and the prevention of its occurrence in Africa. This paper focuses on conflict resolution and crisis of government in Africa with Nigeria as the case study. The paper equally provides a blueprint for managing crisis and the essential duty of government in providing security of life, property and general welfare of its citizenry; it goes further to take a brief look at some centres of turmoil in the continent and argues that, there are no discernible differences in the causes of unrest in those states and Nigeria. This also indicates that conflict resolution is a primary function of government, unfortunately state actors in Nigeria/Africa are indeed in crisis of legitimacy and competence, hence, protraction of violence and conflict. Furthermore, the effect of conflict and state helplessness are also given attention. The study concludes that all hope is not lost as recommendations to that effect is ability to provide liberal and true democracy, access to sound and quality education, giving more attention to poverty eradication programmes among others.

Key Words: Conflict, Resolution, Crisis, Governance, Africa

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Introduction

Human history is replete with conflict and human race come to face this reality as “every man, desires to have his own way, think and act as he likes” (Appadora; 2004:3). Indeed, as every man strives for the accomplishment of personal desires, he encroaches on the desires of others. This elicits reactions and counter-reactions. This situation extends beyond the relationship of the duo to the community or other members of the society. Undoubtedly, such also abound among states especially as “sovereignty and territorial boundaries have not restrained states from trying to change events and situations in other countries” (Ugwueje and Madu, 2012:39). This explains inter-state conflicts as recently evident in the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by the United States.

This perhaps explains why Igbalajobi (2014) asserts that, there is no hope in sight on when crisis will be brought to a halt in the globe. The redefining and attempt at humanization of relationships among human species by the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and other national and transnational organizations notwithstanding, conflicts occurs, as evident in the Middle-East brouhaha, Syria’s “liberation war” self determination face off in Crimea, Ukraine, “nationalist” struggle in Turkey, Greece’s economic upheaval among others. The case of Africa is particularly mind boggling and scandalous. Rather than benefit from the wave of optimism of world peace at least on a relative scale that engulfed the globe after the cold war, Africa became a blood spilling ground with the emergence of war lords which precipitated the “privatization” of security which paved way for unquestionable impunity (Sesay, 2012) as experienced in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Burundi, Somalia, D.R. Congo, Sudan, Rwanda, Chad, Ethiopia and Eritrea among others. Thereby prompting the United Nations for Humanitarian Affairs to declare eight of the fifteen “complex emergencies” in the last decade and a half on Africa. (Herbst 1998; Cilliers and Mills 1999, cited by Galadima, 2006). The situation is so tense that Adetula (2006) asseverates that about three to four million people were killed in Democratic Republic of Congo, 160,000 in Sierra Leone, millions in Sudan, Uganda and Coted’Ivoire, 140,000 in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Although, the Economist (2005) cited by Adetula (2006) noted that Africa made appreciable progress in 2004 particularly with Liberia and Sierra-Leone cases, but equally warned of “two grave worries” which are the ethnic cleansing in Dafur and the other being the potential for fresh crisis in states with bad government, tyrant leaders, stagnant economy and states with abundant valuable minerals.

The warning of the Economist was probably ignored, or how do we explain the protracted uprising in Dafur and new centres of horror as clearly seen in Central Africa Republic, Mali, South Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria among others? Of course, the primary responsibility of government in any human community is the assertion of order. Government enacts or ensures order through conflict prevention and resolution, system of law, reward and punishment system, redistribution of income through the provision of services and the maintenance of good relationship with the people in order to elicit their cooperation for an organized community. It is unarguably under this type of condition that the human race stand to actualize their dreams. Perhaps that is what made Aristotle (cited by Enemuo, 1999:65) to assert that any individual outside the state or an organized setting is a “beast or god”.

The protraction of violent conflict in many African states and Nigeria in particular, despite the existence of government, which ordinarily ought to ensure conflict resolution cannot but make this research a necessity. This is further instigated by the fact that government is the object of attack and ridicule in the conflicts. This raises question of legitimacy or acceptance of government in these countries and Nigeria in particular. Of course, this optimises crisis in governance.

Conceptual Discourse

The concepts to be placed under discourse for a better understanding of this paper are Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Crisis of Governance.

Conflict: Intellectuals differ greatly on what a definition of conflict should be as they prefer definitions according to their social persuasion and ideological school. While some see it in almost the same direction, others view it differently. The division is so obvious that Akpuru-Aja, Nwaodu and Udochu (2012:31) state that, “scholar’s perception and theoretical interpretation of the phenomenon itself manifests conflict situation”. Meanwhile, Schmidt cited by Abiodun and Igbalajobi (2012:182) sees it as “a struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources. He went further to assert that the group of individuals involved may not only try to obtain the desired values but may try to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals”. Coser (1956) cited by Akpuru-Aja, et al (2012:31) sees it as the “struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponent are to neutralize, injure or eliminate” He also refers to it as physical confrontation, clash, controversy, hostility, tension, disagreement, competition, struggle etc among individuals and groups in a society. He submits that, its major causes include: ethnic competition for the control of the state, struggle for regional succession, warfare arising from state collapse, broader disputes, poverty, corruption, human rights abuses, frustration, oppression, insecurity, foreign domination among others. The above, have established the fact that conflict arises as a result of value or interest by different set of individuals and violence mostly follow as parties attempt to lord their will over others. Garver (1991) gives a clear idea about this when he says, the basic fact about conflict is that parties violate one another in terms of their obsession and competition for scarce resources in the political and economic realm. Perhaps no one puts it succinct than Marx (1937) cited by Abiodun and Igbalajobi (2012:182) when he says that “the history of all existing society is the history of class struggle”.

Indeed, the basis for struggle among the classes Marx refers to is interest. While the dominant class want to maintain the status quo, so that his interest can continue to be preserved and served, the dominated class want a change of the existing order. Interest, which is the basis for conflict can be economic, political and socio-cultural. It is within this context that, the view of Francis (2006:) that by definition, conflict “is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence” becomes relevant. He goes ahead to define it “as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups”. This work therefore sees conflict as human activity which is a product of the pursuit of incompatible interest which propelles the use of ammunitions which generates tension, violence and human casualties.

Conflict Resolution: It came into being as a result of conflict. Like conflict it has no universally adopted definition. Miller (2003:8) for instance, sees it as “a variety of

approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict. Best (2006:94) opines that it “connotes a sense of finality, where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in a true sense”. The major trust of the concept of conflict resolution is the fact that a number of actions calculated at bringing conflict to an end are deliberately taken and this eventually bring the conflict to a halt. Again, the parties to the conflict embrace such actions either due to a coercive authority or because of conviction but what is of utmost importance is the fact that, the process returns peace to an hitherto hostile group or communities. The peace so attained is also sustainable and capable of yielding a productive relationship between the parties in no distant future. The view of Mitchel and Bank (1996, cited by Best, 2006:94) is apt in explaining the above view. They posit that it is

an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is

mutually acceptable to the parties, self sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries.

The position of this study is that, conflict resolution is a number of direct and indirect action taken by government and its officials in a bid to bring violent confrontation among people to an end and also restore relationship among the people. The actions entails legislations, allocation of resources, positions, infrastructure, wealth of the nation among others. Indeed, care must be taken in the allocation because the distribution has potential to plague the country into another round of conflict.

Crisis of Governance: This refers to the inability of government to exercise control over the state of affairs in the country. This greatly stiffens the social system and put the people at the mercy of indigenous and foreign intruders in the social and economic realms of life. This is merely evidential of the “seminal absence of intellectual rigour” (Achebe, 1998:13) and incompetence of state actors as well as absence or sudden disappearance of their acceptance by the people. In other words, it is a manifestation of the absence or erosion of legitimacy because the people are grossly disappointed by their governance style and means of emergence.

Centres of Turmoil in Africa

Indeed, many countries in Africa are at present entangled in conflict with varying levels of crisis that have also attracted attention of the international community. In these conflicts, scores of casualties are recorded, as some take the form of ethnic cleansing, rape, abduction, torture and looting. In Mali for instance, rebels have again started their campaign against the government. In Egypt, it is the case of multiple conspiracy and illegality. The military which owing to public outcry sacked democratically elected government of Muhammed Morsi is now hunting members of the Justice Party which is dominated by the Muslim brotherhood. Infact, the Muslim brotherhood has been declared a terrorist group with over 1000 members sentenced to death. In Libya, groups loyal to former leader Muammar Al-Gadaffi have refused to allow peace to reign. They see the overthrow of Gadaffi as a product of foreign

instigation; they are therefore determined to ensure the liberation of their father land. In South-Sudan, the crisis is largely ethnic as President Salva Kiir Dinka's ethnic nationality continues to slog it out with vice president Riek Machar's ethnic group. This division is also evident in the South-Sudanese army as it became polarized and the two groups picked arms against each other, while the president made allegation of coup (www.google.com.nglgwt/x?gI=NG&hl=en-)

The crisis in Darfur region of Sudan lingers, despite scores of death, which made the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue arrest warrant on President Omar Al-Bashir. The confrontation is essentially over an alleged neglect and monopolization of power by Arab majority at the expense of the people in Darfur. This impoverished the region and made the people resort to armed struggle as a means of actualizing their dream of political relevance and economic empowerment. In central Africa Republic, Christians and Muslims continue to attack one another. This was after the Seleka coalition rebels had pushed President Francis Bozize out of power and installed Michel Djotodia who was later forced to resign in January, 2014. In Somalia safety of life and properties remain in doubt as the Al-Shabaab militant group continues to launch attack.

It is indeed clear from the above survey that, conflicts in Africa can be summarized as being instigated by, or centred on struggle for political participation, ethnic sub-nationalism, distribution of resources, self determination, military intervention, religion, territory or boundaries and political legitimacy (Adetula 2006, Alli, 2006).

It should be noted that, the present day conflicts in Nigeria are also along the above line even before independence. In a beautifully analysed argument, Abiodun and Igbalajobi (2012) observed that, conflicts in twenty-first century Nigeria are either community induced, emancipation induced, state induced, politics induced or religious induced. They cited the Odi Massacre, Zaki-Biam onslaught, Gbaramotu kingdom attack as examples of state induced conflict. The general neglect of the welfare of the people and development efforts, failure to promptly act in times of national emergency. as well as the use of wrong approach to solving socio, political and economic problems also fall within this realm. Indeed "corruption, human right abuses skewed allocation of resources, harassment of social activists and academics, subservience to foreign (western) determined and dictated ideas" (Ihonybere, 2001:15) by state actors influence conflict in Nigeria. How do we explain how a government that cannot properly fund education can cough out N10 billion for ministers to charter jets, or release N130.7 billion to the military between January and April 2014? The level of insincerity in governance largely explains why the Nigerian government lost the command and respect of the people.

In the political realm, the political elites struggle for political power and relevance through appeal to inordinate sentiments at great cost to national loyalty. At best they instigate the people against themselves. They blame their failure and the appalling situation of the people on other tribes and religions. Ake (2001:5) captures this when he says;

many of them had sought power by politicizing national, ethnic and communal formations. Now in office, some of them manipulated ethnic and communal loyalties as a way to deradicalize their followers and contain the emerging class division of

political society, which could isolate and destroy them. So they began to place emphasis on vertical solidarities across class lines. In particular, they tried to establish mutual identity and common cause by appealing to national, ethnic, communal and even religious Loyalties.

The incessant crises during Babangida's administration was partly blamed on blunders of political elites. The post presidential election crisis that ensued in Northern Nigeria in 2011 is better attributed to the inordinate debate over the People's Democratic Party (PDP) zoning arrangement which made Northerners to think that Southerners sought to use their turn in power.

The various minority communities in the country also relentlessly engage themselves in a free for all fight on issues concerning land ownership and who governs certain areas. An example is the Jos crises.

In like manner, emancipatory or self-determination conflict came to the fore, when a critical look is taken at the purported struggle for liberation by the Niger Delta Militant. The deadly Boko Haram that seek a complete change of the existing governance system can also be said to have a link on emancipation but for the inhuman, cruel and murderous method they adopt. Today, activities of Boko Haram according to Human Rights Watch has claimed 1500 lives between January and March 2014. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees also stated that 40 villages in the North-East zone had been sacked, creating a humanitarian crisis in which over 300,000 persons mostly women, children, the aged and disabled had been displaced within Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republic (Punch Editorial 9/04/14). The case of Boko Haram can be likened to the Al-Shabab of Somalia especially as it also takes a religious dimension. Although Muslims have denounced them, the fact that they lay claim to perpetrate their evil in the name of Islam brings about a challenge of who stands on the true teachings of Islam. This is because of the contradiction which this epitomizes. Today, North-Eastern Nigeria is on the verge of state collapse as violent attacks persist, despite the declaration of state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe by President Jonathan. The activities of Boko Haram has alarmed the United Nations, continental and regional bodies, to the extent that, the United Nations passed a motion declaring the group a terrorist organization. Their nefarious activities also precipitated a meeting in Paris on Saturday 17th May, 2014 between the Presidents of Nigeria, France, Benin Republic, Chad and Cameroon, with the United Kingdom Secretary of Defence in attendance. This was followed by another meeting in South Africa on Saturday 24th May, 2014 between the Presidents representing the five regions in Africa. The Presidents of Rwanda, Chad, Ghana, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Algeria, D.R. Congo, Angola, were all in attendance to perfect strategy with which they can roll back terrorism in Nigeria and the continent at large. They pledged their commitment to presenting a proposal to this effect at the June African Union Assembly of Heads of States and Governments Summits. Despite all these meetings and the arrival of the United States military in Nigeria, violence still rages in the North, East and Jos Plateau.

Conflict Resolution, Crisis of Legitimacy and Competence of government

Unarguably, conflict resolution falls within the realm of basic governmental functions. Although, government owe the people a duty of conflict prevention but

when conflict especially its violent dimension occurs, it relentlessly becomes urgent for government to ensure that it is resolved. This is because government is expected to be viewed by all parties concerned as an unbiased arbiter to which they have submitted their natural and respective power, so as to assert authority through which the “greatest happiness of the greatest number” (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2008:259) of people is ensured. In Nigeria, rather than embrace the peace process unveiled by the government, they engage the state in violence. They take up arms against the government and contest its sincerity and neutrality. They display flagrant disregard for the authority of the state. Thereby putting the acceptance or legitimacy of the state in serious doubt. Where this does not take place, the incompetence of the state in handling conflict situation is evident. This has not only been displayed in the Niger Delta crisis before the Yar’Adua/Goodluck amnesty programme, it is at present manifesting in the fight against Boko Haram, as the Presidency and Northern State Governors have given different accounts of the emergence, intent and vision of the dastard group. They also criticize in the open the approach of one another and eventually resort to name calling, while the group owe sway even in the Federal Capital Territory. The general loss of legitimacy or non acceptance of both central and state government’s intervention in conflict situation is a function of some or a combination of the following:

(a) **Emergence of Leadership:** The means through which leaders emerge in Nigeria put their legitimacy on the line. This comes in two ways. The first is the electoral law which only emphasise highest number of votes and not absolute majority. In a multi ethnic and religious state like Nigeria, where people are sharply divided on virtually every issue on ethno-religious lines, the electoral law should provide for above fifty percent, for who becomes the chief executive at the federal and state levels. This is necessary for such a person to convincingly command support of majority across the regions/groups that make up the country. Indeed, with the exception of Late President Musa Yar’Adua, other Chief Executives – Shehu Shagari, Olusegun Obasanjo and Goodluck Jonathan for instance, have been enmeshed in the trouble of acceptability in some parts of the country. President Shagari was disliked by South Westerners, General Obasanjo by his own people and during his second term by the North. President Goodluck Jonathan is not accepted by the core North, majority of the South-Westerners are also against him. His main supporters are the South-South, South-Easterners and Northern minorities.

Put differently, the fraud that accomplishes electoral process in Nigeria erodes what would have attracted legitimacy to whoso ever is declared elected by the electoral body. Akinlade and Igbalajobi (2012) asserts that all elections in Nigeria from 1964, with the exception of 1993 have been characterized by irregularities with the attendant effect on the psyche of the people which brings about loss of confidence in democracy, upsurge in violence and loss of sense of value and integrity among the civil populace.

(b) **State Failure:** In Nigeria, government is summarily seen as a means of personal accomplishment by the political class. Majority of the people view government as a bunch of wicked and corrupt set of people who are bent on making life difficult for the people with little or no sense of responsibility. The poor state of the people justifies this type of thinking. For instance, about 10 million children are out of school in Nigeria, thereby making it a country with one of the largest number

of out of school children in the world. Over 50 million people are unemployed, there is infrastructural deficiency, portable water is not accessible, among others. It is one of the two countries in the world with polio in 2014.

The officials of the government, particularly the police toy with the lives of the people, the few developmental projects are always of very low quality and people particularly the youth live without hope. The various sectors of the economy epitomise great failure. The recent rebasement of the Nigerian economy which puts the nation first in Africa and twenty-sixth in the world is at the height of embarrassment because the majority of the people live in penury and schools are closed for months due to teachers' industrial action over government inability to fulfil its agreement with them. The words of Douglas inevitably become the guiding principle. He states that "where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced where ignorance prevails and where one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor properties will be safe" (cited by Mudiaga-Odje, 2009:2). Indeed, Nigeria particularly the North has summarily been turned to a slaughter slab. All these put pressure on the legitimacy and capacity of the State to command respect and deal with conflict among the people. Jinadu (2012:3) puts this into perspective, when he states that indeed;

there is every reason to believe that there is a strong correlation between social security and state capacity: the weaker social security is, the weaker state capacity also is; the stronger social security is, the stronger state capacity will also be. For social security provides an important constitutive foundational rock for the social trust so vital for engendering and sustaining state capacity.

The 1999 constitution was clear on the fact that security and welfare of the people shall be the primary responsibility of the government. The government has neither guaranteed security nor welfare of the people. In fact, Boko Haram, emerged out of concern about the failure of state under the present arrangement.

(c) **Interested Party:** The persons in governmental positions in Nigeria are mostly seen as interested parties in most of the conflicts, thereby making the government an object of attack. This perception greatly hampers all effort by the government at resolving conflicts. Government is sometimes blackmailed, so that it can resolve the conflict using the prescription of a particular group. This is more pronounced when the press takes side with one of the parties. For instance, about ninety five percent of popular privately owned print and electronic media in Nigeria are owned by three ethnic groups and people of a particular religious persuasion. Therefore, information on conflicts involving such group is always biased. The case of Plateau State also readily comes to mind, where the indigenes will blackmail federal government intervention, if the head of state is of Hausa/Fulani extraction. This occurred when President Yar'Adua attempted setting up a panel of inquiry on the protracted crisis in Plateau state in 2008. The state government questioned the authority and competence of the federal government to set up such panel. The Hausa/Fulani community in Plateau State also often allegedly see the state government as instigating some of the crisis in the state.

(d) **Ethno/Religious Appeal:** A substantial number of the conflicts in the country take ethno/religious coloration and such are the most violent and difficult to resolve because people find it difficult to shift ground when such issues are floated. Although, it is the humble view of this work that, most conflict that appear religious in the North are not, but are ethnic and political in nature.

Effects of Conflict & State of Helplessness in Nigeria

It is obvious from the above, that the Nigerian state suffers great crisis of governance and this produces the following effects with respect to the protraction of conflicts.

Loss of Lives and Properties: Many lives and properties were lost, the number of refugees increase daily, some towns has been left desolate, while others destroyed.

Economic Woe: The economy of places that are known for the protraction of conflict in the country have either collapsed or is on the verge of collapse. Investors do not only take to their heels, they also close their business as they run for safety. Unemployment sets in and Infrastructures that can facilitate economic activities such as bridges, telecommunication mast among others are damaged, thereby adding to the economic failure.

Pressure on Resources: The government divert resources both material (wealth) and human that ought to be used for developmental purpose into the purchase of ammunitions and other security materials such as the close circuit television. The fact that the 2013 and 2014 budgetary allocation to security is the largest in Nigeria affirms this fact.

Damage to the Unity of the Nation: There is an increasing hatred in Nigeria among people of the different religious believes and regions as the crisis in the country particularly in the North increases. They now call for an end of the federation, so that the different ethnic nationalities can go in the direction which they like.

Loss of Confidence in the Leaders/government: Today, majority of Nigerians question the competence of our leaders as well as the continuous existence of the country as the crisis deepens.

Brain Drain: Many people that should have developed the country have fled to other nations

Conclusion

It is clear that, conflicts in Nigeria like in other African countries is centered around self determination, re-distribution of wealth and political participation. Unfortunately, government has not been able to stem the tide primarily because it suffers crisis of legitimacy and incompetence.

Recommendations

To reduce the upsurge of conflict in Nigeria, the following must be quickly done.

* The government must embrace good governance.

- * The electoral body should be made truly independent, so that, it can conduct free and fair elections.
- * Absolute majority as an electoral system is strongly advocated.
- * Government should treat all parts of the country equally and must not do anything that would suggest its interest in some sections at the expense of others.
- * There should be tolerance among the ethno/religious groups.
- * The mass media should step up campaign for the enlightenment of the people on the need to prioritize national patriotism.
- * Sound and qualitative education must be provided for all
- * More attention should be given to poverty eradication programmes

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