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Probing the Dynamics of Communal Conflict in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

The phenomenon of communal conflict has assumed the posture of ethno-religious conflict in its occurrence and destructive potential in this era of democratic development in Nigeria. Its incessant occurrence has not been matched with scholarly investigations like the way ethno-religious conflict has been explored in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, this article explored the conflict with respect to developments in the North. This becomes essential to enable its causes and dynamics be situated in perspectives for better understanding and proffer of coherent policies to arrest it. The changing contours and security dilemma of communal conflict in the North were discussed. The study, therefore, posited that the various communal crises experienced have enthroned developmental crisis in the North, and if not tackled squarely can aggravate the governance

crisis already facing the nation and military take-over may be experienced in the country.

Introduction

The historical antecedent of the post colonial Africa is tinted with the menaces of violent conflicts. The 2005 Human Development Report revealed that of the 20 countries listed as experiencing the lowest levels of human development (all of which are in Africa) more than 50% have been subjected to significant levels of armed violence since 1990. Similarly, Bahati (2009) noted that “the International Action Network on Small Arms, Saferworld and Oxfam International reported that armed conflict cost Africa \$ 18 billion between 1990 and 2005. During this period, 23 African nations experienced war”. The point is that Africa is replete with cases of violent conflicts. These conflicts, apart from crippling its socio-economic development, had redefined the fate of the continent to be known as “a very good laboratory for the study of violent conflict and its attendant effects (Nwolise, 2003; Alimba, 2004 and Tchombe, 2006). Even the collapse of the cold war in the 1990s did not transform the fate of Africa, other than changing the conflict dynamics from interstate to intrastate. Internal conflicts have rendered Africa highly unstable and unsecured. The volatility of conflict in Africa has affected all the spheres of activities, paralyzing economic, political and social engagements in a large scale. According to Ogbogbo (1999):

Africa is once again undergoing very fundamental turmoil that permeates the socio-political and economic structures of the various states. The dimension and ramification of what has been stigmatized as the African crisis is indeed frightening. Plagued by socio-economic and political problems, most African States have either collapsed or the state system is at the verge of destruction.

The causes of the crises have explanation in colonialism, politics, greed, inequity, corruption, injustice and leadership problem. The

current wave of democracy pervading the continent has proved elusive in ameliorating the problem. Instead, it created room for the intensification of old crises and manifestations of new ones. This is contrary to the believe that “the principles, institutions and rules associated with democratic practice seek to manage inevitable social conflicts in deeply divided and less conflicted societies alike (Sisk, 2003). Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa, shares the sentiment of harbouring varied magnitudes of conflicts, since the emergence of democracy in 1999, preventing citizens from enjoying its dividends in real terms. Albert (2001) enunciated that since:

Nigeria transited from military dictatorship to multi-party democracy on 29 May, 1999. The country has been bedeviled by various forms of violent social conflicts. Thousands of people lost their lives, were maimed or displaced from their communities as a result of these problems. While some of the conflicts had their roots in the past historical circumstances of the concerned communities, some others were “manufactured” by the elites, seeking to stretch the liberty inherent in the new democratic process in Nigeria to a breaking, if not absurd point.

The manifestations of electoral conflict, ethnic conflict, religious conflict, herder-farmer conflict, communal conflict, and indigene/settler conflict have become brazen characteristics of the democratic development in Nigeria. Of all these conflicts, communal conflict has manifested its self as the most pandemic issue next to ethno-religious conflict in the democratic era in the country. Olusola (2004) posited that Nigeria in the last four years (and even till date) has witnessed a dramatic increase in communal violence. Onwudiwe (2004) asserted that while democracy has not been economically kind to many Nigerians, the prevalence of communal violence since 1999 when Obasanjo was sworn in as civilian president ranks among its most bitter disappointments. Communal conflict exists in all the geopolitical zones of the country. There is no part of the country that

is spared from its ugly deficiencies. The concomitant effect of communal conflict has been the distortion of the development prospect of the country. That is, both human and material resources have been adversely affected to the extent that it resulted in systemic deficiencies in Nigeria. In Northern part of the country, communal conflict is a recurring disaster. It has been consuming human beings and properties like a tsunami disaster. In this democratic period, the North exhibited a high incidence of communal conflicts than any other region in the country. For instance in States such as Jos, Benue, Nassarawa, Bauchi, Adamawa, Kaduna, Taraba e.t.c communal conflict has rendered these places highly unstable for effective social engagements. The properties destroyed, those killed and humanitarian problems induced had affected the socio-economic and political activities of these states, and generally the country. Despite this, communal conflict remains the least explored among the catalogue of conflicts plaguing the North. This is because focus is based on ethno-religious and political conflicts in the region. Based on this, the study systematically examined communal conflict dynamics in Northern Nigeria. To achieve the objective of the study, the following thematic areas were explored:

- (i) Conceptual clarification of conflict
- (ii) Meaning and identification of communal conflict
- (iii) Causes and consequences of communal conflict
- (iv) Changing contours of Communal Conflict in Northern Nigeria.
- (v) Communal conflict and security challenges
- (vi) Approaches to resolving communal conflict

Conceptual clarification of conflict

A constant fact about conflict is that it is an ever present phenomenon in social relations. It is inevitable in any social gathering, organisation and society. The certainty of conflict to occur in every social arena motivated its interpretation in various forms. However, the existing definitions follow a thought pattern that clearly describes conflict as: a

state of incompatibility, behaviour, an opposition, an interaction of interdependent parties, a bad omen and positive or constructive outcome. As a state of incompatibility, conflict is described as a situation in which the concerns of two or more individuals operating within the unit appear to be incompatible (Darling & Fogliasso, 1999). Incompatibility breeds conflict because it is a psychological state in which people cannot get along with one another in an organisation. Gray and Starke (1984) considered conflict as the behaviour by a person or group intended to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group. Conflict will emerge when behaviour is laced with emotions, which is expressed in an antagonistic form. As an opposition, Hellriegel and Slocum (1996) posited that conflict is an opposition arising from disagreement about goals, thoughts, or emotions with or among individuals, teams, departments, or organisations. Opposition is all about blocking an individual or a group from achieving set goals, and this will lead to conflict because of the instant overt reaction that will be put up by the party being blocked. Conflict can also be defined as a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interest, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals (Donohue and Kolt (1992).

Wilmot and Hocker (2011) described conflict as a felt struggle between two or more independent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or differences in desires for esteem, control, and connectedness. Conflict occurs when people are nested by some sort of social cords. It does not occur in isolation, people must be relating or be depending on one another. Conflict can be defined in terms of good or bad outcome. When the outcome of a conflict scenario is positive, it is defined as a functional or constructive conflict. Conflicts that end up in negative outcomes are regarded as dysfunctional conflicts. Hoelscher and Robert (2002) viewed conflict as the underlying power that stimulates innovation.

Pondy (1967) described conflict as a phenomenon that can produce positive outcomes by introducing different perspectives that produce innovative solution. Lindelow and Scott (1989) defined conflict in negative term, as element that conjures negative connotation, invokes negative feelings and often leads to destruction. It is important to note that the outcome of a conflict situation depends on the perceptions and management approaches of the conflicting parties. The definition of Donohue and Kolt (1992) suggested some fundamental elements that need to be clarified at this point. These are:

- (i) Conflict occurs where people are interdependent. People must be connected in one way or the other, either through their views, goals, aspirations etc, before they can be enmeshed in a conflict.
- (ii) Conflict can be expressed in manifest or latent form. The parties concerned may blow the problem out of proportion for people to know about its existence or they may make people not to be aware of the conflict. Manifest conflicts can be easily managed because they are known by people, but latent conflicts are not open to people's awareness, hence, resolving them may be difficult.
- (iii) Conflict involves needs and interests. Needs are those things that are fundamentally of utmost importance to people, which they must fulfil as soon as the purchasing power is available. Interests on the other hand, are the desires of people. These elements, most especially, needs, have the potential to generate conflict, when people are blocked from pursuing their needs or interests.
- (iv) Conflict is caused by interference. In a bid to achieve the emerging needs or interest, interference may be experienced among the parties, bringing about the emergence of conflict. Conflict, therefore, is a fate of life, which occurs where the interactions of people are marked with differences in goals, perceptions, attitudes, views, beliefs, values or needs.

From the above analysis, conflict is a natural phenomenon which results from differences in individuals or groups aspirations, values, or needs. However, when conflict occurs, its manifestations and outcomes vary depending on the perceptions of the conflicting parties and the approaches adopted to manage it.

Meaning and identification of communal conflict

Communal conflict is made up of two axiomatic words “communal” and “conflict” while conflict has been conceptualized, communal is derived from a Latin word “communis” which means “common”. Communal relates particularly to groups, and it involves things commonly used, shared or experienced by a group in a society. Such things can be resources or conflict. When it is conflict, it is known as communal conflict. Communal conflict is a social conflict that relates to a group or groups in a society. When it occurs within a group, it is known as intra-communal conflict and inter-communal conflict when it occurs between groups. It is worth noting that these groups have common social ties, which may make the competition that may ensue to be fierce. The point is that the misuse or unequal distribution of the available resources that should be jointly enjoyed by a group will produce conflict. The conflict will usually be complex to tackle because of the level of hatred that would probably have been cultivated among the parties in the process.

Communal conflict was considered by Azuonwu (2002) as a conflict that occurs between two or more communities. Oboh and Hyande (2006) described communal conflict as involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims for land ownership, religious and political difference leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Communal violence (sometimes inter-communal violence) is a situation where violence is perpetuated across ethnic lines, and victims are chosen based upon ethnic group membership (Horowitz, 2000). Dzurgba (2006) was of the opinion that communistic violence is that which occurs between two or more communities over territorial land,

farmland and territorial water for fishing. These definitions revealed that communal conflict is more or less community conflict or ethnic conflict. This is not surprising because “communal” by its interpretation as a phenomenon that is common to a particular group characterises a community or ethnicity. Onwudiwe (2004) attested to this fact when he said that communal friction is what is usually described as ethnic conflict. More so, for communal contenders to have been described as culturally distinct people, tribes, or clans in heterogeneous societies, who hold or seek a share in state power (Gurr and Haxton, 1996) help to buttress the point that communal conflict is often interpreted as community conflict or ethnic conflict. While it is not the focus of this thesis to divulge the differences inherent in these variables, if there is any, it is pertinent to stress that the peculiar identity of “communal” in terms of reference to a group, concerning common issues or elements could as well be attributed to other social groups in a society.

This implied that several communal groups make up a community and therefore, in terms of involvement or participation, communal conflict is narrower than community conflict. Therefore, communal conflict is a state of incompatibility that emanates from a commonly shared or used property or resource by a group or groups in a society. It occurs within or between groups that are defined by some forms of social ties over resources that are jointly owned or shared in a community. Communal conflict arises when two distinct groups in a community disagree over jointly shared resources due to the possibility of inequitable distribution or the problem of domination by a group. The development of this kind of conflict in any society has attachment to commonly shared or used resources or elements which can be tangible or intangible.

The identity of communal conflict is rather fluid in nature. This is because it occurs in divert forms, which can sometimes be misleading to identify. Albert (2001) posited that this form of conflict “often manifest in terms of host-stranger face-offs in which a section of the community tags itself as the host (owners of the community) and some

other groups as strangers(that is, those who migrated into the community at a date later than the coming of the “owners” of the community). Apart from this, communal conflict can also be imbued in religious issues, land, politics, resources, local government, chieftaincy issues, e.t.c. The finding of Erena (2013) revealed that population is the main determinant of communal land conflict in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. Equally, in Cross River State, the Biakpan and Etono 11 communal groups clashed over land. In Ebony State, communal crises exist between Ezza/Ezillo groups. In Akwa Ibom State, Eyo Abasi and Idua have been experiencing communal crisis over oil rich parcel of land located at the boundary of their localities. Other examples of communal conflicts are the Yoruba-Hausa community in Shagamu with respect to the Oro traditional festival; Ogoni-Adoni Hausa-Yoruba clashes in Idi-Araba in Lagos State; the Eleme-Okrika which is centred on the creation of state and local government, unclear boundaries and clash over ownership of oil fields, farmlands and waterways; Itsekiri-Ijaw/Urhobo over the movement of LGA headquarters from Ijaw area to Itsekiri territory and land ownership/dispute.

The Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra State over land problem; the Ife-Modakeke in Osun State over indigenes/settlers problem; the Ijaw-Ilaje conflict in Ondo over ownership of land reputed to be rich in oil reserve. Its pervasive existence in every nook and cranny of the Nigerian society has heightened the state of insecurity. Communal conflict has adopted the posture of intractability and in most cases, highly violent in nature in Nigeria. In the North, communal conflicts are reoccurring decimal to the extent that their occurrences have imposed insecurity in communities where they exist. Examples of communal conflicts abound in Northern Nigeria. In Tiv area of Benue State in various local government areas between 1988 and 2004, 29 communal conflicts were recorded by the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affair as having occurred in the state. Within the periods, some of the conflicts reoccurred two to three times.

The Tiv-Jukun in Wukari which has to do with the case of Indigene/settler; the Chamba-Kuteb Chieftancy tussles over selection process; the Basa-Egbura in Nassarawa; the Hausa/Fulani-Sawaya in Bauchi; Fulani-Irigwe and Yelwa-Shendam, both in Plateau State. Communal conflicts also exist in Nasarawa State, for instance, in Assakio, Obi and Odoibu communities in Lafia Local Government Area, the clashes of communal war between these groups are ongoing in the state. Tiv farmers and nomadic Fulani in Benue and Nasarawa States and the Tiv in Guma and Gwer West are also embroiled in a conflict. Even in Abuja, communal conflict between Fulani pastoralists and Gwari farmers in Gwako village in Gwagwalada Area Council is ravaging the place. Other states in the country are not immune from the experiences of communal conflict. The manifestations of communal conflicts follow patterns that make them difficult to be identified in the North. This is because they do not occur in pure form. Communal conflicts are highly filled with religious and ethnic sentiments. However, the social ties that exist in a group and the partnership involved in sharing and using resources that often ignite the conflict give room for a clear identification of communal conflict in a society. The point is that at community levels, communal conflict can be clearly ascertained. This is due to the elements that underlie the conflict. The manifestations of communal conflicts are more pronounced at the community level in rural settings. Therefore, the identification of communal conflicts is an important determining factor in deciding what should be done, how and when it should be done to stem their destructive tendencies at a particular time.

Causes of Communal Conflict

Various factors have been identified by scholars as responsible for communal conflict in the country. The causes vary from one area to another. Yecho (2006) indicated that the causes of communal conflicts are not static but rather dynamic and varied in nature depending on the socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances at the time. Onwudiwe (2004) listed social conditions as population explosion, economic migration, and the anti-poor policies of the government as triggers of

communal friction. Horowitz (1990) pinned down communal conflict to revolve around politics, politicians, and their pursuit of group advantage. Albert (2001) identified indigene/settler problem, religious differences, ownership of land and its resources, goals and aspirations of people as some of the factors that can ignite communal conflict in the country. Hembe (2000) indicated that political struggle and colonization, while Lyam (2000) mentioned loss of soil fertility, soil erosion, deforestation, bush burning and flooding as some of the causes of communal conflict. Yecho (2006) pointed out that the fundamental causes of communal conflict are poor economic conditions, high level of illiteracy, the quest for, and fear of domination by other groups, land disputes, market ownership, chieftaincy tussle and party politics.

Varvar (2000) indicated that increased demand for land for agriculture, unemployment, rural hunger, poverty impoverishment as communal conflict triggers. Deprivation, exploitation and domination of minority groups by major ethnic groups and leadership problem were highlighted by Angya and Doki (2006) as factors that can exert communal crisis. Equally, religious differences, competition for livelihood resources and traditional chieftaincy tussles were enumerated by Oboh and Hyande (2006) as potential communal conflict triggers in the country. Competitions for land and chieftaincy tussle are the major causes of communal conflict in the North. For instance, in Nasarawa in 1993, Alago, Hausa and Tiv clashed over land and chieftaincy from 1995-2005, the Egburra and Bassa in Toto clashed over land, chieftaincy and politics. In 1989, 1990 and 1997, intra-communal conflict occurred in Ipav in Gboko based on land problem. In Taraba State, between the Chamba/Jukun and Kuteb over chieftaincy tussle since 1996 when it stated, it is still ongoing; in 2004 in Adamawa State between the Bachama and Hausa/Fulani over land ownership, politics and religious. On March 5, 2005, communal clash between Maruta (Jigawa) and Burmin (Bauchi) occurred over market relocation. On June 2003, Ekepedo and Ogori clashed over land ownership in Kogi/ Edo States. Best (2006) argued that in Benue Valley, the pressure on land from all directions heightens the

proliferation of ethnic and communal conflicts in the region, including the political ones, most of them arising from the land question. In essence, the causes of communal conflict from the above analysis are:

- Economic factor: The factors manifest in the forms of competition for inadequate resources such land and its content; problems of distribution of available resources; unemployment and poverty.
- Social factor: This has to do with issues that border on deprivation, envy, jealousy, marginalization and exploitation of people. In fact, fear of domination by major groups is equally a social factor that attracts communal conflict.
- Political factor: It involves the contest for available political positions in a community and leadership failure. Also added to this, is traditional chieftaincy tussle imminent in communities in the country.
- Ecological factor: This factor manifests in the forms of encroachment problem, farming and pastoral problems, deforestation, flooding, soil erosion, and bush burning. Communal conflict creates room for people to drift from place to place as a survival mechanism and in search of livelihood.
- Colonial factor: Colonialism is believed to be the background cause of communal conflict in Africa, and Nigeria inclusive. Most of the communal conflicts have direct attachment to colonial formation, while others manifesting in the post colonial period have explanation in colonialism.

Consequences of communal conflict

The destructive tendencies of communal conflicts are such that have largely affected the developmental prospect of the country. The consequences range from mere envy, suspicion, jealousy to large scale destruction of lives and properties. The research work of Ekeh (1999) on Aguleri-Umuleri communal conflict in Anambra State lucidly revealed that the two communities have for decades lived and farmed side by side but with mutual distrust and enmity. But in September

1995, when the conflict exploded, public property including schools, banks, post offices, town halls and even churches were razed to the ground, further, some 200 private houses were destroyed and countless number of people killed (Ekeh, 1999). In the case of Ife-Modakeke communal crisis, Albert (2001) asserted that:

every election in the area was characterised by electoral frauds and violence, perpetrated by either the Modakekes or the people of Origbo in the desperate efforts to control the new local government council. He stated further that there were no conflicts in Yoruba history whether in the precolonial, colonial and post-colonial times, which were as dangerous and destructive as that of Ife-Modakeke people. The conflict claimed several lives and led to complete evacuation of Ile-Ife, the cradle of Yoruba people several times especially in the pre-colonial period. In 1981 and 1983, several houses, vehicles and persons were burnt in both Ife and Modakeke. As usual, several hundreds of people were shot, slaughtered or lynched; housing estates, fuel stations and shops, especially the popular Oranmiyan Shopping Complex and Sijuwade Estate, were set ablaze by irate youths.

Oboh and Hyande (2006) averred that in the communal conflict in Oju L.G.A in Benue State, apart from the normal destruction of lives and property, trees and arable crops, livestock, houses, schools, markets and hospitals were destroyed in the process. They concluded that all these have overwhelming negative influence on food security thereby worsening the already existing food problems with its attendant problems of malnutrition, under nutrition and abject poverty (Oboh and Hyande, 2006). It is clear that communal conflict is highly destructive in nature. Another deficiency of communal conflict is the production of humanitarian problems such as internally displaced persons. Olusola (2004) was of the opinion that the result of numerous natural disasters and human-made violent clashes have produced

unmanageable proportion of internally displaced persons estimated recently to be well above 750,000 within Nigeria. IRIN (2005) reported that the number of internally displaced people in Jos crises since 2001 peaked in 2004, were up to 220,000 people. On December 2012, the conflict between the Gwari and Fulani nomads at Gwagwalada in Abuja produced over 1,500 displaced persons from about 27 settlements. In Nasarawa State, communal crises have continued intermittently, over 11 villages were affected over 4,500 people were displaced. Out of this number, the Governor of the State, Al-Makura was able to move 2,000 displaced people back to their origin, that is, Bassa District and donated five hundred thousand (500,000) naira to each of the 11 communities affected in the crisis. In the Jos crises of 2001 over 1000 people were killed. HRW (2010) indicated that more than 13,500 people have been killed in communal violence since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999. On May 3, 2005, Buruku/Katsina-Ala in Benue State in a violent clash over ownership of a piece of land, farms and houses were destroyed and women were abducted. The clash between Tsagari and Share communities in Kwara State on 8 September 2000 claimed several lives and property. In Nasarawa State, the conflict between the Azara and Tiv lead to the killing of Azara traditional leader making the conflict to escalate. It occurred on 28 June, 2001. In essence, the consequences of communal conflict can generally be summarized as:

- Social problem: This includes the experiences of hunger, development of psychological problems, loss of lives, abuse of human rights, and increased level of insecurity.
- Humanitarian problem: Communal conflict brings about the displacement of persons and leads to refugee dynamics in extreme cases.
- Physical problem: This involves the destruction of properties and material resources such as houses, land, crops etc.
- Health problem: This manifests in the experiences of stress, malnutrition, and injuries.

Changing contours of communal conflict in northern Nigeria

Northern Nigeria is however noted for the manifestations of religious conflict. It occurs either in pure form and sometimes coloured with ethnicity. It is characterised by reprisal attack. Higazi (2011) stated that religious violence in its contemporary expression became a problem in the north from the 1980s, continuing through the 1990s and after 2000. Similarly, Yake (2013) averred that Northern Nigeria is synonymous to ethno-religious conflict. These assertions stems from the fact that ethno-religious conflict is the most experienced and explored conflict in this part of the country. The domain of researchers even outside the region is concentrated on ethno-religious conflict. However, this does not mean that other forms of conflicts are not in existence in the North. Communal conflict is one of those conflicts that was latent but has become manifest in the recent times. Higazi (2011) stated that there have been a large number of incidents of communal violence across the North, including some appalling episodes in which hundreds or even thousands of people have been killed.

Communal conflict is rather conspicuous in states like Kaduna, Jos, Nasarawa, Maiduguri, Bauchi, Gombi, Adamawa, Benue, Taraba e.t.c. One of the changing phases of communal conflict is that it becomes more manifest in the democratic moment like ethno-religious conflict in the North. Presler (2011) in a commentary pointed out that Northern Nigeria has been a flashpoint of communal violence between Christians and Muslims in today's world, and Kaduna State has been the epicentre of this conflict in Africa's most populous country.

Communal conflict does not occur in isolation; it is exerted through ethnic and religious sentiments, which are the main factors that have accentuated it to the point of prominence in communities in the North and Nigeria at large. ACLED (2013) reported that communal violence constitutes only 13% of overall violence in Nigeria, this approximately double the average continental rate in Africa. The propensity gathered by communal conflict in its occurrence in the

recent time is equally associated with the nature of social factors involved in its prosecution. Ethnic and religious militias, community group members, and sympathizers are those often involved in the conflict. Their backgrounds serve as impetus in bringing the conflict to limelight because of their powers to mobilizing it. The ethnic and religious sentiments attached to it, sometimes, are strong mobilizing factors in its execution. ACLED (2013) reported that communal violence involving communally-identified groups such as ethnic or religious militias, mobs or rioters, has the highest level of fatalities per event of all kinds of violent interaction in Nigeria.

Another factor in the changing dimension of communal conflict is the volatile nature. Communal conflicts in this democratic era are highly volatile, involving large scale destruction of human and material resources, and also causing humanitarian problems in the society. For instance, ACLED (2013) stated that communal violence has an extremely high human cost, although it is only a small share of overall violence, it is typically extremely fatal. For instance, In May 1992, the communal feud that occurred between the Katafs and the Hausas in Kaduna State claimed lives and caused serious damage to property. Also, in October 1991, the Tiv/Jukun communal crisis claimed 5,000 lives with not less than 12 villages burnt down and over 150, 000 people displaced. The Fulani/Tiv communal conflict outbreak in Benue State in May, 2011, claimed not less than 30 people and left over 5000 people displaced. Ostien (2009) explained that between 1991 and 2007, there were several outbreaks of communal violence in Jos, out of which those of April 1994 and September 2001 stand out for their destructive tendencies. HRW (2001) reported that:

from September 7 to 13, 2001, Jos became the scene of mass killing and destruction....Initial figures compiled by local human rights groups, religious communities and other organisations indicate that more than 1000 people were killed.... Some villages on the outskirts of Jos had been almost completely

destroyed; they lay abandoned and empty. In the centre of town too, extensive damage to mosques, churches, schools, shops, homes, and vehicles was clearly visible.

Higazi (2011) reported that “the total number of people killed in Plateau State in the decade 2001-2010 certainly runs into thousands. There have been some very wild claims, totally unsubstantiated, stating that tens of thousands of people were killed in the first period of the violence from 2001-2004”. According to Best (2006) the Kuteb and the Chamba/Jukum conflict as early as August 1998, months after it started, led to the loss of 43 villages, 269 deaths and an estimated 3,000 internal population displacements. The volatile nature of communal conflict in the North stems from the illegal use of sophisticated weapons in its prosecution. Sophisticated small arms have been introduced into the prosecution of the conflict, and they are often used abnormally and recklessly to cause havoc on human and material resources in places where they surface. Mac-Leva (2009) and Abbah (2009) attested to the fact that the Jukun-Chamba/Kuteb conflict in Taraba has assumed violent posture overtime and is characterised by excessive usage of sophisticated weapons.

Krause (2011) submitted that the presence of well-organized armed groups in rural areas, the proliferation of weapons and the sharp rise in gun fatalities within Jos, all point to the real risk of future large-scale violence. One of the changing contours of communal conflicts in the North is the assumption of the posture of intractability. They occur intermittently. Ostien (2009) argued that the Jos crisis of September 2001 was the beginning of a series of outbreaks of communal violence, in Jos and elsewhere in Plateau State, continuing in 2002, 2003, and 2004. The record of Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affair, Makurdi, revealed that between March 1988 and April 2004, a total of 29 communal conflicts were recorded in Tiv area of Benue State. Out of these conflicts, the communal conflict between Mbayase (Gwer East LGA) and Ugambe (Konshisha LGA) which occurred in December, 1997, recurred in April 2000 and March

2004. The recurrence of communal conflict is a function of a number of factors. One of the ideas that underscore this development is when trying to resolve such conflicts “the issues that warranted such resolve become blurred and parties begin to identify each other as a problem. Where this happens, positional demands emerge and serve to further deepen the conflict as issues and underlying interests are neglected (Faleti, 2005). When issues and interests in a conflict are not attended to, the conflict will persist. The intractability of communal conflicts is also associated with faulty approaches adopted by the committee assigned to contain them. The strategies are often based on wrong diagnosis of the events leading to the conflict. Added to this, are sentiments and biases usually displayed by the representatives/agencies put in place to tackle the problem. The Jukun-Chamba/Kuteb conflict in Takum L.G.A in Taraba State has been going on for years “due largely to the absence of a decisive intervention from the state or its agencies (Isa, 2001). The bodies delegated to decisively handle such conflicts often contribute to their protracted nature. Sometimes they may not be conflict experts, hence, lack the capacity to demonstrate the required skills and attitudes demanded to arrest the conflict. Also, the political, ethnic, religious sentiments that underlie their handling mechanisms affect the management of the conflict. Communal conflict is more visible in the Middle Belt region than any other part of the north. The dynamics of the conflict has made Northern region highly unstable, creating high tendencies for security risks for people and distorting the opportunities for the building of the region in this era of democratic development.

Communal conflict and security challenges

The main problem of communal conflict is the imposition of greater security threats in Nigeria. Security is one of the social indices that determine the well being and safety of people and their properties. It is a situation in which the cares of people are met and provided for in a society. Nwankwo (2013) noted that security is freedom from care, anxiety or doubt, indeed, a situation of well-founded confidence. According to Wolfers (1962) security, in any objective sense,

measures the absence of threats to acquired values and in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked. Values are those tangible and intangible elements considered by individuals and groups as crucial for the improvement of their well beings. Therefore, when the values of people are unmet, fear set in and fear is an architect of insecurity. Therefore, the currency gained by the concept of human security is based on the inability of the state to prevent fear and combat threats confronting mankind in today's world. Human security, that is, the security of people is highly threatened by communal crises worldwide. Communal conflict undermines security at the base. This is due to the fact that it is more feasible at the rural setting, which is fundamentally an integral part of every society. Security, at all fronts, is compromised with violent manifestations of communal conflicts around the world. The manner and ways in which communal conflict is deepening security challenges worldwide is disheartening. For instance, the culmination of Mikhail Gorbachev's Federal Democratic Reforms in the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the ethnic and religious conflagrations that are consuming components of the former Yugoslavia are only two of the most poignant examples of communal polarization and conflict (Gleason, 1992; Mihajlov, 1991). Even, India with a fairly stable democratic development is seriously suffering from the growing wave of religious fundamentalism and communal agitations (Varshney, 1992).

The point is that the growing wave of communal conflicts has posed serious security challenges worldwide, especially in Africa where such conflicts are visible and destructive. This has prevented Africa from creating a suitable atmosphere capable of sustaining democracy. The heightened level of insecurity in Africa has not only affected human beings as well as material resources, even social, economic and political structures are adversely affected, increasing the tempo of poverty, unemployment, crime, corruption, and poor standard of education. Equally, the equitable distribution of resources among the competing institutions has been hindered, as more scarce resources are

moved to security sector to tackle security challenges at the expense of other social institutions, deserving such resources for accelerating development in Africa.

The problems induced by insecurity as a result of communal conflicts in the North have threatened national unity and cohesion. The return to democracy in 1999 has brought about greater experiences of insecurity as a result of increased number of communal crises recorded, even to the present. The bombings and killings in the North and kidnappings in the south have gradually snowballed into serious security quagmire, exposing security agencies to untold hardship in the country, especially in the North. Nigerians have been held ransom by the challenges posed by insecurity. Before the return of democracy in 1999, it was a case of ethnic militias from each of the geopolitical areas unleashing terrors in the name of fighting for justice for their ethnic groups. We have groups such as O'odua People's Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys, Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) all are formed in the South and Arewa People's Congress (APC) in the North. Agbaje (2003) postulated that the ethnic and regional groups and their militias have equally become a major part of the political landscape, often inflicting or threatening to inflict violence for political advantage. This development impacted sparsely on the security integrity of the nation since it was sectionally fabricated. In the course of inflicting violence, they often induce communal crises increasing the level of insecurity in the land. In the year 2000, Sharia was introduced causing serious security problems to the polity, most especially in the North, before the emergence of resource control crises in 2007 in the South. The showing up of Boko Haram in 2009 coupled with the incessant manifestations of communal conflicts, especially in the North have led to serious security challenges, which have put the security systems on a red alert in the country.

The security threats prevalent have directly and indirectly affected the behaviours, attitudes and orientations of people to the extent that

wrong practices are being undertaken as survival strategies for them. According to Abubakar (2004) in addressing the challenge to the survival of democracy in Nigeria, it is pertinent to consider security issues and problems that have affected or capable of affecting the attitude, confidence and cooperation of all groups and segments that make up the Nigerian federation. The unstable climate created in the North by the phenomena of Boko Haran and incessant manifestations of communal conflict made the United States to enlist the City of Jos in Plateau State, Bauchi and Borno States among other states in Nigeria, as places where their citizens should not travel to or be involved in any economic transaction.

In fact, the fear and stress emanating from insecurity in the North have forced the central government to declare a state of emergency in some states in the North. Adamawa State, Maiduguri State and Yobe State were currently observing a state of emergency, with heavy presence of security men, deployed from various security systems. Also, the non-indigenes, especially the Igbos have started relocating to the Southern part and other African countries for the sake of their businesses and survival. Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) observed that the phobia of being attacked especially in cities like Kano, Kaduna, Maiduguri, Jalingo and Yola was responsible for the exodus of people from the North to other parts of the country as witnessed in the last few months. The security problems have culminated in upward spiral of the phenomena of crime, unemployment, poverty and other vices, thereby reducing the developmental trend and democratic dividends accomplished in the region. This implied that the “crisis is rather under-developing already underdeveloped Northern region and threatens Nigeria’s prospect of joining the league of highly developed countries in 2020” (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013). The point is that the greatest challenge created by the experiences of communal crises in Northern Nigeria is insecurity. Therefore, since security is simply about development, then, the North is facing a development crisis and

if not tackled squarely can aggravate the governance crisis already existing in the nation, and this may usher in military take-over.

Approaches to managing communal conflicts

To manage communal conflicts in Nigeria will involve adopting two approaches. The first is the preventive approach and the second, the long term approach.

The preventive approach involves the evolvement of strategies that will tackle its causes, to reduce the level of incidence of communal conflicts in communities in the North and the country in general. The preventive strategies will take the understanding of the causes of the conflict. This will provoke the provision of the following facilities to reduce it: enforcement of land control by the government, determination of the extent of boundaries for proper adjustment, provision of basic infrastructural facilities in communities, zoning of political positions in communities, control of arms inflow into communities, equitable distribution of resources, and promotion of mutual respect for people.

The second, which is the long term approach, entails the development of early warning system in communities and the adoption of peace education programme suitable to tackle the peculiar nature of the conflict in communities in the North and generally in the country.

Conclusion

The dynamic nature of communal conflict in this democratic era is rather threatening and has exacerbated the state of insecurity in the North and the country at large. In 1999, when the baton of power was handed over to a democratically elected civilian leader in Nigeria by the military, until this moment over 15,000 people have been consumed by communal clashes. It has become the most visible conflict after ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. Communal conflict occurs in a group and between groups in a community. This conflict has become a serious issue of concern, plaguing the entire geopolitical zones. In this study, therefore, the meaning, identification, causes and

consequences of communal conflict were elucidated. The changing contours and security dilemma of communal conflict with a particular reference to Northern Nigeria were highlighted. How the conflict can be managed was equally indicated for a formidable policy option to be reached in the country.

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