



Conflict and the efficacy of state peace-building strategies in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explores the conflict situation which has engulfed the Nigerian State and examines the efficacy of State-building strategies initiated towards addressing it. The paper traces these conflicts to the political configuration of the country which has remained a product of British political experiment of social cloning. It argues that prior to 1914 amalgamation, each of the 250 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria existed independently and distinctively in culture and tradition. The amalgamation midwifed birth of a country which is a replica of catholic marriage which may not be palatable but cannot be separated easily. By 1954, British government further displayed their political dexterity by introducing federalism. Yet it did not provide the desired unity. Giving the challenges inherent with federalism, the federal character principles were introduced as measures to enhance peace-building and national integration. The study asserts that Federal character as a principle does not pose any challenge rather it is the actors that manipulate the system to their advantage and if the principle is abrogated, the Nigeria State will suffer colossal ethno-political domination by some ethno-centric State actors. It also, recommends that restructuring of the entire system has become a necessity and a major key to addressing the overwhelming issues in the nation to enhance peace-building.

Keywords: the state, conflict, peace-building, federal character

1. Introduction

The emergence of democratic institutions in Nigeria's Fourth Republic featured a quantum of crises and violent conflict. Theoretical underpinning in favour of the causes of plethoric crises could be underscored in the context that a doused conflict situation imposed by an authoritarian regime (in this case, a series of military regimes) could re-emerge immediately after the demise of such a regime even when there is an emergence of a seemingly freedom-oriented dispensation (democratic era). This is what Adebayo (1999: 81-104), three months before the inauguration of President Olusegun Obasanjo on 29 May 1999, referred to as the "scary inheritance" of the Fourth Republic, in which case not only did civil rule provide a base for citizenry to become a challenger of infringement on their socio-cultural, environmental and political life, but most importantly, it allowed for the explosion of hitherto bottled-up emotions. Among the crises that re-emerge at the inception of civil rule in Nigeria is the Niger Delta crisis.

Historically, the nation-State has experienced series of conflict arising from perceived disequilibrium in the distribution process of socio-economic and political dividends. Some measures were initiated to address these doubts and curtail the lingering crisis arising thereof. This prompted the establishment of Commission and special federal agencies to find lasting solution to the unwitting phenomena. Among these Commissions and special agencies are the Federal Character Commission, Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB), the Oil Mineral Producing Areas commission (OMPADEC) and the current Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Despite fervent moves towards resolving and addressing these problems, agitations have persisted. These institutions and agencies have developed well-structured frameworks as the basis of their operation, unfortunately these approaches have not recorded significant difference in dealing with the conflict and

enhancing State building, rather there are continuous agitations which have escalated with monumental consequences on the socio economic and political structure of the nation state. Therefore, it implies that there are fundamental structural dysfunction which affects the functioning of these strategies initiated to enhance peace-building process in Nigeria.

2. Contextual Clarification

2.1 The Concept of State

There is no clear definition of the Concept State. However, some radical writers like Marx and Engels argued that the State is essentially an expression of class relationships generated by the particular mode of production and unambiguously involved in the class struggle on the side of the dominant economic class. Thus, Marx and Engels, (1976:486) wrote that in capitalist society, "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisies. Some regard the State as one organization that transcends class and stands for the whole community. Other definitions have emphasised the political authority, the monopoly of force through government and political allegiance of citizens to the State. Some have regarded the State as moral and good society where justice and the promotion of the general welfare of the people are established. Broadly speaking, the State is the political form of society. What we call the State is a community of men organized for reserving and creating order and the general wellbeing of its members.

2.2 Concept of Peace-building

The term 'Peace building' come into wide spread use after 1992 when Boutros-Boutros Ghali then United Nations Secretary General, announced his Agenda for Peace (Boutros – Boutros, 1992) [5]. Since then, 'peace-building' has become a broadly used but often ill-defined term connoting activities

that goes beyond crisis intervention such as longer term development, and building of governance structures and institutions. It includes building the capacity of non-governmental organizations, (including religious institutions) for peace making and peace building. Emphasis of the United Nations has been on structural transformation, with a primary focus on institutional reforms. Peace-building involves a full range of approaches, processes, and stages needed for transformation towards more sustainable peaceful relationships and governance modes as well as structures. Peace-building includes building legal and human rights institutions as well as fair and effective governance and dispute resolution processes and systems. To be effective, peace-building activities requires careful and participatory planning, coordination among various efforts and sustained commitments by both local and donor partners. To summarize a construction metaphor used by Laderach, (1997), peace building involves a long term commitment to a process that includes investments, gathering of resources and materials, architecture and planning, coordinating of walls and roofs finish work and un-going maintenance. Laderach also emphasized that Peace building centrally involves the transformation of relationships; ‘Sustainable Reconciliation’ requires both structural and relational transformation (Laderach 1997). In practice peace building predate the emergence of a clarified concept (Animasawun, 2006:32)

In the view of Galtung, (1996) Peace-building is one of the measures of intervening in conflict in order to overcome the contradiction at the root of the conflict formation. In principle, this can be done by anybody: government, (inter-government), civil society (inter/non-governmental organizations), capital (transnational corporations); or by individual of any kind. This starts by entering into a communication process with the actors involved in the conflict. This can be done at any time provided the negative and positive purpose of conflict intervention can be served. It can take place anywhere not necessarily around the table with everybody together at the same time. The benefits are for all the participants in the conflict and other stakeholders. However, there are different schools of thought on peace building. These arose against the background of the three basic features of the concept of Peace-building as presented by David, (1999:19-20). These are:

1. The rehabilitations, reconstructions, and reconciliation of societies that have suffered the ravages.
2. The creation of security-related, political and/or socio-economic mechanism needed to build trust between the parties and prevent resumption of violence.
3. An external (foreign) intervention (national multilateral or UN) to create conditions for peace.

The above, enumerate future similarities with developed strategies or programs. However, these different perspectives have generated polarization of views on whether peace building and development should go hand-in-gloves.

3. State policies and peace-building strategies

Prior to independence in 1960, the colonial State set-up Sir Henry Willink’s Commission as a response to minority question of marginalization. The report of the commission in 1958 emphasized the need for prompt attention to the special needs of the minorities. An institutional approach to the problem resulted to the establishment of Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) by the federal government in

1960. Since NDDDB was at best moribund and did not achieve the lofty objectives for which it was established, its failure facilitated the establishment of Niger Delta River Basin Authority in 1976. Besides, through decree No. 23, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) was established in July, 1992. This commission was assigned the responsibility to receive and administer the monthly sums from the allocation of the federation account in accordance with confirmed ration of oil production in each State for the rehabilitation and development of oil mineral producing area. The peculiarity among these special agencies is that they were established during a military regime and were bedeviled by gross mismanagement, copious corruption, and shortage of funds. The advent of democratic government in 1999, under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, recognizes the scary nature of poverty and environmental deterioration in the region and commissioned Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000; although, the impact of the NDDC activities on the festering crisis in the region is still prone to questions. Among other legal frameworks is the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) (1988), the National Policy on the Environment (1989), Natural Resources Conservative Council (NRCC), the Oil in Navigable Water Decree (1968), the Petroleum Decree (1969), and the Associated Gas Re-injection Act (1980). Most of the strategic moves by the government to avert the festering crisis in the region were however adjudged as being mere paper strategies; lacking implementation and monitoring mechanisms. This was capable to neither halt the lingering crisis nor curb the pollution of the environment by the multinational oil companies. Rather, the federal government defies the primary motive of social contract and used State machinery as an instrument of oppression as was the case of Odi in 1999, among others.

3.1 Amnesty Initiative and Implementation

Beyond the threat posed by the crisis in the Niger Delta to economic and political stability in Nigeria are its consequential effects on the development of oil production and supply in international market. Palpably, the sharp drop in the nation’s daily output from its peak of 2.6 million barrel per day (bpd) to 500,000 bpd in the mid-2009 and the dwindling oil price in the world market buttress the fact that issues at the root of the crisis have to be given paramount priority (Guardian 6th Aug 2009:70) ^[3, 7]. Against this backdrop, an administrative approach towards solving the crisis was initiated by President Musa Yar’Adua, christened “Amnesty Policy.” in July 2009 following regular outbreaks of violence from 2006-2009 culminating in a May 2009 military incursion by government troops into the Niger Delta’s creeks, which left thousands displaced. Yar’Adua setup the Presidential Committee on Amnesty for the Niger Delta Militants, headed by Major General Godwin Abbe, which was to implement, in details, amnesty programme focused at disarmament and demobilization of militants in the oil-producing region. The programme, which started on August 6, 2009 and lasted for 60 days (October 4, 2009) was financed with billions of naira; accordingly, those who surrender their arms and enter into the rehabilitation program received 65, 000 naira (\$450) stipend per month. In explaining the goals of the programme within the context of challenges faced by the people of Niger Delta, Late President Yar’Adua noted that: “This administration understands the

challenges of the Niger Delta region and the challenges people are facing and that is why from the beginning I made Niger Delta a top priority in our seven-point agenda. I want to say that the amnesty is not an end in itself but a means to an end. It is a means to peacefully and lovingly with brotherly understanding bring to an end all insurrection and misunderstanding between brothers. It is a means to bringing stable peace and security to the Niger Delta region. It is a means of making the two of us work together to ensure that our youths do not take up arms again" (Guardian 6th Aug 2009:70) [3, 7].

Amnesty is a legislative or executive act by which a State restores those who may have been guilty of an offence against it to the positions of innocent people. It includes more than pardon, in as much as it obliterates all legal remembrance of the offense. Amnesty offer is a transversal approach towards addressing socio-economic problems of the people. It was believed that by granting amnesty to the militants in the Niger Delta region, means of enhancing development-induced alliance between the government and the people in the oil-producing communities could be realized. Such an alliance would defy initial threat status posed against the survival of Nigerian State. The subdued belligerent and eventual serenity would institute an environment for government to properly embark on capacity building policies and projects in the region, boost the revenue of the national government and eventually, have multiplier effects on international oil production and supply.

The essence of amnesty is to bridge the unfriendly lacuna between the government and the people clamouring for environmental, political and cultural freedom. It intends to ensure that youths in the regions have meaningful lives through the programme and trained in vocational skills and small scale businesses. Those that have a flare for education attain that to his/her utmost level, which is a reversal of expectation and a significant change in strategy of resorting to violence and repression with maximum ferocity. Thus, it trails towards youth capacity building through working together with the people by knowing their problems and laying down arms against the State. This was later followed by rehabilitation and re-integration.

The insecurity that had threatened the nerve of the nation's economy does not come to an end with the euphoria of amnesty or that of former combatants laying down their arms unless the root causes of the crisis and the vagaries and vices against development of the regions are adequately attended to. The deprivation and pervasive poverty of several communities, amidst large oil installations with cutting edge technology in the middle of vast bodies of water, fuelled the crisis in the first place. Corrupt practices of States' leaders, neglect by the government and subjective nature of oil companies kindles the light of the conflict. In this manner, does the amnesty programme address the issues paramount to the people of Niger Delta region? Does it provides means of putting an ending cut to total deprivation, environmental degradation and corrupt practices of the States' government, which proves efforts towards the development of the region abortive? What really is the firmness of government towards the post-amnesty promises? If answers to these questions are negative, how can re-occurrence be prevented? How should policies be formulated in such a way that they will institute confidence-building? How can sustainable peace and harmony be promoted while also rebuilding lives and the society?

3.2 Federal character policy as prerequisite to peace-building

Quota System: The Federal Character principle which gave rise to quota system in Nigeria was established to solve the problems of inequality and marginalization as expressed by certain parts of Nigeria. Among other reasons for introducing the quota system were the differences in the socio-economic development of different parts of Nigeria. Secondly there were disparities in the levels of educational developments in different parts of the country. Some sections of the country (North) were perceived to be educationally disadvantaged, while some regions (South) of the country were acclaimed to be educationally advantaged (Akuta, 2009:4). Related to federal character is the quota system that throws expertise to the winds and instead promotes mediocrity in the system. The quota system determines who gets what employment in the federal civil service. It determines who gets admission into any federal school from secondary to tertiary level. Under the quota system, when a position is reserved for a particular zone or State of the country little consideration is given to the capability of the candidate rather than take a capable hand from another State or zone to fill the position. It is rather left vacant because it has being reserved for a particular zone. The quota system and federal character have not achieved the desired objective behind the philosophy of its formulation. This is due to political manipulation influenced by ethno-centricism of State actors. The dominant influence of certain ethnic groups in some establishments and institutions call for doubt in the objectivity and workability of the policy. In most of these organizations, the hierarchy of the top echelon are predominantly occupied by people of particular ethnic origin especially, the acclaim three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo). There is a seeming disequilibrium in the distribution of positions and the common wealth of the people. This has resulted to persistent agitations by different ethnic groups since independence. However, this shows that there is a fundamental default in the implementation of the quota system. Peace-building process has being a core thrust of the Nigeria federalism since independence. From the conscription of different nations into a State, discontents have persisted overtime, which is responsible for the challenges faced by the State. In spite of the federal character principle which was aimed at addressing the concern of the people, the Nigerian State is still lingering in pervasive national questions. However, Ayoade, (2000) argues that since the federal character principle was adopted during the 1977 Constitutional Drafting Committee and became part of 1979 constitution of Nigeria, the questions of merit or competitiveness among Nigerians were set aside in place of quota system. This system has hindered development and it defiles all logic. How can a nation make progress when their best cannot occupy their due positions because we are practicing quota? We cannot move forward as a nation by putting round pegs in square holes. From the time of incorporating the quota system into the Nigerian law books till date, the federal government has used it as a policy instrument in recruiting people to all federal government establishments like the armed forces, police, ministries, federal government owned universities etc. Because it's in our statute book, the various state governments and all local governments" used the quota system in their various appointments etc. Merit, experience and hard work do not matter if quota system is in use especially when it comes to appointments. Its contrary to what Max Weber (1864-1920)

said, that employees should be hired and promoted based on merit and expertise. We choose mediocre in place of merit. The use of quota system has brought about intense lobbying each time there is vacancy to be filled. Quota system laid down the quest for the scramble and looting of our nations resources. People, groups, politicians, contractors etc. lobby for positions all because quota system has replaced merit. When people, politicians, regions or states do not get positions they start shouting of marginalization. When they succeed, they loot because they feel it's their turn. Patriotism and national interest do no longer exist in Nigeria due to this policy. Quota system encourages tribalism and division. This twin evil makes peace and love to be difficult in a country like Nigeria.

In Nigerian federal civil service, appointment is often synonymous with recruitment (Al-Gazali, 2006). Recruitment in the Nigerian federal civil service according to Babaru, (2003:26) is determined by three major factors. The first is the availability of vacancies declared by the ministries and extra ministerial departments and forwarded to the commission through the office of the head of civil service of the federation. Awareness for such vacancies is publicized through advertisements and notices. The second factor is the qualifications of the potential applicants. The specific qualifications and skills required for various categories are presented in schemes of service. The third factor is the principle of federal character. That is quota allocated in the recruitment exercise to states to ensure that the federal civil service reflects "Federal Character." Federal character principle is a constitutional matter and an important factor that determine appointments into the federal civil service. This issue is expressed in section 14(3) of the constitution as "The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from few States or from few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or any of its agencies."

The basic idea of the principle is to have an even representation of all states, ethnic and other sectional groups in the federal service. It has a lot of political support, especially from those in the disadvantaged areas mainly the northern States of Nigeria (Ohawu, *et al*, 1997). In order to implement this principle effectively, a commission called the Federal Character Commission was created in 1995. However, promotion in the federal civil service is determined by factors such as number of years in a grade level, performance in promotion examination and interviews (FRN, 1998), and availability of vacancies or jobs at a higher level.

3.3 National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was introduced in 1973 as a mandatory one-year scheme, aimed at involving Nigerian graduates in efforts to fast-track the country's development and strengthens its unity. Although the scheme was initially designed to include graduates of universities, colleges of education and polytechnics, it was later narrowed down to comprise graduates of universities, polytechnics and monotechnics who are under 30 years of age. The purpose of the scheme is to enable the corps members to interact with people from diverse ethnic groups, while getting acquainted with their cultures, social and family backgrounds. Observers believe that by serving outside their respective states of

origin, the corps members would be in a privileged position to have a better perception of other people, while promoting peace and national cohesion.

3.4 Shortfall of federal character policy in peace-building

The federal character principle has been manipulated and channeled to serve the overall interest of the petty bourgeois ruling class. The members of this class formulate and operate the principle to achieve their selfish desires under the guise of the federal character principle. They get themselves entrenched in power and exercise control over the machinery of state through the application of this principle. They strive to reconcile their class differences through the operation of acceptable formula for the allocation, distribution and sharing of national resources and benefits among themselves. While they do this, they capitalize on and fan the ethnic differences among the various Nigerian peoples to win the support of the masses in their areas. And in the course of this elite game, members of this class climb to positions, amass wealth and enrich themselves illegally. Thus, the federal character principle is merely an elite ploy, which would not materially improve the lot of the downtrodden in whose name it is raised (Awa 1972, Agbaje 1989, Gboyega, 1989 in Aderonke, 2013). The federal character principles satisfied the quest for representativeness and appointment among various groups. However in the application of the formula as noted by Bodunrin (1989) in Students' Diary (2013) choices are often made on the basis of other criteria other than merit. For example, the federal character as applied in educational sector leads to lowering of standard against national interest. In the army, it leads to the production of sub grade soldiers and officers. In the civil and public services of the federation, standards and professionalism are compromise by eschewing meritocracy without recourse to standards. The federal character becomes morally reprehensible and an act of injustice. Viewed from this perspective, the quota factor in the federal character principle becomes counterproductive to peaceful and orderly progress, and the development of Nigeria Federation.

However, considering the ethno-centric disposition of the Nigeria State, our concern is not centered on the adoption of this principle but on the efficacy of its implementation. If the system under federal character principle is skewed towards few ethnic groups who dominate certain institutions then what would have been the hope and place of other minority groups in the absence of federal character principle. Therefore, federal character as a principle does not pose any challenge rather it is the actors that manipulate the system to their advantage. If the principle is abrogated, the Nigeria State will suffer colossal ethno-political domination by some ethno-centric State actors in all spheres of the nation's endeavour.

4. Conclusion

Experience shows that dousing any seemingly intractable conflict violent requires an act of lucid understanding of complex local realities and peculiarities. By the virtue of this understanding, both remote and immediate reason(s) that prompted such a violent conflict would form the caprices of strategic peace building efforts.

Sequel to this fact, dedicated efforts from the government would play inestimable role in loosing conflicting veins that connected different warring parties to the conflict. Government need to be proactive with the implementation of

its policies especially the ones that bothered on peace building (fundamental human rights). Also, restructuring of the entire system has become a necessity and a major key to addressing the overwhelming issues in the nation and enhance peace-building.

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