



Enhancing Peace and Security through Ethno - Religious Tolerance in Nigeria for Sustainable Development

MARY IFECHUKWUDE EGWUANIKWU
University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria

Abstract. In recent times, the spate of insecurity through ethno-religious intolerance in Nigeria, a heterogeneous society has become an issue of concern. The paper scrutinized ethnic and religious tolerance as means of fostering peace and security in Nigeria for sustainable development. Peace and Security are germane in the development of every nation; but can only be achieved through tolerance among the ethnic and religious groups. The study employed descriptive and historical methods to elicit information. The significance of peace and security to development; together with the synergy between ethno- religious tolerance, peace and security were discussed. Primary and secondary sources of data collection which includes observation, text books, magazines, journals, and others were consulted in the documentation of the outcome of this research. The findings revealed that ethno-religious tolerance promotes harmony and enabling environment for healthy business operations that enhances growth across all sectors. The paper recommended that the government, religious and community leaders should enlighten the masses on the significance of tolerance, sincere dialogue; reconciliation, among others; which would serve as instruments to uphold peace and douse security challenges currently bedeviling the nation. It therefore behooves on the government to employ the necessary template for good governance embedded in peace and security for development to flourish. Religious leaders should ensure that right religious tenets are taught and practiced in order to discourage religious sentiments or fanaticism. Such would entrench national integration and peaceful co-existence among associates of various ethnic and religious affiliations for ultimate stability and sustainable development.

Keywords: Peace, Security, Ethnicity, Religion, Tolerance, Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

A peaceful and secure atmosphere is crucial to every society because it has the capacity to create social, economic and political development. But this is dependent on the level of ethno- religious tolerance in that country, especially that which is heterogeneous in nature. There can be no significant growth and development in any nation where there is lack of peace and security. The current spate of insecurity in Nigeria, a multi - ethnic and multi – religious nation such as armed robbery, cultism, terrorism, kidnapping, insurgency, banditry, ritual killings, assassinations, suicide bombings, among others; have resulted to fear, difficulties, sorrow, demolition of religious centers and indiscriminate destruction of lives and properties (Adedokun & Bolarinwa, 2019). Sadly, these heinous acts have often been attributed to ethnic and religious intolerance. This is consequent upon the emergence of some separatist groups namely: Boko - Haram, IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra), Fulani Herdsmen, Unknown Gunmen and so on.

Peace and security can only become discernible in a society that encourages ethnic and religious tolerance, hence the necessity to tackle the major problems of Nigeria which are tribalism, nepotism and religious bigotry. The security challenges in Nigeria have prompted the 2020 Global Terrorism Index to grade Nigeria as the third most ravaged country by terrorism across the globe (GTI 2020). Since the Independence in 1960, the Nigerian society has been disfigured by varied levels of ethnic and religiously instigated violence and uprising, which usually manifest in the slaughter of innumerable innocent citizens. Egwuanikwu (2023) reiterates that tolerance is an inevitable apparatus for harmony and security for definitive growth and national integration in Nigeria. Mutual understanding will breed unity among religious and ethnic groups which would ultimately foster sustainable development.

Nigeria is an ethnically diverse country comprising over 250 ethnic groups, the largest, the most populous and politically influential are the Hausas, Yorubas and Igbos. The ethnic groups consist of multiple tribes detailed about 371 in number. It also has over 500 languages, with English as the official language. Besides, the three prominent religious sects in the country are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. Rather than being a blessing, the religious and ethnic plurality of the country presently has been adduced as being responsible for her socio-political adversity (USCRIF, 2016). Peace and Security are the most paramount and critical necessities of every society; without peace, no meaningful growth and development can be attained. This explains why the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has continually invested billions of dollars of tax payers' fund to quell insecurity. Irrespective of the fact that this enormous capital which ought to have been channeled to infrastructural and other developmental ventures, are invested on issues pertaining to security; the menace of insecurity to individuals and progress of the country remains unabated (Nnoruga, 2022). Therefore, this paper argues for the imperative of ethno - religious tolerance as catalysts for peace and security; which would ultimately restore sanity and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Based on this backdrop, the paper probes the significance of ethno- religious tolerance in promoting peace and security for sustainable development in Nigerian society. To buttress this fact, the paper explores various areas of discourse, namely: Conceptual Discourse, Significance of Peace and Security to Development; the Synergy between Ethno – Religious Tolerance, Peace and Security; Recommendations and Conclusion.

2. Conceptual Discourse

2.1 The Concept of Peace

Peace is conceptualized as societal acquaintance and concord devoid of resentment, conflict and brutality (Nnoruga, 2022). Banks (2020) defines peace as harmony, order, justice or management of conflict. It is the existence of non-violent attitude. It depicts harmonious living, that is, to live without fear of being hurt or murdered by someone. In Global parlance, peace represents living in unity across societies and the liberty to operate as individuals without assuming the identity or freedom of other persons. Jonah & Olawale (2019) aver that peace is the main value of every society. Presently, peace is

interpreted as a public good since it enhances growth and development of human and material resources.

Generally, peace researchers are of the view that peace entails the absence of war; that is, dearth of express disagreement, peace is fairness and progress, which portends the absence of orchestrated aggression; peace is reverence and tolerance among people; inner peace portrays spiritual peace as well as wholeness (Shedrack, 2016). In summary, peace is essential for any significant advancement. Peace is vital in our daily activities such as our businesses, schools, churches, mosques, footballs fields and anywhere humans subsist. Peace is not just the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence; but upholding an organized and sane social order; sheltered from violence or extortion of assailants and honest in being fortified against mistreatment and exploitation by the more influential and oppressive class.

2.2 The Concept of Security

According to Terriff (1999) security is the state of emotional safety; freedom from hazard, threat or destruction; defense, fortification, as well as the absence of any kind of intimidation which could negatively affect individual members of the society. It is the preservation of the prime-values of the people, and the exclusive task of those in positions of authority. This is in accordance with the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which unequivocally affirms that “The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of Government”. Inadvertently, there’s an affinity between peace and security when social welfares of persons, community and nations are measured. There is an agreement among the intelligence community that security is not necessarily the absence of terrorism or security challenges, but the existence of a vigorous machinery to react proactively to the difficulties caused by these menace with pragmatism, proficiency, and swiftness. Thus, it is believed in contemporary literature that security is imperative for national integration, peace and sustainable development. Therefore, peace and security are both fundamental and critical facets of development. High rate of insecurity is bound to make development impossible. This understanding necessitates urgent reform of a country’s security segment in order for development plans to be effective (UNSD 2013).

Ugah, Shemang and Akwanga (2023) emphasize that the security of the citizens of a nation is of great importance. They contend that security is for the citizens, and not vice versa. This implies that the

peace and security of the citizenry can only be guaranteed when the basic necessities of life, namely: food; good health; freedom of speech, movement and the right to live; availability of jobs; justice; and all other ingredients of life are readily available. They further observe that there are two types of security which include Human Security and State or National Security. Enu and Ugwu (2011) submit that **Human Security** is liberation from physical and synthetic encumbrances which includes war, poverty, and discrimination, political repression, together with protections from hurtful distractions in the mode of life, jobs, homes and communities. Human security which solely focuses on human affair has seven dimensions which are personal, food, health, economic, environmental community and political security.

National Security refers to orderliness and tranquility within a society. It is regarded as the protection of state sovereignty and territory from external invasion. Besides, it is concerned with defense against criminal activities, safeguarding of lives and properties, as well as maintenance of orderliness within a country (Efeurhobo and Fredrick, 2020). Undoubtedly, national security is a situation where a nation consciously promotes its esteemed principles; legal interests; improves the standard of living; creates a peaceful and safe environment. Essentially, this would enable its citizens to access and enjoy the nation's resources together with the basic necessities of life which translate to development.

2.3 The Concept of Ethnicity

Ethnicity, ethnic groups, or ethnic identity are three interrelated expressions often used interchangeably with reference to tribe or race. They refer to a collection of individuals residing in a common geographical setting with mutual philosophy, principles and traditions. This conviction in familiar culture and pedigree is subject to customs and practices regarded as fundamental to the community, or on myths of historical related ancestry (Egwuanikwu, 2023). These three are therefore consistently used in this work in that manner. Obi (2001) describes the phenomenon of ethnicity as the utilization and or mobilization of ethnic identity or diversity as a means of benefitting in circumstances of competition, disagreement or collaboration. Thus, ethnic group signifies individuals whose members possess a familiar distinctiveness and kinship with respect to a similar language and custom, fable of identical ancestry and environmental native land. Typical of these are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, three

foremost ethnic groups in Nigeria with historical, linguistic, cultural and territorial differences; but have been coerced to subordinate political, social and economic situation in the federation and its component.

Nnoli (1995) attests that ethnicity occurs whenever there is rivalry between ethnic groups at the expense of cooperation. It is typified by cultural chauvinism, and political favouritism. Based on this analogy, ethnic identity which ideally refers to socio- cultural traits exclusively shared by people who claim the same ancestry; is the mechanism through which the ethnic group exploits politics. It could therefore be deciphered that 'Identity' is the avenue through which politicians fan the amber of ethnicity as means of hijacking power. Ideally, ethnicity ought not to be a game of numbers at all times, the reason is because smaller ethnic groups through a mishmash of historical cum socio-economic issues, have the capacities to mobilize and consequently attain positions of authority to control larger groups (Osaghae, 1998).

To Umezina (2012), Ethnic group connotes familiar blood or lineage, selfsameness and identicalness which could be imaginary or real. The group may be large or few in numbers or geographical location; but their shared features are the basis of the claim to a common descent. The mental sensitivity associated with the knowledge of this shared foundation stimulates oneness and cohesion among the members. Arising from the above, ethnicity, ethnic identity or ethnic group relate to a person or group of persons with defining and identifying characteristics, traits, cultural mannerisms, financial status and actuality among other facts, which bind them together. Ethnicity is a general belief that connects races distinguished by language, colour, and religion; together with tribes, races, 'ethnic groups, and 'social groups.

2.4 The Concept of Religion

There is no universally accepted definition of religion among scholars due to its ambiguous nature. However several definitions of the concept have been projected by different people based on their personal experience or perception. Best (2011) defines religion as the entire composite mode of life, beliefs, sentiments, expressions, practice and institution through which individuals fulfill divine mandates and convey their primary affinity with the supernatural. Religion could also be viewed as an established framework within which particular theological dogma and rituals are promoted and adhered to

habitually, among a community of people with mutual beliefs (Ojo and Akolo, 2021). Thus, religion refers to a personal response to the supernatural in the quest for significant livelihood on earth. It is a structured incorporated set of beliefs and rituals; articulated principles and symbols based on experience with respect to the holy and profane; in total reliance upon the Supreme Being.

2.5 The Concept of Development

The idea of development is complex, as there are variations of opinion over its conceptualization. Development could be defined as advancement of a nation's fiscal and social situation. Obviously, development signifies strengthening or administration of a country's natural and human resources, as a means of generating wealth and people's standard of living. This should be viewed as a universally acceptable essence of development in order to attain individual's potentials (Osimen, Aisedion, Adi, 2022). Development is a multi-dimensional concept which relates to societal transformation ingrained on economic, diverse cultural and ecological contact. It is a process that involves substantial progress ranging from material goods produced through technical means; cultural growth which embraces values, customs and norms of a society; to individuals' advancement (Ofili, 2021). In his view, Menede (2006) avers that development is a notion derived from the French term, *de, un* and *velopper*. While *velopper* signifies to wrap, *develop* denotes to unwrap.

Factually, development connotes *un-velopping*, unwrapping, unfolding or unveiling, outcome of what was encased, concealed or suppressed. Development could therefore be described as upgrading the initial, in addition to a substance which subsists. Inadvertently, development is the opposite of envelopment. Menede (2006) reiterates that development generally portrays improved standard of living which enables the citizenry to utilize some facilities which include good roads, good houses, stable electricity distribution, quality health care services, hygienic water, high-quality education; overflowing food supply; and social justice. Apenda (2006) opines that development implies purposeful and continuous improvement of society. It indicates unwavering attempt to effect invaluable social change in a preferred pathway, using the accessible funds.

Melkote (2003) concurs with the above assertions as he purports that development is a procedure which has the capacity to create proper and sustainable

prospects for advancement of people's lives and that of the communities. From these definitions, it can be deduced that development is man-centred. Ironically, the four features of development namely: mass participation, societal and material enhancement together with sustainable prospects as revealed seem to be lacking in Nigeria, hence it is the major challenge confronting the developing nations, particularly Africa. A country's infrastructure and natural resources can only be useful to development depending on their level of contribution to the enrichment of the people's lives socially, culturally and politically.

2.6 Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development could be conceptualized in several ways. It implies the development that satisfies the yearnings and aspirations of the present and future generations (Brundtland & Mansour, 1987). It is a process of change in the management of human and natural resources in an environment or country with the aim of achieving economic and social development; which would in turn improve lifestyles and preserve the ecosystem for the benefit of individuals within the society and the upcoming generation (Claudia & Ramirez, 2022). This notion precludes ecological obliteration and disintegration of resources. Basically, it entails, among others, two challenges: social justice and equity. Apparently, if sustainable development is a preference to guarantee the continued existence of humanity which engrosses matters of inter and intra-generational equity; it could therefore be inferred that an environment where peace reigns is paramount. Thus, sustainable development doubles as a goal and a procedure, which cuts across existence and efforts in socio-cultural and political organizations.

3. Significance of Peace and Security to Development

The trio peace, security and development are so interconnected that the absence of one adversely affects the other. This is illustrated by the popular slogan: "No peace, no development, no peace, no justice, and no security, no development" (Osimen, Aisedion & Adi, 2022). For instance, peace and security are germane to progress and development in various nations across the globe. This presupposes that they have the ability to create vigorous and equitable economic advancement which could impact positively on the society. Apparently, many nations of the world, whether developed or undeveloped often grapple with insecurity within and outside their territories. Thus, insecurity and lack of peace remain

great challenges to the universe at large. Lack of peace and security will definitely impede the development of any nation. Implicitly, the nations experiencing growth are enjoying peace and security since businesses can only thrive in serene environments. Besides, it would attract financiers who would ultimately create job opportunities for the masses and improve individual's standard of living (Jonah & Olawale, 2019).

This underscores the fact that peace, security, alongside good governance and respect for human right are crucial in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. While the indices for development are viewed as economic growth, well being, competence, potentialities, opportunities and choice; security refers to individual, human and state safety, which could be internal, external, existential or otherwise. The focal points of each of these factors differ, since the menace to security is usually instantaneous, but that of development is generational. Moreover, peace describes nonexistence of all manner of disturbance and discomfort which includes galloping inflation, poverty; fear of engaging in farming in order not to be kidnapped or encounter the Fulani Herd's Men, inability to express one's opinion for fear of being accused of hate speech, oppression and exploitation by the leadership.

In fact, peace expresses fairness and forbearance among people of different religious and ethnic nationalities; hence it is essential for any significant progress. On the contrary, security threats result in lesser investments, disruption of business operations, high cost of business transactions; marginalization of the poor by the higher class, general hardship and frustration on the part of the masses as experienced in Nigeria presently. Additionally, severe destruction of infrastructure could lead to deterioration of health, since health care largely depends on good infrastructural facilities and successful operation delivery sequence; which could ultimately induce several indirect deaths (Siyan Chen et al, 2008). Obviously, Boko Haram menace and Farmers versus Herdsmen clash have made it difficult for people to go to the bush to farm for fear of being molested, raped or killed by Unknown Gun Men.

This negative experience has ultimately contributed to the scarcity of food products as well as hike in prices. This was recently buttressed in a Radio Program tagged "Republic" that the sit at home order imposed on the Eastern State of Nigeria has resulted in serious insecurity and operation of the Unknown Gun Men who unleash severe terror on the innocent

citizens, such that some of the women in the market were severely beaten, their goods destroyed; and even pupils who attended their Common Entrance Examination were flogged and chased out of the Examination hall in Enugu and Ebonyi States respectively (Sleek, 2023). What a pathetic experience and indirect means of upholding backwardness! Certainly, the only means to attain sustainable development is through peace and security network in Nigeria. It therefore behooves on the government to make available the template for good governance embedded in peace and security for development to flourish.

4. Synergy between Ethno- Religious Tolerance, Peace and Security

There is emergent acknowledgment that ethno-religious tolerance, peace and security are interwoven and fundamental for socio-political, economic, and sustainable development across the globe. Over the years Africa has witnessed an upsurge in the number of conflicts ranging from religious, interstate, ethnic, to communal strife. Nigeria has been particularly affected, especially with respect to ethno-religious conflicts, engendered by ethno-religious intolerance which has greatly devastated the country and impeded development. Ethno-religious intolerance tops the list of the factors militating against peace and security in Nigeria. This is against the backdrop that every individual in the society has religious and ethnic affiliations; which often results in crises due to poor relationship. Other factors which include Boko-Haram insurgency, poverty, unemployment, porous border, Fulani Herdsmen versus Farmers clash, kidnapping, armed robbery, loss of cultural and communal values, poor attitude of government towards crime control, weak security systems, collaboration of security agencies with criminals, illiteracy, violation of human rights among others (Osimen and Iloh, 2022) are oftentimes ignited by ethnicity or religious intolerance.

Lack of tolerance undermines the benefits of development by obliterating economic resources and infrastructure, which in turn obstructs societal progress. Alabi (2006) claims that African continental differences are undoubtedly evident and overemphasized by Africans, hence the achievement of national identity has been complex in the continent and noticeable through unending conflicts. According to Kane (2008) the incessant violent clashes in the African continent are generally considered her most distinctive features. Gilpin (2015) surmises that frail government's historical animosity, exclusive politics, natural resource contention, exterior opinionated and

economic intrusion, coupled with terrorist philosophies have collaborated to the demise of millions of people, with unfathomable material goods shattered, despite several efforts to promote workable peace, security and sustainable development within the continent. A country afflicted by ethno-religious intolerance is bound to experience conflict situations which are often violent and affects economic activities. Consequently, several businesses would fold up, while others would relocate to safer places in the bid to escape structural or cultural violence. Declining fiscal positions and unemployment in a conflict-ridden environment impinges on taxation. Moreover, there would be defective social services, incidence of social problems which includes scarcity of food supply, hunger, poverty and inequality (Osimen, Aisedion & Adi, 2022).

Conversely, Ethno-religious tolerance promotes peaceful co-existence which is an integral aspect of human life. Peaceful co-existence is a pillar that binds humanity together. The reason is because harmonious living is a crucial aspect of human life and it emanates from the inner being. It permits individuals to have deeper understanding of the society, arrive at a compromise; easily resolve challenges and move forward. Since humans are sociable creatures, peaceful and harmonious co-existence guarantees survival and growth. Thus, peaceful co-existence demands a conscientious effort, determination, self will, and commitment to be actualized. Ethno-religious tolerance promotes harmony and enabling environment for healthy business operations that enhances growth across all sectors. Undoubtedly, sustainable development goes beyond averting ecological demolition and collapse of resources, but also entails the creation of a peaceful atmosphere for fulfillment of human potentials. Egwuanikwu (2023) affirms that tolerance is an indispensable quality that entrenches peace and security among people for significant development. Peace among individuals from diverse ethnic and religious affiliations is the principal feature for unity within and among nations. Thus, the pathway to peace, security and sustainable development in Nigerian society is through ethno- religious tolerance.

However, the possibility is dependent on mutual understanding which is capable of instituting cohesion among religious and ethnic groups. Since ethnicity and religion are replete in human societies, tolerance is a sufficient mechanism for checkmating religious and ethnic disturbances for enhancement of peace and security. This can be achieved when adherents of different religions respect other people's faith and do not assert superiority over other

religions. Such is also applicable to various ethnic nationalities within the country; especially some political office holders who marginalize other ethnic groups in favour of theirs through one sided or biased political appointments, employment, admissions, scholarship awards; provision of basic amenities among others. For instance, the immediate past president of Nigeria, Retired General Muhammadu Buhari was accused by some individuals during his tenure of appointing people from his region into political offices at the expense of other ethnic groups, yet he ignored the complaint. It was therefore not surprising that his regime was bedeviled with diverse ethno-religious conflicts and general insecurity. Religion and ethnicity, if not properly addressed are like time bomb waiting to explode, ironically, anybody could be a victim. Certainly, tolerance creates room for dialogue and good relationships which in turn produces enduring peace and security. People should be educated to desist from religious fanaticism and embrace peace for sustainable development because no religion preaches violence. During football matches, Nigerians watch collectively and celebrate without discrimination, there are several intermarriages between Christians and Muslims which have lasted several decades and have produced children who could be addressed as "Chrilms". The current President of Nigeria, Bola, Ahmed Tinubu is a very good example; as a Muslim, he has been married to a Christian woman for several years and their marriage has been successful. Besides, there are inter-ethnic marriages that have succeeded over the years, which are signals of possible peace. For instance, during the Eidel Kabir celebration which held on the 28th and 29th of June, 2023, some Muslim faithful attested that their Christian neighbors assisted them to clear their prayer ground (Sleek, 2023). Such gestures are often reciprocated during Christian festivals as a means of strengthening their relationships. Thus, peace and security can only be accomplished in a multi-faith and multi-ethnic country like Nigeria in an atmosphere of tolerance for sustainable development.

5. Conclusion

The quest for sustaining development through peace and security is extremely challenged by ethno-religious intolerance in the Nigerian nation. Peace portends freedom from social conflicts, absence of war and violence for the achievement of individuals or groups essential needs, ambitions and aspirations without disruption. Basically, security stems from the process of development, which implies that good development policies can be derived through the provision of security. Thus, the task of peace and

security is the responsibility of the government, security agencies and the entire populace. Nigerians must recognize that good security policy produces peace and also facilitates socio-economic development. Nigeria is a certified religiously pluralistic nation that accommodates adherents of different religions and other secular ideologies. This reality necessitates positive tolerance and respect for others faith for harmonious co-existence. Moreover, there should be a democratic culture of patriotic and visionary leadership devoid of sentiments, discrimination, nepotism, corrupt practices, social injustice in national exercises and policy implementation. Equity in the distribution of available human and material resources among the ethnic groups would breed mutual trust and faith among the citizenry.

6. Recommendations

There is need to refocus attention on matters that pertain to national ethos with emphasis on respect and acceptance of internal idiosyncrasies, ethno-religious and cultural diversities, in a multi-faith Nigeria.

The government must educate the masses on the significance of tolerance, sincere dialogue; reconciliation, among others; which would serve as instruments to promote peace and douse security challenges in this multifaceted nation.

Government must be deliberately impartial on matters that relate to religion and ethnicity as an indication of their willpower to gratify the desires of the citizens, and ingrain national unity, peace and sustainable development.

Religious and Community Leaders should emphasize ethno-religious tolerance and accommodation of divergent opinions as measures for intensifying harmonious co-existence with other ethnic and religious sects in the country.

Government should focus action on good governance and encourage ethno-religious tolerance through policies that would unite the various religious and ethnic groups; rather than resolving existing conflicts, which are expensive and unsafe.

Nigerian Government must engage the International community to establish and finance global networks for diplomacy and justice to fortify peace-building within and across the nations.

The government at all levels should collaborate with the Civil Society and other well meaning Nigerians towards ensuring that the country becomes more peaceful and secured for sustainable development.

The government and the organized private sector should complement each other through the enhancement of human capital advancement of the citizenry, particularly the youths and women. Obviously, this is a *sine qua non* for the achievement of a just, secured and progressive Nigerian society.

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