Ethno-Religious Conflict In Nigeria And Under-Development: Law To The Rescue

Prof. Sylvia Chika Ifemeje PhD & Helen Obiageli Obi PhD

Department of Public and Private Law
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT
Nigeria in consequence of its diverse ethno-religious background has experienced unprecedented spate of insecurity, killings, destruction of property due to ethno-religious conflicts in various parts of the country since independence. The conflict has escalated over the years and has in the past decade assumed an alarming and threatening dimension. For instance, Boko Haram insurgency, MASSOB /IPOB Movement activities for actualization of Biafra, Niger Delta Militancy and numerous inter-ethnic conflicts in various parts of Nigeria in recent time as typified in crises in Jos, Ebonyi and Benue states have had it adverse effect on the Nigerian economy as the Nigerian government has sunk billions of Naira in fighting these conflicts .This of course has had its adverse toll on Nigeria’s meager economic resources, thereby seriously retarding our economic development. Besides, most foreign investors have fled from Nigeria for other more politically stable African countries. The situation to say the least is now worrisome and calls for drastic measures to salvage our dear country from collapsing economically. The paper identifies and examines the immediate and remote causes of these incessant violent conflicts in Nigeria. The paper equally examines the consequences of these ethno-religious conflicts and finds that the conflict inter-alia fuels insecurity, violence and mutual distrust and economic under development, this is evident from the fact that Nigeria is now labeled one of the poorest nations in the world despite its abundant human and material resources. These crises as observed earlier which has succeeded in driving away foreign investors from Nigeria, have deprived Nigeria, the economic gains and development such investments would have attracted. The paper critically dissects the societal problem at stake from a legal perspective and makes a case for more reliance on Mediation in resolving these conflicts citing instances in the past where dialoguing was effectively used in resolving such ethno-religious problems. It also makes a case for public disclosure of all the findings of future Panel set up by Nigerian government.

Keywords: Nigeria, Ethno-religious conflicts, Economic development, Mediation, Law

INTRODUCTION
There has been an increasing evolution of conflicts in Nigeria since the advent of Fourth Republic in 1999, the violence ranges from political, ethnic and religious violence, militancy and more recently banditry, kidnapping and Herders/Farmers clashes. The focus of this paper however is strictly on the correlation between incessant ethno-religious conflict on Nigeria and under-development. These incessant conflicts needless to say have taken its toll on the socio-economic conditions of Nigerians (Nzor, 2019). It has drawn Nigeria to a verge of collapse. It has also occasioned human carnage, internal displacements, refugee crises, loss of investments, fatal inter-communal conflicts and threatened internal security and distrust (Uhunwangho and Eppelle, 2011). The crises which from all indications are traceable to Nigeria diverse ethno-religious background has escalated over the years and has now assumed on alarming dimension. Instances of the crises are, the Boko Haram insurgency, MASSOB/IPOB agitation for actualization of Biafra and numerous inter-ethnic crises in the Middle belt, Niger Delta, Jos, Ebonyi, Cross River and Benue States, which all speak volumes of the huge crises Nigeria is currently contending with. The crises of course invariably have a diversionary effect on the Nigerian government, which has sunk millions of Naira in fighting these crises
without even making any headway. These conflicts have also negatively impacted on our economy and retarded our economic growth. Besides, most foreign investors have since fled Nigeria because of the pervading insecurity in the country; they now prefer more stable African economies like, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda etc.

The bad economy and insecurity occasioned by violence has equally forced Nigerian intellectuals and professionals to migrate to UK, USA, and Canada etc for greener pastures and maximum security, thereby leaving Nigeria under-developed and impoverished, little wonder Nigeria is now ranked one of the poorest nations in the world. This situation is least to say very worrisome and calls for drastic measures in order to salvage our dear country from total economic collapse. The problem at stake is also a major concern to the international community, in fact, the United States National Council Intelligence Report of May 28, 2005 predicted that Nigeria may explode within 15 years (Agbaje, 2005).

This paper as the abstract depicts therefore aims at identifying and examining the immediate and remote causes of these incessant violent conflicts in Nigeria. The paper equally examines the consequences of these ethno-religious conflicts on Nigeria’s economic development and proffers recommendations majorly from legal perspective.

**Examination of Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria**

Africa and indeed Nigeria is seriously plagued by diverse conflicts. These conflicts are mostly traceable to differences in religious and ethnic identities, control of state power, and unequal allocation of resources. (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). Between 1999 and 2013 alone, more than 11,000 deaths occurred, in consequence of five hundred incidents of communal violence. Ethnic violence has continued to be a daily phenomenon in Nigeria till date especially in Niger Delta, North West and Middle Belt (Uzodike, and Whetho, 2011). Communal conflicts have become one of Nigeria’s most deadly and destabilizing security challenge. The most negatively impacted states are those in Nigeria Middle Belt like Benue, Taraba and Plateaus. Available statistical data reveal that communal conflict reached its peak in 2004 and 2011 with around 2,000 fatalities. In 2015, 700 fatalities were recorded. In March 2019 again, many people were killed following bloody communal clash in Agatu, Benue State, houses were razed down as a result of a disagreement over the ownership of a farmland and fish pond. On April 8 2019, it was reported by “Our Reporter” that 8 persons including a three month old baby were killed in a resumed boundary dispute between two communities in Ebonyi State. There is also this unending communal clash between Ukelle in Iyalla Local Government Area of Cross-River State and their neighbours in Igbe-Agu, Izzi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State on Friday June 2018. At least 40 people were killed, many maimed and 1,500 houses set ablaze. There were destructions of farmlands and livestock. On 15th of February 2019, the communities clashed again (Wodu and Nnachi, 2019). The economic losses to the Nigerian economy as a result of the activities of these crises cannot be easily quantified. Aside the destruction of lives and property, several families have been dislocated with countless people physically and psychologically maimed for life. The conflicts have also grossly affected the food production output of the displaced farmers. Again, the future and ambitions of many Nigerians, particularly children have been cut short or disrupted. While local economy suffers grievous harm. Foreign investors as earlier observed are now scared away because of the many violent communal clashes in the country.

It is glaring that the frequency of these incidents are indicative that we are teetering towards a lawless society with all the attendant frightening social and economic implications. There is therefore an urgent need to rise up to this situation and address there nagging problem before Nigeria descends to a state of anarchy (This Day, 2019). It is also noteworthy, since the beginning of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic in 1999; communal conflicts have taken a new dimension in the form of Farmer/Herder violence which has killed over 10,000 people. (Mea Risk, 2018). The majority of the farmer – herder clashes have occurred between Muslims Fulani herdsmen and Christian farmers thereby exacerbating ethno – religious hostilities in Nigeria. These clashes have occurred in the middle belt e.g. Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba States. Zamfara in the Northern Belt recorded 229 deaths. In 2015 Fulani Militants were involved in non-state armed conflict with groups from Eggon, Jukun and Tiv farming communities and these clashes resulted in 800 deaths. (Global Terrorism Index, 2015).2016, witnessed similar incidents in Agatu, Benue and Nimbo Enugu State. In 2019
June over 200 people were killed and 50 houses burnt in clashes between farmers and Fulani cattle herders in Plateau. 
Lastly, increased agitations of IPOB and MASSOB of late for the actualization of the State of Biafra in the South East have further escalated communal violence in Nigeria as many lives have been lost and property destroyed in South-East.

Examination of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

Religious conflict in Nigeria could be said to have experienced an upsurge in the 1980s due to the death of Mohammed Marma (Maitatsine). In the same decade, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida enrolled Nigeria in organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and this movement aggravated religious tensions in the country. In the same 1980s, serious outbreaks between Christians and Muslims occurred in Kafanchan in Southern Kaduna State. The leaders were able to polarize their followers through speeches and public speeches (Wikipedia). In 1991, the German Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke attempted a Crusade in Kano which resulted in a lot of deaths in Kano.

Since 2009, the Islamist movement Boko Haram has also fought an armed religious rebellion. This Sect believes that western education is sinful. The group from all indications has two main aims, namely:

1. The opposition of what it considers to be the secular westernization of Nigeria especially co-educational system of learning

Boko Haram has unleashed and is still unleashing untold terrorism in Nigeria till date. The abduction of 200 Chibok girls, in 2014, attracted serious global outcry and condemnation. Since, the emergence of this Boko Haram terrorism, Nigeria government has had a running battle with it the insurgents and many Nigeria military personnel killed, property destroyed. Educational system disrupted and billions of naira wasted by Nigerian government in a bid to stem the violence.

Ethno – Religious Conflict and under – development in Nigeria

The above litany of ethno – religious conflicts in Nigeria have left untold adverse effect on the socio, political and economic life of the nation (Nwaomah, 2011). These conflicts have resulted in loss of lives, property and have succeeded in fracturing the Christian/Muslim relationship in Nigeria (Onabanjo, 2011). It has equally hindered genuine national integration. The resultant effects of ethno – religious conflict on Nigerian economic development which is the focus of this paper are enormous. It pervades all the sectors of the economy, it breeds insecurity, discriminations, mutual mistrust and it retards economic development. This is aside from thousands of lives that are wasted and maimed on daily basis (Apuwabi, 2018).

These incessant ethno – religious conflicts in Nigeria paints an embarrassing and ugly picture and sends the dangerous signal to the global world that Nigeria is a terrorist nation. This invariably adversely affects the reputation of Nigeria and scares foreign investors and tourists. There is no gainsaying the fact that every economy can only thrive in an atmosphere of peace. Nigeria, from all indication would have been a tourist haven if not for these violence (Onwumah, 2014), most tourists now prefer going to more secured and stable countries like Kenya, Egypt, Ghana to establish their industries and businesses because Nigeria is currently considered unsafe. Ethno – religious conflict therefore negatively affects the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flow into Nigeria. It is a well-established fact that FDI has positive relationship with economic growth and development as the more the FDI flows in a country, the more the job employment opportunities and higher standard living. It is a well known fact that every economy can only thrive in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. The crises has equally taken its toll on the educational sector, it has led to incessant closure of schools, destruction of school facilities, abduction and raping of school girls by Boko Haram insurgents. The correlation between ethno-religious Conflict and under-development was well captured by Onwumah (2014) when he posited that:

In economic terms, religious and ethnicity crises damage resources and facilities which took time to be acquired. No foreign investor will like to invest funds in country that is divided by communal religious and ethnic crises.
The reasons for the above are obliviously two–fold; firstly, every investor targets maximal profit of which is not possible in a conflict ridden environment like Nigeria. Secondly, any resources invested in conflict or crises prone environment will eventually go down the drains. It is glaring from the foregoing discourse that ethno–religious conflict is a menace that has succeeded in hindering rapid economic development and national integration in Nigeria. It a huge diversionary trend and an obstacle to economic growth as billions of naira that should have been channeled toward developing Nigeria have been wasted fighting the insurgency, militancy and communal conflicts and this has left Nigeria more impoverished than ever. No wonder Nigeria is now ranked one of the poorest nations of the world.

Major Causes of Ethno–Religious Conflict in Nigeria
(1) Ethno-religious conflicts unlike other social conflicts involves different ethnic groups with different religions. Nigerians have in the past complained of religious and ethnic discriminations at the federal and state levels and this has exacerbated these conflicts under discourse.
(2) Another major cause of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria has been the use of religion and ethnicity in political discourse, actions and government appointments. It is therefore apparent that allegations of neglect, oppression and domination are the major causes that fuel ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. (Salawu, 2010).
(3) Nigeria, like many African countries lack a consensus as to how necessary changes or reforms can be equitably effected. Naturally tensions would often arise when a particular ethnic or religious group feels they are denied the attempt to increase their stake in relation to power or wealth (Apuwabi, 2018).
(4) Nigerian government inability to formulate good government policies that would promote national integration has resulted in massive unemployment and this correlates with increase of communal/religious conflicts as an idle man is the devil’s workshop.
(5) It has been posited that low standard of democracy as a result of protracted military interferences in politics has legalized the application of coercion and violence as tools for social change. In other words long Military interference in governance in Nigeria in the past has culminated in the current frequent application of force as a means of settling misunderstanding.
(6) The conspicuous absence or abandonment of the erstwhile traditional methods of social control involving Traditional rulers, religious leaders and elders of the community which were characteristic of traditional African societies has led to escalation of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria (Haldun and Adedoyin, 2016).
(7) Finally the major causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria include inter-alia; lack of genuine desire to understand each other’s religious belief and culture; Hate speeches against one ethnic group and religion and extremisms from the two sides have also exacerbated ethno-religious crises in Nigeria (Apuwabi, 2018).

Way Forward: Law to the Rescue
Nigeria has over the years relied heavily on orthodox court litigation system in resolving ethno–religious conflicts without achieving much desired results. It is has been observed that many factors inherent in our orthodox court system have been responsible for this. These factors include; high cost of litigation; complexity of procedure; rancor; slowness; inconvenience; lack of privacy etc. These factors have over the year constituted a clog in the wheel of progress in fighting ethno–religious conflicts in Nigeria (Nwabachili, 2017). Since it is glaring that the social problem under discourse is fast assuming an alarming and threatening dimension on daily basis there is every need for us to re-strategize, as it is strongly believed and advocated that litigation as a method of resolution of ethno–religious conflict should be jettisoned as it has woefully failed the nation. The paper therefore advocates a more humane approach, which is mediation. This method is faster, cheaper, and more convenient, less formal and compliance level higher as the parties have jointly midwifed the outcome of the mediation. It has been observed that mediation has in the past played a significant role in settling most communal/religious conflicts in Nigeria because of its enormous advantage and acceptability. For instance, Aguleri/Umuleri crises that lasted for years were resolved via dialogue between the two communities in collaboration with traditional rulers, religious leaders and subjects. Oaths were administered and this brought about a long lasting peace to the war torn communities. It is therefore suggested that a leaf ought to be taken from Aguleri/Umuleri experience. These conflicts should be tackled from the grass root or less formal environment. There should also be interaction and dialoguing between the
warring parties in order to identify the root causes of the conflict and this will definitely facilitate a way forward in order to forestall the repetition of such conflicts in the future. It is a well-known fact that subjects have a great respect and pay great allegiance to their traditional leaders. The government should therefore endeavor to set up ad hoc committees consisting of village heads, communal and religious leaders. Whatever decisions that are arrived at by the ad-hoc committee should be signed and documented by the parties and made public and could be presented to the courts for legal backing and enforcement.

CONCLUSION
It is quite evident that ethno – religious conflicts in Nigeria have fueled insecurity, violence and have succeeded in driving Nigeria into further poverty and under-development. Nigeria is now labeled one of the poorest countries of the world despite its abundant human and material resources. The crises has further succeeded in driving away most investors from Nigeria and existing ones have since folded and settled in other more secured African countries. Billions of naira that should have been utilized in building industries and infrastructures and schools has been diverted towards fighting ethno – religious conflicts, insurgency and militancy. It is firmly believed that more reliance on mediation and dialoguing, especially at the grass-root levels would go a long way in curbing this turbulent societal menace in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The paper recommends:
1. Grass-root community based dialoguing instead of court litigation should be relied on in the event of eruption of ethno – religious conflicts in Nigeria.
2. Modern alternative dispute resolution management mechanism like Arbitration, Mediation, and Conciliation should be relied on more in resolving Ethno-religious conflict.
3. Transparency and good Governance by Nigerian government is advocated. There should be fairness and transparency in governing the country. The government should eschew favoritism. No particular ethnic group or religious group should be given government protection. This has become imperative if a lasting peace would be restored in Nigeria.
4. Proper awareness of the advantages of alternative dispute resolution should be canvassed.
5. ADR should be introduced in our school curriculum. The content of the course should include but not limited to the common heritage we share as Nigerians, principles of nation building and the negative impact of violence on national development. The National Youth Service Corp Service NYSC orientation should also include an aspect of this.
6. Corruption by Government official should be curbed as it generates conflicts and under-development.
7. Public disclosure of all findings of ad hoc Committees is advocated.

REFERENCES


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**BIOGRAPHY OF PROFESSOR CHIKA SYLVIA IFEMEJE**

Sylvia Chika Ifemeje, holds a PhD in Law and is a Professor of Laws at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. She specializes in Gender Rights Law. She teaches Law of Evidence, Family Law and International Human Rights Law both at Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels, she was a former Head of Dept of Public and Private Law and former Sub – Dean Faculty of Law Nnamdi Azikiwe University. She has published widely in both local and international reputable journals.

**BIOGRAPHY OF DR. HELEN OBIAGELI OBI**

Helen Obiageli Obi holds a Ph.D in Law and is a lecturer at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. She specializes in Family Law and Gender Right. She teaches Family Law and Legal Method at Undergraduate Level. She has published widely in both local international reputable journals.

*Email Address: helentonyobi@yahoo.com*

*Phone Number: 08034721460*