



BEYOND CONFLICT: A QUEST FOR POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN NIGERIA

*Obi Jane Uchechukwu

Centre for Peace Advancement and Socio-Economic Development (CPAED), Nigeria

**jennycreativity@gmail.com*

Abstract

Armed violence and corruption are a widespread, affecting public institutions and the well-being of the citizens, which no meaningful development has been achieved since Nigeria's fourth Republic 1999. Corruption is wide spread among political leaders and government officials who have established a closed and centralized system of dictatorship and authoritarianism as a means of holding power to propagate a class system that marginalized those of lower socio-economic status, thereby inflicting unspeakable hardship and poverty on millions of Nigerians, violates their human rights, and destroys harmonious environments. To this end, the paper examines the state of peace and development in Nigeria, highlighting some drivers and dynamics of violent conflicts and their connections to politics and corruption. It provides a context-specific understanding of how transformed government can be; it can serve its citizens while providing home-grown solutions rooted in local architectures for promoting peace, transparent, and accountable governance with focus to people-centred development. The paper utilized field experiences, Desk research, Literatures reviews, In-depth interviews, and descriptive analysis as research techniques. Key findings as highlighted, such as voter intimidation and fraud; .Bad leadership, corruption and lack of transparency accountability; Class system and socio-economic inequality; Intolerance, stereotypes and mistrust have heightened violent conflicts and pushed so many into abject poverty, leading to Nigeria being perceived as a failed state. In conclusion, peace can only be achieved when National. State and local actors collaborate to address drivers of conflicts. Oversight functions on public institutions, widening civic spaces for dialogue and participation and promoting transparency and accountability of public proceedings. A shift from "MITIGATION to "PREVENTION" is the surest way to deal with conflict/corruption because it is cheaper and saves lives. Without political accountability to governance, the collective aspiration of the people for diversity, inclusion, equality, social cohesion and harmony will be unattainable.

Keywords: *accountability, armed violent, corruption, participation, transparency*

Introduction

Armed conflict and violence in Nigeria have grown in strength and trend, with its impact felt in different regions. Across the 36 states of Nigeria, issues around armed violence, transparency and accountability, corruption, and inadequate citizens' participation had left much to be desired and become the subject of many discussions. Political leaders have established closed, and centralized political systems of dictatorship and authoritarianism as a means of holding power to propagate corruption and promoted a class system that marginalized those of lower socio-economic status, thereby inflicting unspeakable hardship on millions of Nigerians, violating human rights and rule of laws as well as destroys



harmonious environments. No wonder states in Nigeria are on the verge of collapsing and social norms and values that hold communities together are broken because of this economic and political decline, a culture of secrecy, a web of disinformation, and an easy flow of illegal arms and public funds. This has engineered violent conflicts and driven crime that put the lives and welfare of millions of Nigerians at risk, with women, youth, and children suffering the most.

To this end, the paper seeks to examine the state of peace and development in Nigeria, highlighting some drivers and dynamics of violent conflicts and their connections to politics and corruption. It provides a context-specific understanding of how transformed government can be; so that it can serve its citizens while providing home grown solutions rooted in local architectures for the promotion of peace, transparent, and accountable governance with a focus on people-centred development. To achieve peace and development, shifting from “MITIGATION ” to “PREVENTION” is the surest way to deal with conflict/corruption because it is cheaper and saves lives. Without political accountability to governance, the collective aspiration of the people for diversity, inclusion, equality, social cohesion and harmony will be unattainable.

Literature Review

Armed violence, democracy, and corruption in Nigeria

There are many definitions of what constitutes a democracy, yet all have in common two things: a democracy that protects the freedom and liberties of the people and makes the electoral process open, fair, and credible. According to Finnish, a Political Scientist, and Tatu Vahanen, stated that power holders are elected by and responsible to the people because democracy has explicit values- inclusion, consensus building, freedom of information, association, and peaceful expressions, which are natural tools for promoting a harmonious society.

Since the 1960s, Nigeria has faced numerous challenges of armed violence and ranked 143 out of 162 independent countries worldwide most affected by violence in the global peace index. According to Human right Watch, over 15,700 people have been killed in armed violence since the country’s transit from a military regime to civil rule in 1999. In addition, ethno-religious motivated violence has led to casualties and subsequent displacement. In the 2000s, sectarian violence emerged with Boko Haram insurgents and herder and farmers crisis in the North, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-east, Militants in the South-south, and Omotekun in the South-west leading to wanton killings and destruction of properties. Every day, people die from armed violence, so many are forced to flee from their homes/communities and young people live in a climate of fear, tension, and uncertainty with response to conflict often low, poor, and inadequate. The overall impact is “CATASTROPHIC” and thwarted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It heightens poverty, halts investment, breaks the social fabric, and shatters potential. (Collette & Cullen 2000). On the political front, structural and



systemic discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization disfranchise people and ferment conflicts and violence. Bad governance, uneven growth, identity, and diversity, gender inequality, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, youth restiveness, illegal arms flow, and border porosity are contributing factors driving the violence. No wonder states in Nigeria are on the verge of collapsing. Like the Israelites under Pharaoh's bondage, Nigeria is waiting and praying for Moses to deliver them. The truth remains that Nigerians desire drastic political changes but are helpless and not convinced that politicians can deliver their desire and achieve results.

Quest for Political Accountability and Making Shift For A Change

It is not enough to examine the causes of conflict it is important to understand how to manage it. According to MC Donald 2003, Schukoske 2003, managing conflict is based on stakeholders' actions and their countless responses, while Shaheen Mozaffar and Andreas Schedler (2002) posit that people are the primary source of democratic government and to ensure the unbiased rule of laws and procedures, the institution must be impartial. So addressing violence requires effective stakeholders' engagement to hold the government accountable on commitments made so far, particularly when Nigeria is facing the strongest head-winds and the 2023 general election is heated up. Governments need to be supported to fulfill their commitment and where they fall short of international standards, they must be encouraged to improve them or be pushed to accept the real political change mantra. Governments must commit to socio-economic and political reforms, including free, fair, and credible elections. When the government commits, the civil society, international community, media, community leaders, and political stakeholders must hold them to account for their promises. With the fundamental change, there is the need for a political system where political leaders account for funds used and the management of public resources. This will ensure accountability and indicate that democracy is not for the highest bidder. When politicians know that they have to rely on the electorates for their votes, it will keep them on their toes. It is such a systemic transformation that will yield good candidates that can drive sustainable peace and development.

Methodology

The paper examines the state peace and development in Nigeria and highlights some drivers and dynamics of violent conflicts and their connections to politics and corruption. It provides a context-specific understanding of how government can be transformed to serve its citizens while providing homegrown solutions rooted in local architectures for the promotion of peace and transparent and accountable governance with a focus on people-centered development. Information in this paper was extracted through literature reviews, desk research, field experiences, in-depth interviews, and descriptive and explanatory research techniques.



Results and Discussions

The results and discussions in this paper present a holistic picture of contextual issues as findings to posit the level of peace and development in Nigeria. These are the followings:

Voter intimidation and fraud:

In Nigeria, Politics and armed violence are closely intertwined. Violent struggles by political groups for power and distribution of resources often accompany elections and other political events. Militant groups- whether formal or informal, are often recruited, patronized, or sponsored to unleash violence on political opponents or suppress their ability to campaign or vote during elections. This resulted in various assassinations, rival clashes, and sporadic secessionism across Nigeria's states.

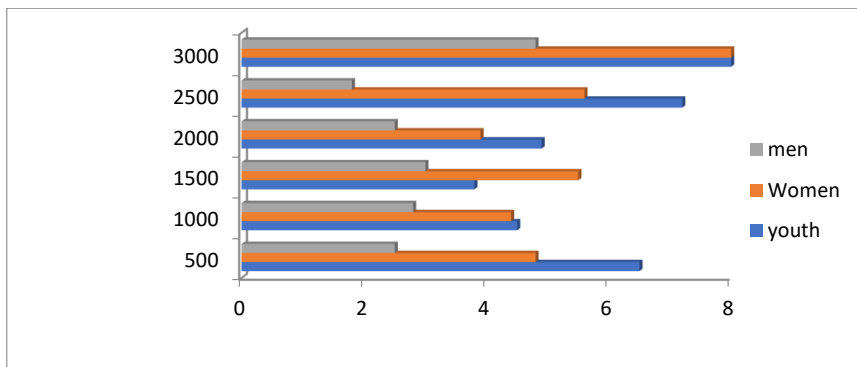


Figure 1: Political Armed violence in Nigeria and reported fatalities

This underscores that youth are forcibly recruited and manipulated to perpetrate violence leading to thousands of their death. On the other hand, women were often on the ground to vote during the election as victims of violence.

Bad leadership, Corruption, lack of transparency and accountability

Despite the effort of the government and non-governmental organizations to fight against corruption, this is a major problem that has pushed so many Nigerians into abject poverty and escalated violent conflict. The extent of armed violence in Nigeria has originated from both political actions and inactions, leading to a failed state and citizens taking responsibility for their security and survival.

The class system and socio-economic inequality

This has deepened inequality and heightened discrimination among people. This is clearly seen in the difference between the political leaders/ Elites and the rest of the population within the lower socio-economic status. They are mired in a pocket of abject poverty and resource deprivation. However, wealth inequality as a result of the class system is the driver of violent conflicts and armed violence.

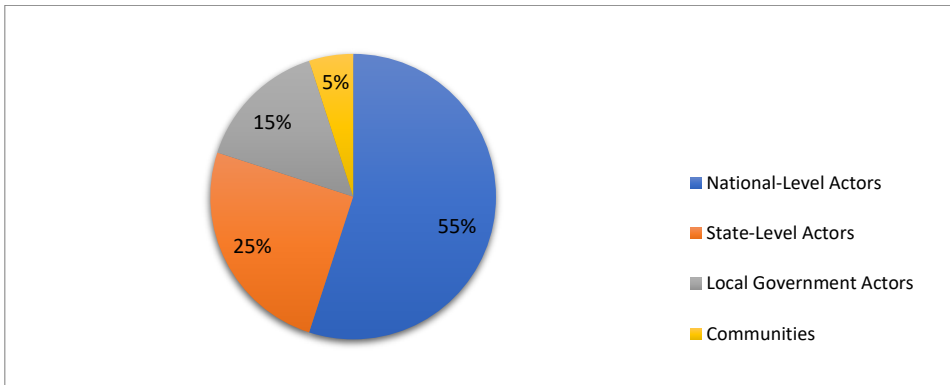


Figure 2: Inequality of wealth in a political class system

Intolerance, stereotype, and mistrust

Identity overlaps within culturally defined groups are potential of conflicts drivers of conflicts, break the social fabric and shatter potential investments. Indigenous minorities have been a contextual issue in Nigeria. This implies that no matter how long families or individual(s) may have resided in a particular location, not a place of their origin, they are perceived as **Migrants**, mistreated, and deprived of access to land, resources, and public offices. This fostered intercommunal violence that ravaged the country's potential investments and caused millions of deaths and the destruction of properties

Conclusion

Despite efforts so far toward building peace in Nigeria, conflict continues to spread because deep-rooted drivers are embedded in our social fabric. Peace can only be achieved when National, State and local actors collaborate to address drivers of conflicts. When people feel safe and secure; there is a good chance that societal diversity and inclusion will be valued, equality will be actively pursued among different people in the communities, and guarantee social cohesion. I believe that governments at all levels will see armed violence and corruption as a considerable challenge that requires collective efforts to address the scourge. It is suggested that achieving sustainable peace and development oversight function on public institutions, widening civic spaces for dialogue, and participation and promoting transparency and accountability of public proceedings. A shift from reaction to prevention is the surest way to deal with conflict/corruption because "PREVENTION" is cheaper and saves lives than "MITIGATION. Without good governance, the collective aspiration of the people for social harmony, mutual trust, and relationship, as well as peace and development, will be unattainable.

Recommendations

- Government to develop and expand information sharing, dialogue, and feedback mechanisms to enhance citizens' engagement and strengthen local structures.



- Government to improve transparency and accountability through citizen-oriented participatory budget processes, implementation of rule of law, and fiscal responsiveness.
- Government to ensure an effective and efficient procurement system for better contract outcomes, guarantee value for money, and ensure transparency and accountability through robust civic participation.
- Improved equitable access to quality health and educational services through an improved partnership with stakeholders so that essential services can be delivered impartially to reach those in need, including women, girls, and children, as well as PLWD.
- Government should prioritize peace-building and developmental needs and develop a framework to achieve Agenda 2030.
- Government to provide a life of dignity for all and reduce political apathy from the citizens
- CSOs allow for seamless engagement with the government as this will promote diversity, inclusion, and a culture of tolerance and help marginalized communities/groups exercise their voices and assert their rights so that their needs be met.
- Anticorruption institutions should operate independently to halt illicit financial outflows and curb excessive capitalist accumulation.
- Link-local and national response teams/ mechanism to reflect early warning and early response system
- International communities to assist government and CSOs in coordination and support monitoring of peace-building efforts involving dialogue and experience sharing with local and regional mechanisms as well as work on funding solutions that address violent conflicts through adequate and sustained finances.
- All must observe human rights in the community; as such, it is central to achieving sustainable peace and development.
- Political parties should provide space with a political arena for citizen participation as an advocate of constituency issues.

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