

National Security for Sustainable Development in Nigeria: The Role of Religious Leaders

Okoh, Blessing Uenoson

Department Of Religious Studies

University Of Delta

Agbor, Delta State

E-mail: blessen4favour@gmail.com

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Abstract

The scourge of insecurity in Nigeria has become a recurring decimal that threatens the protection of lives and properties. This invariably poses danger to sustainable development. It has become of great concern to us in the nation. Government effort to address the scourge which include public security awareness campaigns, equipping the security agencies, amnesty programmes, job creation to mention a few have not yielded the desired results. This could be as a result lack of political will by leaders at various levels, policy inconsistencies and the craze for wealth. Security is a necessary ingredient for sustainable development in Nigeria. This paper therefore examines the possible role religious leaders could play in addressing national security for sustainable development in Nigeria. Historical-descriptive method was employed in this enterprise. It concludes with the fact that any attempt to effect societal change with regard to national security without involving Religious Leaders is tantamount to ignoring one of the crucial catalysts for that process. The paper recommends that Religious leaders by virtue of their grass-root support and coverage should co-operate with governmental agencies to stem the tide of insecurity of lives and properties in the country. Until and unless this is done, the goal of sustainable development of the country will be difficult if not impossible to achieve.

Keywords: Religious Leaders, National Security, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Religion is one important feature of human existence that cannot ordinarily be underplayed. The history of humanity is replete with man's adherence to various super-natural injunctions. Such injunctions have aided socio-educational development, inter-personal and international cooperation. It has been an underlying force, precipitating conflicts, civil and international oppression. As a double edged sword, religion can make or mar, depending on how it is used. Nevertheless, if well harnessed, the religious virtues of Nigerians can be used to promote national security and sustainable development. The focus of this paper is on possible ways religious leaders can make meaningful contributions to the attainment of internal security which is a

contributory factor to the realization of sustainable development.

Background of the Study

Security means safety or protection from harm and danger to the ordinary man. According to Isiaka (2005) “Security” implies the protection, of lives and properties of people from various forms of threat. He furthered postulates that “national security” is of uttermost concern and a priority to any government. Longley (2021) buttressed this by stating that “national security is the ability of a country’s government to protect its citizens, economy and other institutions”. Imobighe and Okonkwo (2018) adds that “without security the state is bound to experience great difficulty in harnessing its human and natural resources for the general wellbeing of the people”. National security is an indispensable factor in national development.

National security can mean the safety of a country against threats such as terrorism, war and kidnapping. It is the duty of government to secure its citizens, economy and their aspects of the nation. This is, further buttressed by Ebo (1997) that “the security of a nation is ultimately to be found in the security of the citizen”. Every government all over the world makes security of lives and property within its territorial area of coverage a priority agenda, just as it makes the survival, continuity, defense and security of the state a primary goal (Onovo, 2009). National Security is one of the chief responsibilities of the government of any nation like Nigeria. It also involves developing useful partnerships and alliances with other nations, in a bid to foster economic growth and free trade. This is attested to by Gurama (2010), who sees security as the backbone of any society and is tied to its social, political, economic and cultural growth. Negligence of this vital ingredient of development has led to all manner of social ills, including violent crimes such as armed robbery, ritual killings, child trafficking, kidnapping and others. Apart from the regular security outfits such as the Army and the Police, several agencies have been established to complement these bodies. These include the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDEA) and several others. In spite of the existence of these agencies and the huge financial allocation to them, achieving the goals of national security remains a herculean task. A paradigm shift therefore becomes necessary. The study advocates a collaborative venture between agencies of government that are saddled with the task of national security and faith based organizations represented by their leaders. Such a synergy is relevant to achieve internal security objectives and sustainable development in the country

What is Internal Security?

Safety and survival constitute priorities of the modern states. In nowhere are these priorities more meaningful than in the areas of internal security. In this paper, internal security implies the existence of a state of tranquility, peace, orderliness and safety of persons and property in a state (Ehianu & Idahosa 2012). It indicates the absence of any form of threats to life, property, human rights and the socio-economic and political wellbeing of the people (Ehianu & Idahosa).

What is Sustainable Development?

This refers to development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is effectively balancing socio-economic and environmental objectives in decision making.

Who is a Religious Leader?

Your Dictionary (2019) defines a religious leader as someone who is recognized by a

religious body as having some authority within that body. The Free Dictionary (2019) also defines a religious leader as a person who rules or guides or inspires others. Again, religious leaders and faith communities are the largest and best organized civil institutions in the world, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers in the world and bridging the divides of race, class and nationality. They are often the most respected figures in their communities.

Collins English Dictionary (2019) defines religious leader as one who is recognized within a particular religion as having authority within that body. Religious leaders are not just clergy men, imams, pastors in their various ranks and files. They include leaders of religious communities at every level, including men, women and youth. They are widely known and hold positions of respect and authority in their local communities. Nigerians in the strict and natural sense of the word are seriously religious, of which it can rightly be said that they eat religiously, drink and dress religiously. For them, their religion is their existence and their existence their religion. Mbiti (1969) struck the right chord when he said ‘Africans are notoriously religious’ As a result, it is hard to separate the life and living of a Nigerian from his religion. This was confirmed by a BBC Survey (2004), which revealed that an average Nigerian attends a church, mosque or other religious services more often than most other nationalities. In essence, here lies my contention that the importance of religious leaders in the context of national security effort is apt and timely.

Religious Leaders and National Security

The following are possible areas religious leaders can lend their support in the making of an internally safe and secured country.

- i. **Shaping Public Attitudes and Opinions:** Religious leaders play vital role in shaping attitudes, opinions and behaviors not because of their grassroots support but because of the trust and confidence their followers repose in them. At the family and communities level, their advice, opinion and explanations are sought on national and local programme, policies and decisions. They set the parameters of acceptable behaviors. As consultants of a sort, they are in position to shape social values often in line with the teachings of their faith. Social values are moral beliefs and principles that are accepted by the majority so as to ensure the continuity of a society (Ergil, 1984). The decisions we make on daily basis are a reflection of our values and beliefs and are most times directed towards a specific purpose. The aim or purpose is the realization of individual or collective need, even in the area of national security. According to Barret (2016), values are based on what is important to a people, what we need to feel a sense of well-being. Values help to shape a nation. As said earlier, religious bodies constitute and form the moral compass of their followers. Therefore, they are expected to use this privileged office to inculcate the right virtues in their congregation. Such virtues as respect for lives,, love, mercy, forgiveness, tolerance, accommodation, patience and sundry other virtues which are indispensable ingredients for peace and security must be explicit in their words and actions so that their faithful may be so influenced.
- ii. **Authority:** According to Snyder (2016), religious leaders have authority across large percentages of the population. As faith leaders, they speak to the heart of people’s decision making and identities. Snyder went further to state that the beliefs and priorities which religious leaders hold must be heard and recognized. And that when this takes place, they are empowered as agents of positive change as regards national security. They must not be instrumentalized by politicians but motivated by the fear of God and love for their nation. As the conscience of the nation, their actions must promote peace and

- security. Religious leaders interact with their communities, almost on daily basis, whether speaking from the pulpit or in their day-day relationship with their people. These interactions could be avenues to nip violence in the bud.
- iii. **Privileged Access to Leadership/Security Agencies:** Religious leaders do not only wield authority on their congregations, they also have access to the government of the day at all levels. This is critical if national security must be achieved. They have access to persons of all ages and social strata. In a society where citizens are afraid to report acts that run contrary to public peace to law enforcement agencies for fear of reprisal, religious leaders could fill the gap as the people have more confidence in them than in the statutory law enforcement agencies. Information is vital in matters of peace and security. Synergy between religious leaders and security agencies will enable the latter to secure the needed information to curb crime and criminality in the country. For instance, they know preachers whose teachings are likely to result in breach of public peace. They also know when foreign clergy with violent antecedence enters the country and are expected to alert security agencies. Women Organizations such as the Mothers' Union, and Women's Guild in Nigeria operate on Provincial, Diocesan, Archdeaconry, Parish and Station levels which give them far-reaching coverage. The Mothers' Union is a world-wide organization which promotes the well-being of families based on Christian teachings. The Women's Guild is a church organization for all baptized Women in the Anglican of Nigeria (Ekpenisi, 2020). These organizations are leading the way in providing avenues for women to transform from being passive victims of violence to active agents of national security. Partnership with these women organization could be supportive in the fight against insecurity in the country.
- iv. **Peace Making:** Religious leaders are by their calling peace-makers. For example, the Christian faith with its founder Jesus Christ, said "Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called the children of God (Matt. 5:9). Peace is at the heart of the Christian faith. The Hebrew word shalom translated "Peace" refers to the complete well being of an individual, a city or a country, including its material prosperity and safety. *Merriam – Websters Learner Dictionary* defines peace as a state of tranquility or quiet. Islam is also a religion of peace while African Traditional Religion also promotes peaceful co-existence. It then follows that the leaders of the three major religions in Nigeria should be apostles of peace, freedom harmony and peaceful coexistence.
- v. **Practical Religiousity:** The objective for the teaching of Christian Religious and Moral Education in schools as encapsulated by the National Commission for Colleges of Education [N.C.C.E] include: *inter-alia*;
- i. To demonstrate sound knowledge and appreciation of moral values needed to live as a Christian at various stages of growth and development;
- ii. to live as a Christian in the community and radiate attitudes and values which are typical of a mature and responsible member of the Christian community;
- iii. To promote good human relationship and value for human life.
The objectives above buttress the fact that the Nigerian Government recognizes the usefulness of religion in its quest for peace and security. As custodians of these aspirations, religious leaders are not only expected to inculcate these values, into their faithful but to be embodiments of same in their private and public lives.
- vi. **Speaking Out:** Religious leaders, no doubt have the onerous task of honestly speaking out against prejudice, corruption, ethnicity, discrimination, injustice, oppression and other

situations that provide fertile ground for violence to thrive. As a result of their exalted positions, the political class listens to them. Their actions set precedence, their strength and integrity afford them the opportunity to make meaningful impact in mitigating violence in the society. Therefore, any message on national security by religious leaders is potent enough in changing the behavioural pattern of the Nigerian people especially the youth who are more vulnerable to negative tendencies.

vii, **Co-operation and Understanding among Different Religious Leaders in Nigeria**

The need for co-operation and understanding among different religious leaders is crucial in the fight against national insecurity. Mutual relationship and proper networking among religious leaders will create a united force against the common enemy called insecurity. This is buttressed by Yakawich, N. (2018), who said that Muslim and Christian leaders are collaborating against violent extremism in Southern Kaduna through Global Peace Foundation (GPF) and the Nigerian Interfaith Peace building efforts. On the 10th of May, 2018, the “One family under God Campaign” gathered community stakeholders and faith leaders for the Southern Kaduna Peace and Reconciliation Committee Dialogue Forum with security agencies in attendance. In the same vein, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, Governor of Ekiti State on 27th of June, 2019 affirmed that only collaborative approach by all sectors of the Nigerian population could successfully tackle and overcome current security challenges facing the country. He stressed that security of lives and properties was crucial to social-economic development which explains why his administration had taken proactive measures to curtail security challenges.

According to Fasola (2001), “religion must sustain all men and women in a network of love, and must cast our traumatized world in a rich mosaic of peace, justice, brotherhood, solidarity, mutual acceptance, equality and freedom”. These qualities are incarnated in all religions. Akokotu (2017), a religious leader advocated that every Nigerian has something to contribute towards the corporate peace and security of Nigeria and that the leaders have greater roles to play in this pursuit.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Insecurity in Nigeria is a great threat to the attainment of security of lives, properties and sustainable development goals. Governments at various levels claim to be on top of the situation, yet the scourge continues unabated. Perhaps because of the neglect of an important institution in the country-religious organizations represented by their leaders. Religious leaders have the power to promote and support public policy that protects lives and properties. They offer support to followers of their religion through spiritual and moral guidance. Any attempt to effect societal change with regard to national security without involving them, is tantamount to ignoring one of the most important catalysts for that process. Their influence can be a profound motivator for non – violence. For religious leaders to improve in the performance of their duties in conflict prevention, management and resolution, the following are recommended:

- ❖ there must be constant and regular training of religious leaders on national security;
- ❖ they should also help to issue press statements and grant interviews in the media on the factors that fuel violence and insecurity and its effects on sustainable development;
- ❖ there is the need for religious leaders to emphasis love, equity, justice, tolerance, sanctity of human lives and other virtues that will promote national security;

- ❖ they must continue to preach the word of God with all honesty and sincerity for sustainable peace and security;
- ❖ they should connect with other security agencies and establish support groups;
- ❖ they must maintain neutrality in any situation in order to sustain public trust and enhance national security;
- ❖ they must not allow themselves to be bought by politicians for their selfish interest.
- ❖ religious leaders should encourage government to incorporate a course as “Religion and Human Values” in the primary and secondary school curriculum, while “Religion and Peace in multi-faith Nigeria” be made a core-course in General Studies Curriculum of all tertiary institution in Nigeria.

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