



ESUT JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

2005 ISSUE VOLUME 2, JUNE 2005

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. S. I. Udabah
Department of Economics,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology

Dr. S. C. Ugwu
Department of Political Science
Enugu State University of Science and Technology

ODOZI OBODO SEVERUS IFEANYI
Department of Political Science, ESUT, Enugu.

DR. LEONARD IFEANYI UGWU
Department of Psychology,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu.

ANICHE ALEXANDER
Department of Sociology / Anthropology,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu.

DR. FELIX C. ASOGWA
Department of Political Science,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu.

DR. C. A. EZEH
Department of Sociology / Anthropology,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu.

DR. E. C. UJAH
African Institute for Applied Economics, Enugu

ONYUKWU E. ONYUKWU,
Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus.

OGUJIUBA KANAYO K.
African Institute for Applied Economics, Enugu.

JOURNAL

IX

INTER – ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: NEW EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

By

Aniche, Alexander

**Department of Sociology / Anthropology
Enugu State University of Science and
Technology (ESUT) Enugu.**

INTRODUCTION:

According to Okafor (1997:1) " Nigeria is the most populous nation in the African continent. Its population of about one hundred million people is constituted by diverse ethnic nationalities, which have different languages, cultural identities and religious perceptions. As a result of size, human and economic potentials, Nigeria is often looked upon for leadership in Africa. Unfortunately, ethnic conflicts that characterize her history among other things since it gained independent from Britain from 1960 have marred these potentials and in recent times brought her once flourishing economy to ruins.

The concept of ethnicity is associated with culture and is often used interchangeably with culture as well as race or nationality. Usually, ethnic group is used in reference to groups that are characterized in terms of common culture, or language. According to Aniche and Onyia (2002:19) " an ethnic group is a large number of people who see themselves and are seen by others as one people inhabiting a defined geographical contiguous area, speaking one common language which they did not learn as a second language and claim and are reputed as the descendants of a common ancestor, usually mythical. This group can be seen as an extension of the kingship and descent group. Ethnicity on the other hand is a situation when an ethnic group sees itself as "we" and others as "they" and psychologically consider themselves as pitched in a perpetual battle of survival against all these others. According to Otite and Ogiuowo (1979) Ethnicity involves discriminations and strife based on differences in inter – ethnic symbols. Isawa (1994) defined ethnicity in a more expanded way by regarding it as attitude and / or ideology concerning the relationship between an individual's own group and other groups, where positive characteristics of the individual's own group are strongly emphasized while features and members of other groups are denigrated.

Consequently, ethnicity can be seen as any group of people distinguished by common cultural and frequently racial characteristics. The members of most ethnic group have a sense of group identity and larger culture within which they live recognizes them as a distinct aggregation. Inter – ethnic conflict can be seen as the rivals that occurs when different ethnic groups come to enmity.

The inter – ethnic relationship among different tribes in Nigeria is not that of brotherhood but that characterized by mutual suspicion and distrust. Nigeria was put together as one nation by the British at the beginning of this century when Frederick Lugard, a British colonial administrator and the colonial office in London amalgamated

EFFECTS OF INTER – ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA.

According to Okafor (1997:3) inter- ethnic conflicts in Nigeria between 1980 and 1995 alone have claimed several thousand lives and property owned by Nigerians, especially the Igbos have been wantonly destroyed. The frequency and the violent nature of these ethnic confrontations have caused Nigerians residing outside their ethnic enclave to live in fear of uncertainty about their lives and property. The economic havoc, the social disruption and political instability brought about by these ethnic crises are undermining the foundation of the corporate existence of Nigeria.

The consequences of breaking the country as a result of inter – ethnic conflict are hard to imagine and the prospect of another civil war is dreadful and inter – ethnic conflict retard national development. Other effects include :

WAR / DISUNITY

War is certain to happen in the mixture of different tribes. War is also violent conflict between states, tribes and ethnic. Though the word is used to describe other type of conflict – civil war, class war between the sexes. Inter- ethnic conflict leads to war and disunity war is armed conflict or hostilities between one ethnic group and another, between sections of the same polity or state, usually over the related issues of self determination and justice, the distribution of economic and political power and the upholding of fundamental human rights (Igwe: 2002: 470). Inter – ethnic war lead to lost of lives and property. The Igbos and Hausas are always at loggerhead with each other most of the times because of religious reasons.

RETARD NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The concept of development is not very easy to operationalise; hence different individuals have attempted to define it in different ways according to different theoretical inclinations. For some, Gross National Product (GNP) is the main parameter for the measurement of economic development. Thus, development is defined as “rapid and sustained rise in real output per head and the attendant shifts in technological, economic and demographic characteristics of a society (Okpanigbo: 1994).

Inter – ethnic war retards national development. The ethnic groups engage in struggle and planning for war to defeat their opponent to the detriment of planning for development and participating fully in national development. Inter – ethnic conflict does not encourage national development in any form.

NEW SOLUTIONS TO INTER- ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

A number of things could be put in place in order to enable people of diverse origin and values to live with one another in peace and these include:

- A. Religion should serve as a catalyst in the process of advancing better social relationship among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The country should have recourse to and treat with greater seriousness the measure recommended in 1981, by the Aniagolu Tribunal, to promote peace and harmony namely: Government, both federal and state should constitute a public enlightenment division under the ministry of internal affairs of the federal government and home affairs of state governments whose duty, among others, would be vigorously

educate and enlighten the generality of public on the necessity for tolerance among Islamic and other religious groups in the country.

- B. Our, religious institutions should take a look at, and re-access their performances and achievements in terms of inculcating the cherished universal values in the lives of the adherents. It is duty of the various religious authorities to ensure that their members imbibe the virtues of the fear of God, love and tolerance, which should enable them to overcome the primitive tendencies of narrow mindedness, unhealthy rivalry and uncharitableness. A situation whereby those who spearheaded and fan the members of ethnicism and religious bigotry, are the same who constitute the membership of our religious institutions, an indication that these institutions have gone moribund.
- C. The imperative of functional education for the Nigerian citizenry cannot be over – emphasized. The minority of Nigerians still exhibit bestial and primordial propensities capable of disrupting the social order because of the provincial character of their mentality and their privations. It is education that can enable them to change their experience, realize their potentialities, and improve on their social and economic life style and to perform justly and responsibly in the society. Other new ways to curb inter – ethnic conflicts in Nigeria according to Okafor (1997:9) are:
- D. A federal government with reduced powers and reduced attraction will lesson the bitter ethnic politics and violent competition to control power at the center.
- E. Creation of ethnically homogenous states or groups of states or regions will induce confidence in the government. Ethnic homogeneity, reflecting a community of interests, will lesson acrimony and rivalry and also assuage the fear of ethnic domination. Members of the same ethnic group of states, beneficiaries of power divested from the centre, will manage their own resources with greater commitment and accountability. They are likely to be more responsive to the needs of their people and take full control of their destiny.
- F. Conflicts generated by feelings of domination or monopolization of power by one ethnic group leading to a feeling of alienation or marginalization by the rest, especially the ethnic minorities, emphasize the inevitability of power sharing for national unity.
- G. The Armed forces as the security and compulsive instrumentalities of the state should be constituted in such a way as to ensue equitable ethnic representation and inspires confidence. All the ethnic nationalities in their broad groupings should be equitably and effectively represented in the armed forces and the police, not in the ranks but also in the officer corps and command echelon. To further consolidate this, the location of command headquarters and defence installations should equally respect equitable geographical distribution.
- H. Government should evolve a policy that encourage the rapid growth of the educational sector in the Northern Nigeria.
- I. Government should stop any form of inter–ference in religious affairs in Nigeria since this could lead to ethnic conflicts. Religious education in schools should

include knowledge of the fundamental doctrines of the two major religion (Moslem and Christian) in Nigeria.

J. Psychological and social re – orientation of the Nigerians towards thinking and feeling as Nigerians rather than as Hausa – Fulani; or Igbos or Yorubas or as other ethnic components of Nigeria should be rigorously and systematically pursued by the government and religious bodies and organizations.

K. It is imperative to break the mirror image by which members of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria upto now relate with one another. This can be achieved through a new programme of education and enlightenment aimed at correcting the negative attitude and misconceptions that characterize inter- ethnic relations.

L. The finally means by which inter–ethnic conflicts will lose its currency is through the weakening of the power of military businessmen, academics and traditional rulers who claim to be the representative of their own ethnic groups under false pretences.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the country would begin to entertain the hope of meaningful national development when all the consenting nationalities would have had a just and fair treatment in the allocation and distribution of national wealth in a bid to eliminate economic, social and cultural inequalities of the people. Inter-ethnic conflicts will be a thing of the past in Nigeria if all these strategies are adopted as solutions. Thus, national development will be made possible in Nigeria.

References

- Isawa, E [1994]. "Ethnicity and federal option in Nigeria" in Isawa, E. etal, *Federalism and National Building in Nigeria*. Abuja: N.C.I.K.
- Kalu, O. [1981] "Religious as a factor in National Development" in Amucheazi, E. O. [ed] *Reading in Social Science*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension.
- Lambo, S and Ibeanu, A. [1997]. "The people of Nigeria" in Okafor.F.U [ed] *New Strategies for Curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflicts*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Nnoli, O. [1977]. *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Okonkwo,L.[1992]. "A sense of History and National Consciousness: The case of Nigeria" in Okoro, J [ed] *African Humanities*. Awka: Mestink Publishers.
- Okpanigbo, A. [1994]. "Tackling the Ethnic Question" *National Ambassador*, 13-15 Jan.