SOCIAL CHANGE AND CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Prisca I. Isiwu

Godrey Okoye University, Enugu

Edwin C. Onyeneje

Federal Polytechnic, Ohodo, Enugu, Nigeria

Correspondence: pisiwu a gouni.edu.ng

Abstract

Social change arises from adjustment in behavior pattern, cultural values, social structures and organizations. This shift in existing order plays role in conflict in Nigeria. Insecurity is prevalent in Nigeria today considering surge of extremism, banditry, insurgence, kidnapping. The part played by social change particularly change in the traditional Nigerian society can no longer be ignored. This study examines social change and its implications on conflicts in Nigeria using descriptive research method. Among assertions are that social change in Nigeria should be geared towards maintenance of equity, justice and that social values that promoted solidarity and cohesion among cultural groups that constitute Nigeria be instilled into the Nation -Nigeria for promotion of peace.

Centuries ago Heraclitus, a philosopher, proposed that change is the only thing that is constant. Change, social change inclusive is the only consistent fact in human existence. Social change is a complex entity that has been conceptualized in diverse ways, (Sablonniere, 2017). Psychologists however, views it from micro (individual) perspective, that is, how individual group members impact and are impacted by social change, (Rogers, 2003). Social change is therefore, the way human interactions and relationships transform cultural and social institutions over time, having a profound impact on the society and long time consequences, (Dunfey, 2019). According to Shan, (2017) it is modification or replacement of old pattern of feeling, thinking and acting with regard to interpersonal relationship. It is an alteration in the cultural, structural, population or ecological characteristics of a social system (Crossman, 2016). Although there is diverse view of scholars on social change, they all agree that it is shift in existing social processes, social patterns, social interactions, social structures and social organizations. It is modification in functioning of any group or institution. It involves new ways of interactions and relationships among individuals in a particular society. Hence it involves change in existing behaviour patterns, attitude, culture, values and norms of a society and these changes affect the process of social action and social interaction. Psychological variables such as desires, views, volition, leadership, unconscious mental drives as well as social factors likely play causal role in social change.

Social change occurs when new pattern of thoughts, feelings, actions and consequential new products and services are introduced in the society. Such new pattern of behavior, services and products are called innovation. Innovation therefore, is the introduction of something new or radically different from what previously existed in society. It is when a new combination or a

new use of existing knowledge is put into practice hence; innovation is means through which social change is achieved. Innovation involves two key components which are creativity and development of ideas, (Taylor, 2017). Creativity and development of ideas have obviously resulted to creation and improved material and non material resources which consequently have profound influence on the social aspects of the society. Hence, innovation adds something new to the society. Whatever it is, innovation often affects people's values and attitudes and thus brings about social change.

Social change occurs in all societies be it primitive or civilized though the speed and extent of the change differ from society to society, (Shan, 2017). Therefore, Social change could be slow, gradual and incremental; it could also be fast, radical or sudden. It is usually faster in urban than rural areas, (Shan, 2017). Contemporarily, we seem to live in a "speeded-up" world because social change occurs at a very alarming rate in the world today. Hence, social change in the contemporary era seems to be faster than what was obtainable in the olden days. It has more intense impact. It can be wide in scope to the extent that it affects almost all the people in a society. Moreover, social change does not happen equally throughout the world. This is evident in disparities in variables such as illiteracy, political freedom and mortality rate. Among social changes that have significant long time effect are industrial revolution and abolition of slavery

Contemporary social change has obviously gone a long way in improving the quality of life of different peoples across the globe. Moreover, it leads to increased awareness and more understanding due to the presence of more information which enable individuals to make informed decisions, (Cohen, 2011). It equally has negative consequences such as over-population, problems of waste disposal, prostitution, crime and unemployment.

Characteristics of Social Change

According to Macionis (1997), there are four major characteristics which are:

1. Social change happens everywhere although the rate of change varies from place to place : This means that social change is universal, although the pace varies from place to place. Macionis (1997) noted that some societies change faster than others, for instance hunting and gathering societies change slowly when compared to technological complex societies. He also reported that in a given society some cultural elements such as material culture change more quickly than others (such as non material culture).

2. Social change is sometimes intentional but often unplanned: Many of the social changes are intentionally put in place but overall positive and negative consequences of the change are unplanned. Hence, most social change yields positive and negative consequences. Manufacturers of information and communication gadgets for instance, may not have envisaged negative influence of the gadgets. An instance is negative influence of these gadgets on altruistic behavior as individuals prefer recording than helping accident victims. Another negative implication of these gadgets is surge in sophisticated crime.

3. Social change often generates controversy: It is usually accepted and resisted by some people. Capitalists for instance, welcomed Industrial Revolution because it will increase productivity and profit while workers feared that machines would make their skills obsolete therefore, the resisted the "progress" (Macionis ,1997). Another example is cutting down of economic trees in rural area by the Government for infrastructure while people in those areas fear that the Government is deliberately destroying their economic trees and forcefully collecting their land. Such controversies often give rise to misunderstanding, tensions and/ or hostility.

4. Some social change matter more than others: Some social change has only passing significance whereas others last for generation. For instance, hair style and style of clothing among youths changes quickly unlike computers that was introduced long ago but is still in existence and likely to stay for a longer time.

Among Social psychological theories of social change are relative deprivation theory and adjustment to change theory.

Relative Deprivation Theory (Runciman, (1966); de la Sablonniere, Taylor, Perozzo & Sadykova (2009a); de la Sablonniere, Auger, Sadykova & Taylor, (2010) applies to social change in two distinct ways. Firstly, collective relative deprivation occurs when people compare their group to other groups and feel that their group is worse off. This will motivate them to improve their status by means of collective action. Secondly, in times of dramatic social change, people are usually confronted with a unique situation that results in confusion and the loss of social cues. It is therefore easier and more relevant for them to compare their group's present situation to their group's status at another well defined period than to compare their group with another group. Use of historical trajectory should be considered when assessing one's group collective relative deprivation.

Adjustment to Change Theory (Goodwin, 2006) views social change as a result of discrepancy between expectation and actualities. Therefore lack or scarcity of necessities triggers social change. However, increase in feeling of deprivation is not always necessary before individuals are moved to act. The theory considers how individuals adjust to social change. Adjustment is the process of arriving at a balanced state between the needs of individual and their satisfaction. According to the theory of evolution, species which adapted successfully to demands of living survived and multiplied while others who did not die.

Adjustment is a process of altering one's behaviour for maintenance of equilibrium (balance), hence, it is response brought about by social change that occurred. The theory argues that factors such as social support and the nature of the event predict the way individual and groups evaluate social change.

Implications of Social Change on Conflict in Nigeria

Diffusion of western socio-cultural values and standards which began under British colonial administration and has continued obviously contributed significantly to social change in Nigeria. Western countries particularly Britain introduced colonialism, capitalism, western education, science and technology, industrialization, urbanization, western law as well as western religion, These dramatically altered existing patterns of social, as well as political and economic life in Nigeria though they set the pace for modernization. Improved living conditions and medical care obviously contributed to drop in high death rate. This is because societies have now become equipped to overcome famine, malnutrition and other life threatening diseases, (Ogunleye & Owolabi, 2018). Consequentially, there is progressive increase in Nigerian population from 195,874,683, 200,963,599 in 2018, 2019 consecutively and 206,139,589 as at September, 11, 2020, (Worldometer, 2020).

Increasing population growth may have played a role in conflict in Nigeria. Parties indulge in conflict over some goods that are limited in supply which both perceive they cannot simultaneously own, posses or enjoy, (Mitchell, 2005). This may be the case of Nigeria where different cultural groups were merged resulting to one nation with many people. Merging of different nationalities that are unequally developed with differences in social change by British colonial administration in 1914 has resulted to struggle for scarce resources which likely is the

root of ethnic tensions that dates back to 1950s. The struggle for scarce resources has resulted to periodic violence among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. This struggle over control of natural resources as well as political power led to civil war in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970. Again the Niger Delta's agitation for control of natural resources in their territory, emergence of Indigenous People of Biafra, Odua Peoples' Congress and Arewa Youths has led to and deepened conflict among the different nations that constitute Nigeria. This has resulted to surge of extremism, banditry, insurgence, kidnapping and consequential massive loss of lives and properties. Social change, therefore, may have contributed to exacerbation of struggle for limited material resources in the nation. Hence, modification in the nature of Nigerian society, social institutions, social behavior, the social relations and other social structures seemly led to growth in population and its consequential struggle for scarce resources and conflict.

Conclusion

Peace in Nigeria could be achieved through social change which improves civic participation due to its role in changing attitude of the public towards correction of instances of injustice, Cohen, (2011). Social change in Nigeria should be geared towards maintenance of equality, equity and restructuring of the nation. Restructuring of the nation should involve devolving of power from centre to the regions and zones in Nigeria. Moreover, most cultural groups that constitute Nigeria were value based and these values promoted solidarity and cohesion in the different cultural groups. Social change, therefore, should be structured in such a way that positive societal values upon which the nations that constitute Nigeria were built upon were revived and infused into the nation. These could reduce struggle for resources among constituents of Nigeria and consequently conflict.

Moreover, social change begins with personal change which leads to commitment and motivation to undertake group and community change in general, (Eimers, 2017). Social change in others makes people think such change is possible, important and compatible with whom they are (Sparkman & Walton, 2019). Hence, the importance of identifying and encouraging social changes in individuals that promote peace. The changes could have positive impact when individuals are well prepared for its challenges and also adjusts to such changes for peaceful coexistence and effective harnessing of human and material resources for national growth and development.

REFERENCES

Cohen, G. (2011). Social psychology and social change. *Science* 334(6053), 178 – 179. http://dx.doi.org/1o.11266//26/science.i212887.

Crossman, A. (2010). *Social change*. Retrieved on September 13th, 2019 from https//www.thoughtco.com,social . .

de la Sablonniere, .R. (2017). Towards a psychology of social change: A typology of social change. *Frontiers Psychology*. https:www.ncb.nim.nih.gov.

de la Sablonniere, R., Auger, E., , Sadykova N, & Taylor, D.M. (2010). When the "we" impacts how "I" feel: Effect of temporal collective relative deprivation on personal wellbeing in the context of dramatic social change in Kyrgyzstan. *Eur. Psychol*, 15 , 271 - 282 .doi:10.1027/1016-0949/a000062

de la Sablonniere, R., Taylor, D.M, Perozzo, C. & Sadykova, N. (2009a). Reconceptualizing relative deprivation in the context of dramatic social change: The challenge confronting the people of Kyrgyzstan. *Eur. J.Soc. Psychol*, 39, 325 – 345. Doi:10.1002/ejsp.510.

Dunfey, T.S. (2019). *What is social change and why should we care*? Retrieved on September 13th , 2019 from https://www.snhu.edu;2017/II.

Goodwin, R.(2006). Age and social support perception in Eastern Europe: Social change and support in four rapidly changing countries. *Br.J Soc. Psychol*, 45, 799 – 815. doi:10:1348/014466605X72144

Macionis, J.J (1997). *Sociology,* (6th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Ogunleye, .O.O & Owolabi, .O.A. (2018). Population growth and economic growth in Nigeria.: An appraisal. *International Journal of Management, Accounting and Economics*,5(5).

Rogers,.E.M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovation*. New York: Free Pres

Runciman, W.G.(1066). *Relative deprivation and social justice: A study of attitude to social inequality in tweenth century*. England Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

Shan, S. (2017). *Theories of social change: Meaning, nature and processes*. Retrieved on 10ty September, 2020 from Sociology discussion.com

Sparkman., G. & Walton, G. (2019). Why social change is contagious? *The Science of Who We Are and How We Relate*. . Retrieved on 21st September, 2020 from http://www.spsp.org.

Taylor, S.P. (2017). What is innovation: A study of the definitions, academic models and applicability innovation to an example of social housing in England. *Open Journal of Social Sciences* , 5, 128 - 146

Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C.(1986). *The social identity theory of inter group behavior*: Psychology of intergroup relations. Chicago: Nelson – Hall.

Worldometer. (2020). *Nigerian population*. Retrieved on 11th September, 2020 from https://www.wordometer,info.

.