PEACE EDUCATION: PANACEA FOR COMBATING CONFLICTS AND VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The prevalence of conflict and its manifestation in various forms is one of the greatest threats to peace, unity, security and development of this nation. Nigerians are faced with myriads of challenges that have culminated in social problems such as unemployment, poverty and social vices. These vices have brought inexplicable hardship on the people. Failure of the Nigerian government to share resources and allocations fairly among ethnic groups has made people to adopt conflict and violent means to achieve their aims. Formation and sustainability of militia groups whose activities have spurred serious violence and terrorism is a problem Nigerians have to contend with. Conflict and violence are inimical to development as it is a known fact that development can only thrive in an atmosphere of tranquility. This paper examines conflict and violence as they affect the polity. It discusses not only the importance of peace education as a means of entrenching culture of peace in the mind of Nigerians especially children, youth and women who happen to be the most susceptible but also describes good governance and government's investment in youth education and empowerment programmes as panacea for combating violent acts in Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflicts, Peace Education, Good governance, Youth empowerment, National development.

Introduction

There is high level of intolerance among different ethnic and religious groups which often result in violence in Nigeria. Conduct of elections (primary and general), students demonstrations and protests, labour union protests, face-off among drivers unions, show of superiority among cultists in higher institutions of learning, to mention a few, have culminated in violence on several occasions. Agagu (2010) claims that religious groups that ordinarily should be harbingers of peace have for some time now had their ethnic militias to the extent that these religious groups are not only pitched against each other in cold or verbal war but in real germicidal war. In the same vein, institutions of higher learning have turned out to be battlefields among secret cults that the peace and serenity that is associated with citadel of learning has almost disappeared. The issue of conflict and violence in the Niger Delta area is of an abnormal dimension. It is an area where kidnapping, oil bunkering and vandalisation of oil pipelines are rife. Several promising young Nigerians have lost their lives while trying to syphon oil through vandalized pipelines. The prevalence of these conflicts and violence has led to insecurity problems which have become the bane of the society.

Kolawole (2011) reiterates that it will be an understatement to say that Nigerians are living in a state of lack of security of lives and property; Nigerians are indeed living in a state of utter apprehension characterised by insecurity of lives and properties. He further stresses that:

Nigeria is experiencing insecurity because of the unbridled activities of armed robbers who Strike and wreck havocs anytime, anywhere without the police being able to do anything about it, kidnapping which has today become the fastest means of making money, politically motivated assassinations, ethnic militia such as OPC, MASSOB. The challenge of Niger delta and militants that almost grounded the economy of the country, child trafficking and boko haram which has assumed a serious level of notoriety within shortest possible time of its existence (Kolawole, 2011:6)

The recurrent security challenges have slowed the pace of achieving peace and development while successive government regimes have failed to create enabling peaceful environment. There is a strong link between national security and development. Democracy, good governance and development cannot thrive in a violent environment. There's no doubt that the current state of affairs in the country will weaken our economic independence, discourage foreign investors and increase rate of unemployment at the expense of development.

Conflicts and Violence in Nigeria

Conflict is a serious disagreement that can easily result in violence. That is, actions that involve the use of physical force intended to hurt, damage or kill. Conflict usually comes with disorderliness, lawlessness and violence while the partakers are highly suggestible and act on unconscious impulse. When some people are agitated, they draw supporters through emotional expressions that build up tension and before they know it, reflexive response of the supporters around would have resulted in violence. Conflict is an inevitable part of human existence and Nigerians have witnessed series of it since independence. Adebisi (2009)

describes violence as a breakdown in social order that emphasizes the irrational, chaotic and destructive aspects of riots. Violence as defined by Agagu (2010), is illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will of others. Terrorism is the systematic use of terror, often violent especially as a means of coercion. It involves violent acts that are dangerous to human life. Common definitions of terrorism according to Thalif (2005) refer only to those violent acts which are intended to create fear (terror), are perpetrated for a religious, political or ideological goal and deliberately target or disregard the safety of non combatants (civilians). Abimbola and Adesote (2012) while quoting from Title 22 of the United States Federal Code define terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. Analysis of Abimbola and Adesote (2012) on the activities/attacks of the dreaded Islamic Sect reveals that not less than 1,200 persons including civilians and security personnel have been killed since its emergence up to February 2012.

Niger Delta area has been the centre of conflicts and serious violence for a long time. It is usually a confrontation between the Niger Deltans and the state and federal government on one hand and/or a face-off between the people and the oil companies. The people have adopted many methods of getting themselves out of socio-political marginalisation, abysmal state of infrastructural facilities, environmental degradation, problem of oil spillage that renders their waters and lands useless for fishing, farm work and so on.

It is a recognised fact that the Federal Government is supposed to protect and save all citizens from all forms of activities that those security threat like riots,

conflicts and those that are usually accompanied by destruction of lives and properties such as violence armed robbery kidnapping, civil disorder, deliberate political killing, bombing, rebellious acts, destructive demonstrations and so on. With the situation of things in Nigeria and judging from the series of unfortunate, embarrassing and pathetic violent attacks of bombers or terrorists on mainly innocent, powerless and unprotected citizens, it appears the federal government is incapacitated. Onwubiko (2011) remarks that insecurity portends the fragility of the nation and potentially makes Nigeria a dangerous investment environment for investors. With the different forms of violence and threats of bomb blast by the Boko haram sect, Nigeria is presently a security risk to foreign investors and this is really having its toll on the economic growth of the nation.

Various reasons have been adduced by different authors as the causes of conflicts and violence in Nigeria. Abe (2010) identifies cultural and intergenerational relations, urbanization and migration, family, illiteracy and unemployment as causes of conflict in Nigeria. Agagu (2010) opines that most of the causes of violence in the country are political, economic, ethnic, religious, greed on part of leaders, poverty and deprivation. Indeed, those constitute the bulk of the members of the ethnic and religious militias in the country are drawn from among the army of the unemployed social miscreants and the destitute. To a large extent, the remote causes of violent crimes according to Abimbola and Adesote (2012) are inherent in failure of good governance by the political elites and their collaborators since the return to civil rule in 1999. For example, before the government could respond to the agitations of the people

of the Niger Delta through amnesty programme over the years, the people had suffered from neglect, political marginalization, environmental degradation as a result of oil spillage and oil exploration without adequate compensation by the government and the oil companies operating in the region through the provision of educational, infrastructural and healthcare facilities and other corporate social responsibilities.

Looking at the causes globally, Bir (2003) maintains that war and violence are traceable to denial of social, economic, cultural and political rights by powerful individuals, groups and nation states. Bir stresses that there would be no peace in a world characterised by an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, maginalisation of women and the less privileged, denial of basic rights and freedoms and equal relationships among countries. Without mincing words, the main causes in Nigeria can be attributed to poverty and unemployment of the teeming young graduates that are produced in our various higher institutions of learning every year without any hope of getting gainful employment. Coupled with these is intolerance of other peoples' cultures.

Peace Education to the Rescue

Peace is a state of harmony or absence of hostility. It is a state of tranquility, quietness or freedom from civil disturbance. Wikipedia (2012) describes peace as a state of harmony characterized by lack of violent conflict and the freedom from fear of violence. The challenges being faced in the world today include crises, conflicts, violence and terrorism usually accompanied by massive loss of lives and destruction of properties. These problems prompted United Nations to look for means of introducing Peace and Human Right

Education into the curriculum to ensure that the world is a safe place for all. The notion of 'culture of peace' was first elaborated for UNESCO at the International Congress on Peace held at Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire in 1999. The Peace Education Network based in London also works alongside the UN in promoting peace through education. Peace education in various parts of the world has been referred to as Education for Conflict Resolution International Understanding and Human Resources Global Education, Critical Pedagogy, Education for Liberation and Empowerment, Social Justice, Human Rights Education, Environmental Education, Life Skills Education, Disarmament and Development Education etc (www.unicef.org/... PeaceEducation.pdf).

Peace education is education that is directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It promotes understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and furthers the activities of the UN for maintenance of peace. Peace Education is an integral part of the work of the UN while UNICEF and UNESCO are particularly active advocates of education for peace. UNICEF (2012) describes Peace Education as schooling and other educational initiatives that:

- Function as zones of peace where children are safe from violent conflict
- Uphold children's basic rights as outlined in the child's rights Constitution
- Develop a climate that models peaceful and respectful behaviour among all members of the learning community
- Demonstrate the principle of equality and non discrimination in administrative policies and practices

- Draw on the knowledge of peace-building that exists in the community, including means of dealing with conflicts that are effective, non-violent and rooted in the local culture

- Handle conflicts in ways that respect the rights and dignity all involved

- Integrate an understanding of peace, human rights, social justice and global issues throughout the curriculum whenever possible Provide a forum for the explicit discussion of values of peace and social justice

- Use teaching and learning method that stress participation, problem solving and respect for differences

- Enable children to put peace-making into practice in the educational setting as well as in the wider community (www.un.org/.../frame2.htm)

Peace education programmes according to Harris (1999) centre on conflict resolution and typically focus on the social behavioural symptoms of conflict, training individuals to resolve inter-personal disputes through techniques of negotiation and peer mediation. Learning to manage anger, fight fair' and improve communication through skills such as listening, turn-taking, identifying needs and separating facts from emotions, constitute the main elements of these programmes. Bir (2003) describes peace education as a vehicle for transforming the culture of war into the culture of peace and non-violence and that it involves teaching about different cultures, ethnicities and social tradition needed for the elimination of the roots of ethnic conflict and violence, education for non-violence, cultural heritage, human rights, the environment, international understanding and disarmament.

Since conflict cannot be completely eradicated due to its inevitability, one of the ways by which it can be reduced is through the school system. Having identified intolerance of other peoples' cultures as one of the root causes of conflicts, it is pertinent to educate the young ones about other peoples' cultures and beliefs.

More emphasis should be placed on teaching of subject matters that are based on rights, cooperation and conflicts. Social studies is a subject that plays significant role in this aspect. A careful look at the social studies curricula for primary and junior secondary schools portrays some topics that are related to peace, human right education and maintenance of peaceful co-existence such as citizenship, rights, responsibilities and obligations, cooperation and conflicts, leadership and followership, lack of cooperation and its effects, agencies and processes of socialisation. These contents would help to promote healthy relationship and instill respect for the rights of individuals in young people.

This aspect presupposes that social studies already has human rights and peace education embedded in its programme. It is on this note that Ogunyemi (2006) declares that a school social studies programme is incomplete without themes or topics on civic rights and responsibilities as well as peace promotion. If properly programmed and effectively taught, it is believed that peace education would usher in a new era of a just, equitable and peaceful world. Some authors also emphasize the importance of complementing the teaching of peace education with human rights education to achieve the desire of maintaining world peace.

Other Ways of Combating Conflicts and Violence

Considering the trend of events, it is observed the dreaded Islamic sect likes to carry out its despicable act unannounced which makes it difficult for the security

operatives to track them down most of the time. It is pertinent to note that this is the right time government must be proactive in devising means of addressing the challenges of conflict, violence and terrorism if the country is to be prevented from being thrust into another civil war that may ultimately result in disintegration. The following suggestions will be useful to combat violence

Preventive Measures

Government should put in place an effective and efficient security management system that can take precautionary measures against spontaneous attacks of terrorists and take immediate actions to quench conflicts and riots before they escalate to violence. Adegun (2010) believes that conflict is inevitable and cannot be completely prevented but can be regulated and reduced. By way of conflict prevention, the following strategies and tactics among others were suggested by Adegun (2010):

- Tackle those sources of stress and tension within the organization
- Strengthen the conflict resolution mechanism in such a way that it will be more accessible at all levels
- Monitor a tense situation
- Intervene to quench a potentially violent conflict before its outbreak
- Initiate activities that address the root causes as well as trigger off disputes
- Establish a way of detecting early warning signs and monitoring specific indicators that may help to predict impending violence.

Youth Education and Development

The strategies for maintaining peace should start with peace education for Nigerian youths. There is need for our youths to be educated about other peoples' cultures, customs, religion and ways of thinking. Usman (2012) stresses that government should promote value based education that will empower the youths with entire skills for self reliance, help them to make right choices, be aware of their responsibility to themselves and their fellow men as well as making them have the moral courage to say no to violence.

One of the ways of disallowing the devil to find work for our youths is to engage them in productive and lucrative activities. Government should provide opportunities for youths to be gainfully employed so as to discourage them from engaging in social vices that cause problems for the society. Abe (2010) adds that government's effort in awarding scholarships and sponsoring youth related activities such as sports and recreation would go a long way in ensuring peace and stability, create avenue for judicious and meaningful use of leisure time and opportunities for economic emancipation of the youths.

Good Governance

A government that is resolute in making efforts to eradicate mass poverty and socio-economic imbalances, that is sensitive to the yearnings of the people and provides for the welfare needs of the citizens can be regarded as a good government. There are several elements of governance. The relative presence or absence, strength or weakness of these elements can help to assess whether the governance prevalent in a particular society is good or bad. Good government with the presence of these elements- participation, rule of law, transparency, equity and accountability lead to development (Onoia, 2012). Good governance

also involves finding visible and permanent solutions to the social, economic and political problems confronting the nation.

What Nigerians need is good governance that guarantees effective delivery of public goods and services, that is swift in responding to critical issues, that can manage crisis effectively and is committed to taking this nation to the anticipated level of development. Many youths and children are lured into unacceptable behaviours in the society due to ignorance and little financial gains. Provision of mass literacy programmes will remove ignorance and enlighten the people politically to know their rights, duties and obligations as citizens and mobilize the populace towards achieving an egalitarian nation.

The National Orientation Agency and Non-governmental organisations should complement government's effort by organizing seminars for youths and women on peace, tolerance, respect for human rights and human dignity as the foundation for freedom, justice and peace in Nigeria. These bodies also need to teach people about the tenets of intercultural understanding, how to tolerate opposing views, non-violent approach to conflict resolution and other strategies. Efforts should be made to eradicate poverty so that everybody will have sense of belonging in the land.

Conclusion

It is important that government devise means and strategies of curbing conflicts and violence as ways of bringing about harmonious relationship and peaceful co existence among the people. Ability to imbibe culture of peace through peace education, to exhibit respect for the rights and dignity of all, to put on new attitude that sternly detests and eschews violence without compromise and strict

adherence to and demonstration of the principle of equality and non-discrimination are necessary ingredients for creating an impressive peaceful and non-violent environment. Government should be alive to its responsibilities by creating employment opportunities for the youths and ensuring that Nigeria is a safe place for us all

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