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## FOSTERING MUTUAL COEXISTENCE AMONG ETHNO-RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN NIGERIA TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BY THE YEAR 2020

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### ABSTRACT

Numerous development plans aimed at achieving the country's objectives have been put in place by the government right from the independence for the purpose of improving the socio-political and economic development of the country. In spite of the natural and mineral resources with which the country is endowed, coupled with numerous governmental policies and programs to foster peaceful co-existence among the multi ethno religious entities which make up Nigeria, the country has virtually become a battle field where incessant ethno-religious crises are staged. The crises do not spare any part of the country as ethno-religious crises have become the order of the day in every parts of the country. Thus the instrument, which is supposed to be used for sustainable development, is conversely being used for destruction and vandalization purposes. The big questions are: can any development be attained in an atmosphere of crises? What are the causes and effects of ethno-religious crises on sustainable development in Nigeria? What steps should government take to address the issue of ethno-religious crises? How can religion assist in checking the menace of crises in the country? These, and some other questions, shall be answered in the course of this paper.

### JEL CODE

O1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### KEYWORDS

Coexistence, Ethno-religious crises, Sustainable development, Vision 20:2020.

### INTRODUCTION

As a nation-state, Nigeria is a mixture of diverse and heterogeneous ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural groups. This was made inevitable by the British Colonial Policy of amalgamation of 1914, which brought the southern and northern protectorates together as one national entity for administrative conveniences, though some say it included economic purpose. After several constitutional conferences of the country between the Nigerian nationalists and British Colonialists, Nigeria gained her independence on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960. The decolonization and ascent to nationhood of the country over 50 years ago was heralded within and beyond the country as a symbolic event of hope. For one reason, Nigeria, which is endowed with abundant human and material resources, was seen as the most populous black state on earth and, therefore, the pride of the African race in the ultimate search for self-actualization, especially political and economic self-determination.

Considering the polyglot nature of the Nigerian state, which makes it comparable to well-known multi-national political entities like the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, China, India, Pakistan and Indonesia, many social analysts saw the country as a test-case of how to engender national unity, peaceful coexistence and mutual forbearance in plural national states in the developing world, despite social differences. Immediately after Nigeria's independence, centrifugal forces of ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry and regional rivalry reared their ugly heads and posed a serious threat to the crucial task of nation-building and national integration (Adebayo, 2010). These centrifugal forces not only orchestrated and unleashed the bloody coup and counter-coup of 1966 in the country but also metastidised into the devastating civil war of 1967-70 in which about a million people and properties worth millions of naira were lost. However, the ugly chapter of the fratricidal war was closed by the regime with somewhat healing policies of "no victor no vanquished" and three Rs of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration.

Regrettably, more than forty years after the end of the Nigeria civil war, it is clear that the task of nation-building has become a Sisyphean task in the policy. It is not surprising that micro or ethnic nationalism (Niger Delta Militancy, Movement for Actualization of sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Oodua People Congress (OPC) and recurrent communal pogroms in Jos, Bauchi and Kaduna), religious fundamentalism (Boko Haram phenomenon) and regional antagonism (as currently presented by zoning or no zoning conundrum) are, more than ever before, spreading across the federation nowadays like the dreaded bubonic plague and culminating in intermittent communal clashes and the attendant bloodbath and carnage of unprecedented proportions. Some of these identity-propelled conflicts have presented us with a de Javu of bloody ethnic turmoil of the 1960s like the Wild Wild West in the former Western Region, the Tiv revolt in the then middle belt and the Isaac Adaka Boro –Led Izon insurrection and the secessionist struggle by the Igbos in the distinct Eastern region.

Against this background, one of the major challenges facing the attainment of Vision 20 :2020 of the administration of President Good luck Jonathan is how to engender a real Nigerian nation that will withstand the test of time. This is possible through the efforts towards the nation-building, which requires bringing together of all ethnic groups and cultures in the polity (both the majority and minority) into one people with a common destiny as a precursor to state-building by means of political, economic and social transformation, consolidation and advancement.

### CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In order to conceptualize the dialectical relationship between ethnicity and national integration, it would be theoretically expedient to name the different theories of ethnicity viz: the structural-functional theories which underline assumptions that groups in society behave according to shared beliefs, system, ideologies and communal norms and values.

The structural-functional theory explains ethnicity by looking at how the shared values and traditions held by some groups determine their special features, which inform their differential ranking within a given social formation. Theories of ethnic segregation and stratification are good examples of the structural-functional theory (Levine, 1966). Also, the conflict theory uses the existence of socio-economic political and psychological issues of ethnic conflict and strife in multi-ethnic societies. It is a scarcity of cherished values and differential opportunities or rather access to acquisition of these resources among the competing group in a plural society that intensifies the ethnic question. In societies like Nigeria and other developing countries, there is tendency for ethnic struggles and

acrimony to become more acute and pronounced because of the peculiar nature of the state of our federation where component units depends almost exclusively on subventions or grants from the central government for survival (Lemuel, 2009).

The conflict theory therefore contends that it is the aforementioned reasons more than anything else that explains the persistence of ethnicity (Dahrendarf, 1959). On the other hand, the socio-psychological theories under which such middle ranged theories like identity theories, role theories, traits theories, needs theories or achievement motivation theories attempt to explain ethnicity from the propoundence of some personality features or characteristics and the disposition of individuals (Levine, 1966).

Although, in theoretical analysis or exposition, a way of viewing social reality may not necessarily be the same way it is in real life. Some of these theories claim some merits or utility in the analysis of ethnicity. There seems to be a strong correlation between the character of a society's mode of production, the level of group animosity and consequently integration or lack of it. It is a known fact that ethnic rivalries and conflicts arise from desire of one group to dominate another with the dominated seeking independence and self determination of which the dominant is surely not disposed to grant thereby making conflicts inevitable.

Arguably, the desire of major ethnic groups in Nigeria to subordinate the minority groups is what Alabi (2005) termed "internal imperialism". Alabi (2005) argued that the minorities should be given more access to the political space in Nigeria since peripheral powers of the state are limited because of the immense over-concentration of power at the centre stage. Although, issues of creation of more states and local governments by successive governments have greatly empowered the minorities but it is not without its attendant problems. The idea of rotational presidency as advocated by critics may seem palliative measures which could create a sort of psychological pleasantness and assurance for the oppressed groups. This, interestingly, can hardly solve the problem of ethnicity or even the national question if the prudent management of resources for the benefit of every Nigerian no matter the tribe or creed is not relentlessly pursued.

Lemuel (2005) further posited that to attain national interest in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria, much effort is needed on government's part so as to ensure equal opportunity and access. This is seen in the scheme of things, politically, economically, educationally and socially. The citizens on the other hand are obligated to pledge total loyalty to the state supremacy over and above any ethnic and cultural sentiments. In the face of all these, ethnicity or ethnic pride should be sacrificed not on the altar of prejudice or self interest but for the general good and well being of all sundry in Nigeria.

In furtherance to this argument Lemuel (2005) posited that a nation desirous of national integration in the face of ethno-religious differences, should apply herself to the vigorous quest for justice and equity, prosperity, development, unity and greatness. In addition, equal access to resources for all citizens will enhance the commitment of the people towards the state's programmes and foster a greater sense of belonging and acceptance among the people. Lemuel summarizes that the media in Nigeria has a major role to play in this because many conflicts and hostilities were allowed to fester through the process of socialization. The media should ensure the avoidance of ethnic sentimentality in carrying out their duties so that they can achieve their true potentials of fostering unity among the diverse ethnic groups in the country.

The contention of this paper is that despite our differences and diversities, we have been drawn together to share the same fate and common destiny therefore Nigerians should begin to see themselves as siblings and take a new national identity notwithstanding the sectional differences which have often times divided us. Ibrahim (1995) on his part advocated the transformation of social and moral values of Nigerians. His opinion is predicated on the decay in Nigeria's leadership which in turn was mediated by several factors, i.e. colonial rule, prolonged military dictatorship and massive deprivations suffered by the masses.

Colonial rule as a system was fundamentally immoral and based on ruthless military conquest and deceit. It was undemocratic, unaccountable and anti-people, what mattered was only the interest of the British imperialist whose fulfillment meant a colossal deprivation for the indigenous people. Therefore, the British imperialism and its exploitative annexation method were largely devoid of any positive moral values bequeathed to the succeeding local ruling class and the masses in general.

Military intervention in Nigerian politics also added in no small measure to the nations woes, official corruption and flagrant abuse of office became the order of the day, thus this forceful takeover of power only resulted in official recklessness, mismanagement of resources and promoted the emergence of a dominant class of people, not necessarily on the basis of hard work or excellence in any field but largely as a result of massive looting of the national treasury. Corruption in the society has greatly eroded the values of hard work, honesty, selfless service and patriotism in the citizenry.

This deliberate deprivation of the masses has also impacted negatively in the national values of the people. The emergence of questionably rich elite eroded the value of hard work and honesty and has ushered in a desperate survival policy and thus discarded moral etiquette in pursuit of comfortability.

#### **ROOT CAUSES OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA**

According to Ekenna Nwafor (2009), most of the violent conflicts that have rocked Nigeria over the years and intensified in recent times are "part of the consequences of a failed development process". If Nigeria had realized the potential of its huge human and material resources, much of the discontent that has resulted in violent conflicts would have been avoided. The following factors have been identified as the root causes ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

#### **LAND OWNERSHIP AND RESOURCE AVAILABILITY**

Communities and ethnic groups within and across the boundaries of states and local government council areas lay claim to land as original owners (settlers) or 'aboriginals' and on this basis, those regarded as intruders are fought against. It is nothing new that farmers and pastoralists, fishermen and pond owners, foresters and timber loggers clash throughout Nigeria often over disputed uses and exploitation of land and water resources. Commenting on the above resource based conflicts, Otite (1999:20) writes:

And since 1960s, and particularly from the 1990s, communities in Nigeria's deltaic areas have clashed with one another over claims in territories in which oil exploration companies operate and for which royalty and amenities and development projects are expected.

Ekenna Nwafor (2009:3) in corroboration with Otite (1999) has opined that: Some of the worst violent (conflict) has been between neighbouring communities and ethnic groups over claims of land ownership. Land disputes have fuelled most of the inter-communal and inter-ethnic conflicts in the southern oil region, where land ownership attracts compensations, payments and amenities from oil multinationals. Similar conflicts are also common in most developing countries around the world.

#### **DISPUTED JURISDICTIONS OF TRADITIONAL RULERS AND CHIEFS**

When a king of one ethnic or sub-ethnic group claims ruler-ship over peoples belonging to another ethnic group, his action often generates conflicts. The town of Warri is an example. Here, the Olu (king) of the Itsekiri ethnic group is labelled Olu of the whole of Warri in Delta State, owned and inhabited by members of Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo ethnic groups. The situation arose when the Delta State government enacted edict no1 of 1999 (Traditional Council and Chiefs Edict 1998 vol. 9) and appointed three other Traditional Rulers of equal status in Warri, two for the Urhobo Kingdoms of Okere and Agbassa (Agbarha-ame) and the third for Ijaw of Warri. Violent conflicts followed and many people lost their lives. Otite (1999:20) further observes that: In the case of Ile-ife in Osun State, the Modakekes' claims to the ownership of their settlement and farmland have been strongly resisted by the Ooni (king) and people of ife. In these cases, many people have been killed due to violent conflicts.

#### **POWER**

Power is also a main source of conflict in societies since it has the ability to achieve something successfully. It is also the ability to cause things to happen rapidly. It is the capacity to reward complaints, persuade recalcitrant, coerce intransigents and punish offenders. Thus, power gives the ability to control the behaviour of others even against their will such as deviants, sociopath, delinquents, dissenters and rebels. By using power one can also control economic resources, political processes, social institutions, cultural institutions and development. Thus, power decides and chooses those who will gain and those who will lose in any given situation (Ekpenyong, 2011). Power is always in limited supply. Hence, the gains for one individuals or group are often associated with the losses for the other individual or group. This is why power has become a major source of conflicts not only in Nigeria but also in many other nations (Dzugba 2006: 4).

#### **PRESTIGE AND JEALOUSY**

It is a common phenomenon that prestige of one individual or group is often followed with the loss of prestige of one other individual or group. In the same vein, individual or group that has great reputation is often a victim of jealousy. This is because other persons or groups need not be prestigious, honourable, powerful or feared as rivals in the same society. The consequence is that, either they must be destroyed or absorbed or weakened or made useless. This is why



Dzurgba (2006:4) posits that, these jealous and selfish tendencies give rise to conflict between two or more prominent persons in a given community. In this conflict, the society is torn apart each time the important office falls vacant in a given traditional institution, social institution or political constituency. It is in this context that prestige and jealousy are major sources of conflict.

#### **CORRUPTION**

Corruption is a complex issue that involves society, politics and economy. Years of misrule, massive corruption and squandering of development opportunities by successive governments have pauperized large segments of the population. They have also left frayed nerves, forcing frustrated Nigerians to bare fangs against erstwhile peaceful neighbours at the individual and communal levels (Ekenna 2009:3). For Theophilus Okeke, corruption is understood as "all actions that temper with or compromise justice and fairness (qtd in Charles 2005:1). The end result or product of all actions that temper with or compromise justice and fairness are conflict. And this is why corruption is one of the major causes of conflict in Nigeria.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION**

Environmental pollution induces conflict, especially in the communities where the explorative and exploitative of natural resources such as crude oil are carried out. In these communities, the means of livelihood are destroyed by industrial activities. Farmlands, water resources and forests are polluted, depleted, degraded and wasted. In such communities, ecological benefits are altogether damaged or destroyed and thereby making the people in such communities to suffer from lack of good water, housing, clothing, food, health services, education and other necessities of life. Lending credence to the above assertion Dzurgba (2006:5) observes that, it is in this context that there are frequent agitations and clashes between the communities and business corporations as well as between the communities and government agencies. Niger Delta crisis is a perfect example in this case.

#### **COMPETITION FOR SCARCE RESOURCES**

Obviously, the creation of states and local government councils means the availability of more political and administrative positions such as state commissioners, special advisers and local government chairmen and councilors. It is also true that these positions are limited, that is they cannot go round. Therefore, the contestants mobilize members of their wards, ethnic groups or communities for support in the competition to hold such positions either through election or appointment. This always gives rise to conflicts and killing of the opposing groups or opponents.

We can comfortably agree with Dzurgba (2006:21) that naturally, divergent interests and inter ethnic or sub-ethnic and town conflicts occur. It is generally assumed under such circumstances that the winner in any competition, and thus incumbent of any high office, represents, and promotes the interests of his people. He is expected to bring political goods home and promote the interests of his people in matters of conflict and contested local development programs.

#### **PREJUDICE, HATRED AND DISCRIMINATION**

This is also a major source of conflict. These tendencies of division and separation are seen in all racial relations in cultural, social, economic, political and religious institutions. These often result in conflict between major racial groups and minor ethnic groups, each crying against discrimination and marginalization in economic and political affairs. Putting it in the word of Dzurgba (2006:6), one racial group clashes with another racial group over territorial boundary or area, therefore, there have often been border clashes between racial groups or countries. In politics, the highest office in the land is contested for, but emphasis is on a racial group's ambition for the presidency. This creates division among the numerous racial groups in the country. From there, a normal political contest turns into a political conflict between two or more racial groups in the country. We can therefore agree that the interests of a racial group cause and create most of the conflict in Nigeria.

#### **NIGERIA'S MICRO AND MACRO SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

Nigeria is a segmented society with varieties of conflicting cultural interests, values and to national political positions and economic resources, as well as the divergent perceptions of coexistence in the same country-setting provide grounds for conflict. The opposing views which ethnic groups have of one another, such as the views Jukun has of the Tiv and vice versa, also predispose people to conflicts. The exploited co-existence of cultural and religious differences amongst people in the same polity is itself inherently conflictual (Adeyemi, 2005). We can also see that ethnic group perception, that is the way one ethnic group views or see another ethnic group, provides grounds for conflict.

#### **RELIGIOUS RIVALRY AMONG CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS**

Religion is one of the main sources of conflict in Nigeria. Religious conflict occurs over religious beliefs, doctrines, practices or interpretation of scriptures between individuals or groups. Rivalry between Muslims and Christians has obviously ignited violence in Nigeria, especially with regard to the adoption of strict Islamic law (*Sharia*) by states in the predominantly Muslim North like Zamfara State and others. Some Christians, who are in the majority in the South, have perceived this as a threat of Islamization, and in flashpoints such as Kaduna in the North and Jos in Central Nigeria this has been a source of Christian – Muslim violence (Dogarawa, 2002).

#### **IDEOLOGY**

Ideological conflict occurs between two or more ethnic groups, or countries competing for supremacy in power, prestige, wealth, prosperity, culture or cultural heritage, science and technology (Dzurgba 2006:4). The conflict between Hausa/Fulani and Yorubas is not basically based on resources but on ideology. Hausas are basically conservative in their political posture while Yorubas are typically progressive in their political orientation. This explains the constant conflicts between the two groups before and after independence. Thus, ideology plays a big role in the generation of conflict. The conflict between Christians and Muslims is also a good example of ideological conflict in Nigeria.

#### **THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The concept of sustainable development is the efforts at improving the socio-economic and ecological status and at exploiting and processing the environment or natural resources for the purpose of improving the quality of human life in such a way that the needs of the future generations are not jeopardized. The 'World Conservation Strategy', published by the World Conservation Union, publicized the concept of sustainable development in the 20th century. The term became more pronounced and received greater attention in the report of the Brundtland Commission, which the United Nations General Assembly assigned to propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond (Sulaiman, 2002). The report spells out the definition of the term, sustainable development, its nature, scope, objectives, and approaches, among others. Most of the definitions given to the concept 'development' see it as a process of change in the social structure, attitude, institution, and general acceleration of economic growth through reduction of inequality and poverty. Going through the multifarious definitions of the concept, Mohammed (2002) identifies three important facts on it, namely: Increasing the availability and widening the distribution of basic life sustenance, such as food, shelter, and protection; Raising the level of living in addition to higher income, provision of jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and humanitarian values, all of which serve to enhance material well-being, but also to generate greater individual and national self esteem, and; Expanding the range of economic and social choice to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence.

From the above, some indices of development, which are no doubt prerequisites to sustainable development, are identified. According to Adedeji (1997), the level of human development could be measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), whose components are health, education, and income. To Aliyu (1999), the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is the total output of the economy, is a major determinant of development. Other indices of development, identified by Mohammed (2002) include: improved standard of living in terms of availability of decent accommodation, improved nutritional standards, qualitative health care and education services to the majority; life expectancy which is mainly influenced by the standard of living, availability of health services, literacy level, and income of the people. From this, it could be observed that all the identified indices of development could hardly be attained in an atmosphere of crises and consequently rendered the attainment of vision 20:2020 a mirage. The health, education, and income of Nigerians are jeopardized and adversely affected during any of the ethno-religious crises.

The summary of this is that development could not be attained in an atmosphere where religion is used as an instrument of vendetta. In another dimension, one can attribute the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria as well as the refinery companies there as an element of development. However, this blessing has been

threatened by various agitations, protests and demonstration by the oil producing communities who considered themselves cheated in the sharing formula of the proceeds from the resources.

### IMPLICATIONS OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It is an undeniable fact that a nation that witnesses ethno-religious crises almost on an annual basis could not be said to be stable politically. The problem of ethnicity, which dichotomized the country's armed forces, was said to have been responsible for the outbreak of the 1967 civil war, which lasted for thirty months leaving thousands of lives dead including "soldiers and civilians that would have done the country proud" (Ajimotokin, 2003). It is also observed by Adebayo, (2003) that religion has no place where ethnicity is dominating. He attributed the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election, which was believed to have been the most peaceful, free, and fair election in the political history of the country, to ethnicity where both the acclaimed winner of the election and the then military President that annulled the election were Muslims but from different ethnic background. In essence, ethno-religious crises breed unstable governments, which is very crucial to the attainment of vision 20:2020.

Education is very vital in any sustainable developmental program. The nation is striving to put in place amenities for the purpose of elevating the education standard of the country. This is, however, hampered by incessant closure of schools and institutions in places where ethno-religious crises are holding. Apart from this, schools are not spared in the destructive tendencies of those participating in crises of any nature. Many schools had been burnt down while many were forced to close down for months. The education of innocent youths was equally disrupted under tumultuous situations created by ethno-religious crises, as many were forced to emigrate from the crisis area. Imam (2004) identified two patterns of emigration in such a situation, namely temporary and permanent emigration. He observed:

Those who emigrated on temporary basis came back after several weeks or months in exile to come back and contend with relics of their abandoned residences and properties. However, those who opted for permanent emigration were mostly non-indigenes who suffered losses and felt their continued stay in the crises areas is like casting one's life into perdition (p. 38).

Whichever the case was, the crises destabilized everything, including the education of students whose parents were forced to relocate consequent of the crises. Such people became refugees elsewhere and would take time for them to settle down in their new settlements to practice their profession and for children to adjust to their new environment.

It needs to be mentioned, as well, that no remarkable development could be recorded in an atmosphere of BDR (build, destroy, and rebuild) as it amounts to cycling within the circle. In essence, it gulped the government millions of naira or dollars to put in place numerous amenities which were destroyed during crises. Resources, which could have been used to improve these amenities and embark on other developmental projects, would have to be used on restructuring and replacing what had been damaged during the crises. In most cases, government compensated victims of these crises and this gulped millions of naira, which could have been used for other developmental projects.

Incessant crises are also inimical to sustainable economic development of the nation. This is because, apart from the fact that many virile men of the nation are seriously affected in the crises which consequently led to their death, the country's source of revenue is equally affected. Crises in the Niger Delta, for example, had shaken the country to her root, as the source of the 'goose' of the country was greatly affected. Virtually all steps taken to check crises are not economic-friendly. For instance, imposition of curfew brings every economic activity to a halt as it becomes difficult to move freely from place to place. The whole area of crisis, therefore, becomes desolated and remains a ghost city until normalcy is reinstated. Since no economic development could take place in an atmosphere of fear, anarchy, and insecurity, it, therefore, implies that ethno-religious crises are bane to economic sustainability. Looking at it internationally, incessant ethno-religious violence has added to the fear foreign investors is having of Nigeria. Cases of kidnapping of expatriates in Nigeria are no more news. One wonders how foreign investors could decide to establish in the 'war zone.' Apart from the fact that the image of Nigeria has been dented globally as a country which breeds social miscreant and criminals, Nigerians have also become the first suspects in any scene of crime. They are also exposed to thorough screening before they are allowed to enter other countries.

### STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING MUTUAL COEXISTENCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

There is no single solution for the issue of ethno-religion conflicts and the challenge of nationhood. However, this does not preclude this paper from positing suggestions of strategies and policy options towards the process of ensuring mutual coexistence. These among others include the following:

Conflict management institutions lack the capacity to resolve conflicts using the strategy of political socialization and dialogue. The process of acquiring social learning is known as socialization. It is through the process of socialization that individuals or groups acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to participate as responsible members of ethnic groups and the entire society (Adebisi, 2008). The process of creating social order is essentially one of devising means whereby man's innate drives can be controlled for the sake of harmony in the society. This process should assist the Nigerian society like any other society to curb potentially disruptive drives by channeling them in socially acceptable directions. The various institutions involved in conflict management should empower citizen for political participation, which are essential indicators of nationhood and stability.

A forum for political participation from the grass roots to national and central levels is essential. Political participation as a virtue of its own right is a fairly recent phenomenon among the Nigerian citizens. It may be difficult to sustain a proposition to the effect that Nigerians actually do display high rates of political participation and interest, even at general elections. The leadership should provide the opportunity for voluntary activities by which members of this country share in, the election of leaders and directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy (Adeweg, 2000).

Nigeria like other plural societies has multi-ethnic and multi-cultural characteristics, which pose a great challenge in the articulation of public interest. Each ethnic group has its own basic interests or expectations, which may or may not conflict with those of other ethnic communities. For the sake of nationhood, the leadership organizes resources and rewards in such a way that each ethnic group has increasing expectations of gains. The basic needs of each group should be identified and harmonized within the national needs. This should be taken as an affirmative action to equitably re-distribute the resources.

Our leaders should encourage ideologies and policies that transcend the ethnic conglomeration. Such ideologies and policies should be instruments of public education as opposed to being instruments of political propaganda and mouthpiece of accusations and counter-accusations. Leaders must be open-minded, nationalistic and committed to the democratization process in Nigeria which is both a responsibility and an obligation.

### CONCLUSION

So far, attempts have been made to discuss the magnitude of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria and the factors responsible for these crises. There is no doubt that a nation who focuses on developmental projects without addressing the issue of security is only planting corn on the rock, as no serious development can take place in an atmosphere of crisis. On this note, we suggest the diversification of Nigeria economy to address the problems of poverty and unemployment, which are strong backbones for ethno-religious crises. We equally found out that ethno-religious crises could be checked should their perpetrators are adequately brought to book and made to face the wrath of the law. Sustainable development could also take place where justice and other moral virtues are allowed to reign. The al-Manjiri factor in ethno-religious ethnic crises could also be averted if the products of the system are entrenched in the mainstream of the nation's employment scheme. If not, the case will be worse than that of a father who decided to train some of his children and left the rest untrained. Those who were not trained would, however, not allow the trained ones to enjoy the fruit of their training. In such a case, no development could be sustained.

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