

Conflict and Crime in the Society: A Bane to Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Just like conflict, crime is functional and pervasive as no unit of society is totally free and spared of it woes and throes when it occurs. The way the polity is organized can create both root causes and conditions favourable to negative conflict with its attendant consequences. Societies like Nigeria and other developing countries; where corruption and corrupt practices are heralded, politicians are above the law and the unfit are preferred in positions cannot possibly escape intractable violence and destructive conflict which arguably can undo economic, political and social gains of country and scare potential investors. Two theories (conflict and functional) were considered to explain the phenomena of conflict and crime. The findings reveals that the primary beneficiaries in conflict situations are politicians (they provide arms and fund conflictants); and poverty was seen as another reason for the meteoric rise of conflict and crime in Nigeria. They study made some recommendations among which includes; the existing legislations on conflict and crime as provided in the criminal code should be implemented and culprit punished and vexed issues should be amicably redress through the court, council of chiefs and elders as it is done in African traditional setting.

Key words: Conflict; Crime; Threat; Insecurity destruction

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INTRODUCTION

There is nothing wrong with Nigeria but there is something wrong in Nigeria and Nigerians. A nation with a sizeable land mass located in an earthquake and tsuanami free zone of the world that if properly harnessed our soil can feed the entire continent of Africa and provide employment for her citizens: but is besieged with a larger threat of conflict and crime, which as observed by Mobolaji (2011), "any nation that has conflict, crime and security challenges cannot be said to be in the path of greatness and development.

Across Nigeria and Africa the world has witnessed harsh consequences of devastating effects of conflict and crime that have destroyed and stampeded socio-economic development. The inescapable fact is that, violence orchestrated by conflict and crime has led to significant loss of live and become major element in impoverishment, undermining human security and development.

No doubt conflict and crime are age long hiatus that all societies (developed and developing) have experienced in their vast and ever developmental quest; but the fear here is that the posture it has assume recently in Nigeria is frighteningly destructive and seriously threatens the cooperation existence of a people. Conflict create platforms for crime to fester - as it is divisive and wrong, a monumental problem and affront to peace and development (Obama, 2008). Conflict and crime can cause a nation to a long term decline economically, socially and politically (example; Somali, Sudan, Iraq, Egypt, Syria etc) especially when commitment is compromise to bear services of irresponsiveness (Gaya, 2008).

No day goes by in the country (Nigeria) without reported and unreported cases of conflicts and criminal activities in one part of the country or the other. In the same concern Adeola (2008) contend that, conspicuously is the countless incidences of conflicts and crime in Nigeria - this according him, was demonstrated shockingly (lost of count) when the then Inspector

General of Police (Okiro) was giving a breakdown of the number of ordinary civilians killed in conflicts and crime situations. Conflicts like the Bojie – Insadop communities, Ikot Offiong in Cross River State and Akwa Ibom State buttresses this claims. Other conflicts that have occurred in Nigeria include; Yoruba – Hausa Community in Shagamu (Ogun State); Zango – Kataf (Kaduna State); Eleme – Okirika (River State); Tiv – Jakun (Taraba State); Ogoni – Adoni (River State); Chamba - Kuteb (Taraba State); Itsekiri – Ijaw/Urhobo (Delta State); Aguleri – Umuleri (Anambra); Ijaw – Ilaje (Ondo State); Basa – Egbura (Nassarawa State); Hausa/Fulani – Sawaya (Bauchi State); Fulani – Irigwe and Yelwa – Shendam (Plateau); and others not mentioned (Ubi 2001; Imobighe, 2003; Omotayo, 2005). That has proved impossible to control because the warning signs were taken for granted.

Sambo (2005) opined that Nigeria had to count in scores of deaths from avoidable conflict which have rendered thousands homeless and despondent. In all these, report has it that the last twelve years in Nigeria, no fewer than two hundred conflicts and causality figures, conservatively put over 500,000 were recorded in quick succession across the county and resulting to loss of lives and properties. Accordingly Maire (2001) describe Nigeria as “a fallen house that conjures images of chaos, confusion, and crime – repressions, business fraud, a nation in comatose and a brink”.

Conflicts of all shades are intrinsic, inevitable and it is the expression of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs that arise as new formation generated by social change that emerges against inherited constraints, argues (Gaya, 2009). This according to Chima (2009), is manifested in incessant armed robbery attack, rape, arson, child labour etc., and the attendant effect on the nation in terms of loss of investment opportunities suggest the fact that, there is a systematic failure in all agencies of government saddled with the onus of ensuring peace, security and crime managed society.

Conflict involves struggle between opposing forces - implying that issues that are more serious than those relating to mere disputes possibly stimulating confrontation, causing harm, damage and psychological trauma that last throughout the years of victim's lives, asserts (Erim 2008). In this circumstances a nation loss it credibility and business outlets. Moreso nobody is spared of the throes and woes of conflict and crime (Effiom, 2009).

Since conflict is functional, it is therefore apt to be recognized and confine within the limit of the law: after all people disagree to agree (Joseph 2011). It only becomes criminal and frowned at when the activities of conflictants have exceeded the limit imposed by societal consensus and the conventions has provided in Cap 42 Section 35, 37 and 51 of the Nigeria Criminal Code (1996). Specifically Section 27 states that “it is unlawful to kill and maim any person unless such killing is authorized or justified and excused by law”. Therefore act like rape,

arson, arm robbery, extra judicial killing, out right theft etc are tagged crime. Sadly criminal minded Nigerians use conflict as a fillip to commit crime.

However, it should be pointed out that nearly everybody abhors conflict in whatever form because the long run effects of this, is that more people are thrown out of jobs, social amenities (both in rural and urban) are destroyed; relationships amongst groups strained, economic and other sundry productive activities stalled.

The world is so interconnected that issues of conflict and crime wherever they occur incessantly is viewed and considered as crude, illegit and at aberrant with societal harmony. However, there is an admission of the fact that conflict and crime are inevitable and that not all conflicts can be resolved but managed.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE CONFLICT

Sounding incredulous is the threat pose by conflict and crime, which undermines human security. Violence resulting from everyday crime, large scale communal conflicts and insurgencies can undo development gains achieved in education, health, employment, capital generation and infrastructure provision. Conflict is a public health problem, a human right problem, and a problem for the state and the international community, because it impedes human freedom to live safety, security and sustains poverty in many countries. (UN 2006).

Conflict occurs in different forms. It can be domestic, political mob - driven or institutional. Domestic conflict is against member(s) of household and is often hidden from outsiders and can be managed. The concern here is how other sources of forms of conflicts, (be it communal, political, religious etc) can be used to commit act of criminality in the society. Unequivocally, conflict and crime is believed to be attack on the very value of peace and freedom which perpetrators do not share. Like J. F. Kenedy said “Let every nation know whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend – oppose any foe to assure the survival of peace and success of liberty”.

In light of the above, the following questions occupies centrally the concern of this paper. Who benefit in conflicts situation? Is conflict a sure haven for people to commit crime? These and other questions not asked is what this study seeks to address as they are the issues which form the background of the study.

CONFLICT AND CRIME (OVERVIEW)

Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century, the possibility of major conflicts has continued to loom whether in the diplomatic community, the military or non-governmental organization and have provoked some fundamental and potentially disturbing question: what is conflict and why the intensity of conflict causing act of criminality?

Conflict therefore is seen as condition of social disharmony in which there are disagreement, antagonism even resulting to violence and large scale destruction of lives and properties. Also conflict entails disorderliness, coercive illegitimate force constituting threat to all citizens.

Accordingly, David (2009) put conflict expressly as anomaly/and pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups. During this discrepancies and acrimony crime(s) like mass murder and genocide are committed against innocent and unarmed civilians. Furthermore, Otite (1990) in Abidemi (2007) views conflicts as arising from the pursuit of divergent interest, goals and aspiration by individuals and or groups in defined physical environment.

While crime is an act or omission prohibited by law for the protection of the public, the violation of which is prosecuted by the state in its own name (Reid 1999). It is a behaviour that breaks the law and is liable to public prosecution and punishment. Crime could also be regarded as a behaviour that violates a society's criminal laws. Hence any behaviour that violates the penal or legal code of a particular society is considered as crime (Ukwayi, J. K, 2008).

Notably here is that, the legal code consists of formal rules called laws and contained in the constitution and enforced through the use of formal sanction when rules are broken. For an act to be criminal in a legal sense it must be intentional, willfull or guilty mind known legally as "mensrea".

Crime just like conflict has impacted negatively to humans and socio-economic growth and development of many communities and nations. Certainly conflict and crime are not pleasant occurrence, therefore the need to strategise through negotiation, reconciliation and peaceful settlement amongst conflictant is apt for cooperate existence and societal advancement.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT AND CRIME

Several factors have been advanced as the main causes of conflict and crime in the society, viz;

a) Diversity arising from multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and religious inclination as typified in Nigeria e.g Christian and Muslim crisis in Kaduna, Kano, Shagamu etc.

b) Denial and deprivation: it is natural to fight to get what rightly belongs to you. There is no gain saying the fact that denial and deprivation still remains the cause(s) of conflict and criminality in Nigeria and other countries of the world (eg. Niger Delta in Nigeria, Sudan).

c) Inequality and uneven distribution of resource. According to Karl Marx, unequal advantage given to "segment of the population over the other, provides the maturation for conflict and criminality.

d) Poverty: No doubt poverty in Nigeria and with Nigerians is indeed staggering and worrisome. Just like the saying goes, "a poor and hungry man is like a bomb waiting to be detonated".

e) Corruption and exclusion. Arguably Nigeria is

sobriquet as a CORRUPT NATION. This is a nation where actions of "so called" leaders has cripple the socio-economic and political landscape, citizens are left without services rendered (no potable drinking water, no medicare, bad roads, no accountability etc).

Accordingly the transparency international has this to say about corruption in Africa (Nigeria): "Cameroon remains at the bottom of the list as the country where government officials are perceived to be readiest to accept bribes. Nigeria came close to receiving that dubious distinction. Through corruption and its accompanying practice, the control of the state and access to it in Nigeria, still ranks among the fastest avenues to private accumulation of wealth. This bleeding of the nation's economy for personal benefits had variously contributed to leakages abroad. This misuses of the executive official position to misappropriate public funds in itself, has created disenchantment which obviously has led to untoward response (Niger Delta in Nigeria).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From the theoretical standpoint no doubt, there are so many theories that can explain the phenomena of conflict and crime. But for the very fact that, it would be less cumbersome to convey lucidly the theoretical underpinning of conflict and crime with fewer theories, this paper therefore considered the following:

a) Conflict theory (Marxist Perspective):

Associated with Karl Marx and sometimes referred under the titles of radical or critical criminology. This is founded on Marx's concept of dialectical materialism leading to capitalism (Domingo, 2004).

The theory holds that private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of the masses by a few but powerful members of the bourgeoisie class is largely the product of capitalism. This leads to poverty of the masses and therefore predisposing them to conflict and crime.

The understanding from the conflict perspective is that exploitation of the masses is principally the cause of conflict and crime in the society. Therefore elimination of exploitation of the masses, it is likely that conflict and crime will be eliminated.

However, it should be noted that the characterization of human society is that of tension, struggle, exploitation, conflict etc. Notwithstanding therefore that with the elimination of exploitation and poverty conflict will automatically cease.

b) Functional Perspective (Merton's Anomie theory):

Theory general underlying characteristics common to all functionalist based theory is a stress on the importance of shared norms and values which form the basis for social order.

For them conflict and crime consist of acts which break

or depart from these shared norms and values. Merton postulated that whenever there is a discrepancy between the goals of human action and the societally structured legitimate means of achieving them, there is bound to be responses through rebellion (conflict, crime) retreat and other untoward means to achieve the goal by different means. Therefore discrepancies breeds conflict and crime.

This perspective has been faulted for the fact that conflict, crime and other hiatus societally will still occur even when all legitimate means are provided for people. Hence conflict and crime is not totally a product of non observance of norms and values, and legitimacy in achieving ones goals.

CONCLUSION

Conflict and crime undoubtedly has remained sources of concern to all Nigerians. To that extent wherever conflict and crime occurs is viewed as illegitimate and affront to societal harmony.

The functionality of conflict and crime no doubt, has been alluded to as observed – without conflict and crime some agencies, organization (police, soldiers, EFCC etc.) and means of livelihood (some of people) would have been stalled and irrelevant. This notwithstanding, when conflict and crime exceeds societal consensus with its negative consequences (death, destruction, rapes, arson etc), the resultant effect is poverty, destruction, killing, hunger, to mention but a few.

Therefore conflict and crime should be discouraged and conditions that predisposes one to embark on destructive conflict abhorred.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This work recommends as follows;

Conflictants should stop taking laws into their “hands”. Redress of vexed issues should be properly sorted (Court, Chief, Council of Elders etc.).

The existing legislations on conflict leading to crime (murder, arson, rape etc) as provided in the criminal code should be implemented and culprit punished.

Those saddled with the onus of providing services to the citizens should do so failure of which, be tried and appropriate measures take accordingly.

Counselling and conscientization should be given to all, deemphasizing criminality and conflict as not honourable to achieving anything good.

Finally Nigerians (people) should tolerate one another and work cooperately to further the course of peace and unity.

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