

## MECHANISMS FOR STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PEACE BUILDING FOR DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper is on mechanisms for strengthening community peace building for democracy and national development in Nigeria. The paper says that community peace is a parameter that can make democracy to thrive in Nigeria, and that as a system of governance, it has the potentials to engender social and economic development in the country. The paper identifies the youth, family and educational institution as mechanisms and agents of community peace-building and instruments of community mobilization for promoting peace in Nigeria. It, therefore, recommends that agencies of government like the National Orientation Agency (NOA), and the Federal Ministry of Information should collaborate by designing programmes that would sensitise the citizens towards the need for peaceful co-existence in the various communities of the nation.*

**Keywords:** *Community peace, Democracy, National Development*

### **Introduction**

There is no doubt that when a community or nation is at peace, it would be able to develop and satisfy most of the well-being and welfare needs of its citizens. The satisfaction of the citizens' welfare tends to increase the legitimacy of the government in power and promote loyalty, patriotism and obedience from the citizenry (Muhammed, 2013). Without peace, the interest of durable democratic governance will be in jeopardy.

Scholars do not agree in regards to the role of democracy in peace and violent conflict. Democratic theory, as enumerated by Russett (2007:2), hinges on the fact that democracy leads to, and engender peace as peace cannot be achieved in the absence of democracy.

Thus, it can be deduced from democratic peace theory that democratic countries are the most peaceful governments we have in the world.

However, democracy has dark side that sups with the devil of political violence; or it is claimed that democracy kills (Keane, 2010:2). Violence is inherent in every effort to establish and maintain democracy. The practice of democracy everywhere rests with foundation acts of violence (Keane, 2010). Reynal-Querol (2004) argues that partly democratic countries are more prone to civil war than full democracies, and full autocracies. Therefore, it appears that violence prevention or reduction does not rest solely on democratic status of a country

alone. It has equally been observed that although democratic countries may not go into war with other democratic countries, however, they are often embroiled with conflict which is often precipitated by electoral contest.

Cervellati and Sunde (2011) contend that democratization process may trigger political violence because the scenario under which democratization takes place, especially, during democratic transitions, provides convenient platforms for violence conflicts among groups within a polity. Rapoport and Weinberg (2001) state that the situation immediately after elections is often very sensitive as the acceptance or otherwise of the outcome of elections by contenders can produce outbreaks of violence as it was the case in East Timor after the 1999 referendum of independence. From the above, it can be inferred that although the universal position is that democracy midwives peace, however, democracy alone cannot bring about peace as evidenced in some countries undergoing democratization such as Cote D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, and old Sudan among others. Elections which are cardinal features of democratization often generate conflict in partially democratic countries. Joshua (2013) submits that there is a relationship between peace and democracy.

One major challenge in the Nigerian political system that has always been making communal peace to elude us is the intense nature of competition for political power. The Nigerian politicians, over the years, have become more desperate and daring in taking and retaining power and more intolerant of

opposition, criticisms and efforts at replacing them (Alemika, 2011:1 cited by Joshua, 2013). This scenario explains why election which is the means of political power acquisition in democratic governance has been violent-ridden in the democratization process.

In Nigeria, the perception of politics as warfare has persisted for too long to the extent that it seems unthinkable to talk of politics without our mind frame flashing momentarily towards conflict and indeed violence. In some pessimistic quarters, violent disruptions of electoral processes have come to be regarded as an undying aspect of our national culture (Olurode and Jega, 2011). In Nigeria, communal or national peace is not only threatened in the democratization process, but equally threatened even more when a democratically elected government is in power.

The idea of communal or national violence, conflict and breach of peace in Nigeria should no longer be regarded as a new phenomenon. Breach of peace in different forms had been a consistent problem in the country for long. Communal riots, religious or sectarian crisis, inter and intra ethnic conflicts have become a recurring decimal in the country. Ethnic, religious and communal clashes or unrest may arise from highly emotional social and economic issues (Ogundiya and Amzat, 2009).

The worrisome breach of peace that is currently threatening the Nigerian democratic governance is the spate of general insecurity in the country. Arising from deficit and anomaly in governance, in the opinion of Adegami and Adepoju

(2017), is the erosion of internal security across the country. Security lapses have continued to manifest in the areas of grave activities of insurgents. The insurgents such as the dreadful Boko haram with its series of bombings and violent attacks have succeeded in mass destruction of lives and properties, especially, in the North-eastern part of the country. Apart from Boko haram insurgents, there are banditry activities that are plundering the lives of the people in different communities in Zamfara State. There is also the emergence of different gangs in the Niger Delta areas which engage in kidnapping of people and destruction of oil installations. All these activities have continued to fuel the wave of crimes among the teeming youths of the nation.

It is against this background that this paper sets out to discuss in details, how community or national peace can be built for the survival of the nation's democracy and thereby facilitate social and economic development of Nigeria.

### **Community Peace**

Writing on the nature of the community Anyanwu (2002), submits that the community, as a social system, is an area of common life, the focus of social living. A community may refer to a group of people gathered together in any geographical area, whether large or small, and united by common interests. To achieve their common goals, the condition that is paramount to be met is that members of a community, as a matter of necessity, must be in harmony among themselves. Community peace, therefore, is about establishing harmonious relationship for corporate existence.

Community peace is about existence of mutual love, mutual respect and mutual understanding between and among members of the community.

Communal peace is about tranquility or an untroubled state of affairs of a community. It has to be noted that there is no perfect nation or community where there is peace forever. As members of a community relate with one another, conflicts are bound to occur. When conflicts occur, the most important thing for members of the community is to find amicable resolution to the conflicts. Peace enriches the community and individual lives, as it directs the community members to embrace diversity and support one another to the fullest extent possible. Communal peace provides care for members. Through caring, generosity and fairness, a platform is provided for attaining a sustainable, just, meaningful, vibrant and fulfilling personal and community life.

Community peace is both social and structural process. It aims to prevent conflict and achieve conditions which reduce community vulnerabilities to violence from internal or external causes. It ultimately seeks to influence attitudes and behaviours through promoting values of peace and tolerance (<https://en.m.wikibooks>). Peace enriches our community and individual lives, as it directs us to embrace diversity and support one another to the fullest extent possible. Through peace, the community or the society at large provides an assurance for security, love and stable minds to develop in the interest of all members of that community.

According to Steckl (2001), there are some ways to perceive community peace as summarized as follows; (i) Making personal commitment to non-violence in our behaviour in the community.

(ii) Good mind to assist people or citizens in need.

(iii) Training the children to achieve calmness and behave in good manners in the community where they live.

(iv) Showing kindness to members of the community who are vulnerable, homeless and those with physical or cognitive disabilities.

(v) Speaking out against prejudice and discrimination in the community.

(vi) Regard people who hurt your feelings as your personal teachers of how to maintain a peaceful nature.

(vii) When you realize that it was about the other person, find in your heart some compassion for that person, realizing that he or she is most surely struggling.

(viii) As a member of a religious community, we should develop interest in how to get more involved so that our community can be at peace.

(ix) Finding a non-profit organisation that works towards peaceful communities and volunteer.

(x) Choosing a career that yields only good things for our families and the entire community.

Community peace entails dialogue engagement with an open mind and the real will to listen to others. Only then will you be able to understand each other and build bridges. Change in terms of development cannot happen and peace cannot be established if people are unable

to communicate with one another; to listen to their experiences and views and show empathy, understanding and compassion. We all have different opinions and we may not agree on the same issues. Building compromise and mutual understanding is incredibly important (Arif-fear, 2017).

### **Conceptualizing Peace**

The quest to define peace as a concept and set of values in our society is as old as recorded history. Ancient people also thrive for peace after series of bloodshed in the name of conflicts as a result of communal clashes, inter-tribal wars and territorial integrity. In modern human society, the effort to establish and define peace within a rational and humanist approach is based on knowledge and on clearly defined methodologies for research and theoretical analysis. It follows then that the concept of peace cannot be defined or pinned down to one way definition.

Peace is a concept of societal friendship and harmony in the absence of hostility and violence. In a social sense, peace is commonly used to mean a lack of conflict (such as war) and freedom from fear of violence between individuals or heterogeneous (relatively foreign or distinct) groups (<https://www.wikipedia.com>). Ajala (2008) posits that the concept of peace is not the traditional definition of peace as absence of war but the inclusion of many situations that guarantee positive human conditions. Peace is obtained by changing social structures that are responsible for death, poverty and malnutrition. Greene, Berkowitz and Kerr 2018 identify some

elements in defining peace. They explain that at an individual level, peace may start with having calmness within oneself. Expanding outward, peace entails agreement and harmony among people.

Mou and Mou (2017), attempt to offer a comprehensive and holistic conception of peace. They linked it directly to the issue of sustainable development. In another way, they consider peace as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and the wider international community. Politically, peace entails political order. That is the institutionalization of political structures in a way that makes justice possible. Inferred from this is that, peace ensures that you are aware of yourself and peace helps you take better decisions. It gives you strength and you stay calm when things go wrong and out of control. Peace provides you the freedom to do experiments in your life and helps you to put things in order. Having peace in their lives, the people begin to focus attention on the need for the protection of human rights, protection of the community (environment) and securing of a real and meaningful international cooperation.

Still on peace, Garuba (1999a, 1999b), states that though war may not be going on in a country, if there are pervasive poverty, oppression of the poor by the rich, police brutality, intimidation of ordinary citizens by those in power, oppression of women or monopolization of resources and power by some social cleavages in the society or a nation, it

would be wrong to say that there is peace in such a country or society.

### **Peace Building Process**

Promoting peace requires valuing and considering both oneself and others. As such, peace is central to every situation throughout our lives. In community organization, promoting peace is part of strategic planning. Adekola and Ezechinnah (2018) state that peace building is an intervention designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict. Peace building activities, according them, address the root causes or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution and stabilize society, in terms of political and socio-economic development.

The activities included in peace building vary depending on the situation and the agents of peace building. Successful peace building activities create an environment supportive of self-sustaining, durable peace, reconcile opponents; prevent conflict from restarting; integrate civil society; create rule of law mechanisms; and address underlying structural and societal issues. The five main goals which peace building is trying to focus are (a) Legitimate (inclusive) politics; (b) People's security; (c) Access to justice; (d) Employment generation and livelihoods supports; (e) Accountable revenue management and service delivery. Where these goals are followed, and local and national programmes of action are deliberately designed by government, the tendency of situations relapsing into conflict or the

emergence of new ones would likely be reduced.

### **Agents of Peace Building**

Adekola and Ezechinnah (2018) have been able to identify agents of peace building, that are persons, institutions and organisations through which peace building can be achieved in a particular community or nation. The agents of peace building indentified include: the youth, family, traditional institutions/religious institutions, Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), and educational institutions. These agents are discussed as follows:

#### **(a) The Youth**

Youths are very important in the process of peace building. As important as they are, inadequate attention is usually paid to their roles in peace building, especially in developing societies such as Nigeria. In situations of insecurity, violence and conflicts, youths are generally vulnerable. This may originate from the fact that they can be easily manipulated because they are tractable young minds. They possess the power to mobilise for violence or peace. A high rate of success is expected where the efforts of the youth are well structured and organized towards peace building.

#### **(b) Family**

The family is recognized as an agent of peace building, being one of the fundamental institutions of society. As parents, they have the power to train and nurture the children to be peaceful, culturally and morally sound. Family institution is the first school of the child in life. If the family fails in its responsibility

as an agent of peace building, it creates more social unrest for the entire society.

#### **(c) Traditional/Religious Institutions**

These are agents of peace building at the community level and larger society. The traditional institutions uphold the norms, customs and values of the community. The local institutions settle disputes among families and communities that may arise from land disagreement and others. Religious institutions, on their part, promote peace building through several programmes/activities that bring people together, especially the youths and women. Religious institutions preach about love, peace, understanding, forgiveness and co-existence.

#### **(d) Community Based Organizations (CBOs)**

The CBOs are socio-cultural and voluntary organisations based in the communities with the aim of fostering peace, unity and development. The CBOs work in collaboration with the community leadership to ensure peaceful co-existence and the sustainability of community projects. It is glaringly obvious in Nigeria today that state capacity to prevent crime and provide security is becoming overstretched and inadequate. Hence, there is a search for alternatives to provide security in order to build peace in the community. The alternatives are found in community-based approaches to promote community based-crime-prevention.

Ojebode (2016) submits that collaborative support between community and the police can bring about safety to the community in terms of peace-building. He emphasizes that each of the communities may have a community association or landlords'

associations to prevent crimes. This, according to him, can be done through the establishment of vigilante groups that are expected to work with the police in order to deal with security situations in the community.

#### **(e) Educational Institutions**

The school is a very important agent of peace building. The school is a larger institution where children and youths are taught to imbibe discipline, the culture of peace and unity, respect, humility and cooperation, through civic education or related subjects.

#### **Guiding Principles of a Democratic society**

Among the universally recognized or acceptable tenets of Modern day democracy as enumerated by Tukur and Awosanya (2004) are:

- i. Popular Sovereignty: This simply explains that the power of a state resides in the people. That is, the ultimate power of a state does not lie either in any ethnic, sectional, religious interests or class-based groups. This principle further explains that the policies and decisions of government must derive from the expressed wishes of the people. Popular sovereignty, in effect, emphasizes that the ultimate power belongs to the people and they have the final say in the way and manner they are governed.
- ii. The Rule of Law: This is the Central Principle upon which democratic rule or governance rests for survival. It explains the

concept that the exercise of the power of government shall be strictly regulated by the law, and that the citizens should not be exposed to arbitrary use of power.

The principle further highlights the right of the citizens to defend themselves in case of any legal action, and gives room to them not to be found or deemed to be found guilty until brought before a competent court of the land and proved by same court. Equality before the law irrespective of citizens' social, political, ethnic, religious and economic status is a significant part of the principles of the rule of law.

- iii. Fundamental human rights and basic freedom: Fundamental human rights have always been a common feature in the constitution of any democratic society. The constitutional provision on human rights usually includes the following basic rights as freedom of movement, freedom of speech, peaceful assembly, the right to vote or be voted for in an election, among others.
- iv. Periodic Elections: This is a necessary tool for actualizing representative democracy. Periodic elections are organized for the citizens to express their choices through on the basis of fairness, transparency and credibility on the part of the country's electoral commission.
- v. Free Press: This is the medium through which the people's opinions are expressed which also implies that citizens must enjoy an

unhindered access to information, particularly from the government for the survival of democracy in any society. Press is often referred to as the fourth estate of the realm and the watchdog of the society.

- vi. Independent Judiciary where justice can be dispensed without undue interference is a fundamental pillar for democracy, peace and orderly society.

### **Nexus of Democracy, Peace and National Development**

According to Yakubu (2012), democracy is built on principles such as participation and inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability, transparency and good governance, regular, free and fair elections, freedom and respect for human rights and observance of rule of law. National Security is the podium of democracy and if democracy loses security imperatives, it has lost its real substance (Atelhe, 2014). The most important role of a democratic government is to ensure peace through adequate provision of security at communal and national levels. The inference from this is that the existence of peace is a supporting pillar for democracy. The existence of peace in a community or a nation is a security for the survival of democracy. When democracy is adequately secured, development is equally secured. Okoli (2013) clearly states that to say the least, national security means sustainable development whereby the nation enjoys freedom from poverty, ignorance, disease, and other forms of vulnerability. In line with this view, there is a nexus between democratic

and development. For the average Nigerian, democracy is only meaningful if it delivers what has become known as democracy dividends. Democratic dividends in this respect can be explained in terms of socio-economic development.

This perspective has been corroborated by Lawal and Olukayode (2012), which democracy is development imbued. It is argued that the more the democratic ethics in a society, the higher the dividends of democracy; and the higher the dividends of democracy, the better the level of sustainable development. Democracy and development are inseparable. Components of development such as discipline, commitment, honesty, transparency, accountability and peaceful co-existence are also embedded in democracy. Equality, which is a principle of democracy, is equally an element of peace, because its absence encourages tensions of all types. As mentioned by Galtung (1969), positive peace would not be obtained without the development of just and equitable conditions associated with equalitarian social structures.

Olagoke (2014) establishes relationships among governance, security (peace) and development. He clearly states that governance expectation is on provision of security for people. Where there is security, there is peace. Various events threatening corporate existence of people in communities, nations and the world at large have not only destroyed human and material properties, but introduced poverty, hunger and diseases to the people. He further states that the major problem of democratic governance

in Nigeria bothers on lust for power without sincerity of purpose, corruption and maladministration of socio-economic and political system in the face of the desire to rule by justice and to establish equity.

### **Challenges of Peace Building for Attainment of Democracy and National Development**

Despite that peace and security are the pillars of sustainable democracy, it is quite unfortunate that the Nigerian democracy least promotes peace and national security. Agagu (2004), as reported by Lawal and Olukayode (2012), the type of democracy operating in Nigeria does not concede any aspect of decision-making to the masses. Even the common one which is that of electoral choice is often derived through rigging and harassment. The Nigerian democracy has been described as one that heightens conflict, brute use of force, intimidation and discord and the underdevelopment of the state and the citizenry.

Majaro-Majesty (2015) observes that the state of affairs in Nigeria is being promoted by the over-centralization of both economic and political powers at the federal and state levels. One of the various factors that is threatening security and peace in the country is that any ethnic community seeking development has to clamour for its own local government area in a bid to secure its areas of autonomous control or in a bid to detach from a majority group and have her representative at a vantage position at the centre to influence her development. The federal government's concept of peace as a

national unity and integration agenda is debased by the same government as a result of poor handling of infrastructure and provision of social amenities which are never enough or evenly distributed. What can be derived from this is a simple statement that peace is a combination of justice and equity.

The current security situation in Nigeria seems not to be favourably disposed to democratic sustainability going by reports of specific and general insecurity in the country. Almost every day, there are reports of violent attacks perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen militia. In Nigeria, according to the UN Security Council (2018), multiple clashes between farmers and herders in the middle Belt States, as well as the Southern States of Edo, Ebonyi and Kogi, resulted in numerous casualties, population displacement and destruction of property. Recurring violence between herdsmen and farmers as well as related cattle theft and banditry in many northern states, including Zamfara and Kaduna, poses serious threats to peace and security.

Conflict in the Niger Delta has always been marked by the vandalism of oil infrastructures and massive systemic illegal oil production that is usually called 'oil bunkering'. What is now common in the region and which has spread to other parts of the country is kidnapping for ransom, public insecurity and communal violence. In the South Eastern part of the country, there have been and there are still agitations for independent state of Biafra largely championed by young people from the area. The Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) seems to undermine the

current democratic government in the country as a result of their persistent agitations for a separate country, independent of the present Nigeria. Southern Kaduna State is now experiencing a sharp segregation along religious and ethnic lines precipitated by a dozen outbreaks of violence (Hoffmann, 2017).

In the South-West, there is growing tension over the safety of road users, especially, the private and public motor drivers, with reports of kidnapping and armed robbery. The perception of the people is that Nigeria is becoming democratically ungovernable as the rate of terrorism and kidnapping is increasing daily (Nigerian Tribune, 7th May, 2019). Following spate of kidnappings abduction and robbery attacks on road travelers in part of the South-West, leaders of thought and traditional rulers in the region have called on the political leadership of the nation to re-design the security architecture of the country. Currently in the south west, an indigenous security outfit known as “Amotekun” has been founded to curtail the menace of security threats in the region.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, the relationships among community peace, democracy and national development have been discussed. It has been stated that democratic governance thrives in an environment where there is peace and orderliness. The study has indicated that democratic governance that is firmly built on peace would likely engender development. The study explored some of the ways to build

community or national peace for socio-economic development of Nigeria. As individuals, we need to recognize the extent to which all of us are interdependent. It has become necessary for us to direct our energy and resources towards supporting and not harming one another. The person that we dismiss or even hate today may be connected in ways we do not realize to own our well-being. This is why we need peace between and among ourselves in our community as well as the country as a whole.

### **Suggestions**

Community peace building has a patent force to enhance democratic governance and national development in a country like Nigeria. Therefore, the following suggestions are made as way forward on the National Security challenges:

1. The entire security architecture of the nation should be overhauled in order to give room for the establishment of people’s police for states, local government areas, and cities designated institutions which will co-exist with the unitary police.
2. The police and the army should be more funded so that there will be provisions for modern weapons and security equipment to tackle the challenges of insecurity in the country.
3. Community leaders and traditional rulers should be involved in the security of their areas because of their proximity to the grassroots.
4. Government agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), and the Federal Ministry of Information should collaborate to

design enlightenment programmes to sensitize the general public on the need to be security conscious at all time.

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