



Religion as a Catalyst for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Religion still remains one of the acknowledged catalysts that enhance sustainable development in any given society in spite of the current debate on the contention of the role of religion in national development. Although recently religion has turned to an avenue in which individuals assault or harass one another and that has led to the incredibility of it. Activities that frighten the peaceful coexistence, stability, and development of the country have been displayed by the political actors, leaders, and followers of these religions in Nigeria making the position of religion to tackle national development related issues becoming more open to discussion. Thus, the aim of this research work is to look at the connection between religion and sustainable development as well as how adherence to these religious codes of belief can contribute to the social reconstruction meaningful to sustainable development in Nigeria. Hence, the method of data collection in this research work was documentary and employed the secondary data to gain more perceptive of the current situation from the existing literature like books, articles, conference proceedings, previous studies among others on the religion and sustainable development in Nigeria. The research work concludes by putting forward that it is difficult to attain sustainable development without religious values in Nigeria. Religion needs to be regulated according to its main tenets in order to achieve the much-expected dividend of democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Catalyst, Nigeria, Politics, Sustainable-Development



Introduction

Religion exists in every society and it is shaped by its social context while sociologists assert that religion reflects society and that it is assumed to be socially constructed and it is confirmed to be an essential constituent of the human societies and shape how people respond to the environment in which they inhabit. Uche (2011) pointed out that religion not only serves the purpose of raising the values to the position of ultimate concern but equally serve as an evaluative feature in politics. It is vital to note that Nigeria as a combination of multi-ethnic groups with different religious ideologies and interaction among these people of un-identical or contradicting belief system have not been completely free of volatile and violent occurrences. Thus, the account of Nigeria history has been pigeonholed by a number of religious upheavals and by implication drastically obstructed Nigeria development as a nation. It is pertinent to state that instead of exploring the values of these major religions towards sustainable developments in Nigeria conversely religions have been used by the main actors to promote disunity and suspicious among Nigerians with a number of a different religious setting.

To this end, Hornby (1995) put forward that religion can be viewed as the faith in the existence of a God or gods particularly the faith that they fashioned the world and gave human beings a spiritual nature which continues living after the death of the body. Therefore, the notion of religion is attached to the notion of having faith in God or gods with a certain set of guidelines, values, and practices among the adherents of such religion. In a related development, studies have shown that since after the independence in 1960, the dimension of crises or violence in Nigeria has been characterized by continual religious violence such as the Mai Tatsine religious crisis of the 1980s, Kafanchan of 1980s to present, Kaduna Shariah Crises of 2000s, Jos religious violence of the recent time, Oro Cultists and Muslim Community violence of 1999 in Sagamu and the present Boko Haram Insurgency among many others (Ewetan, 2013; Suleiman, 2015; Umejiesi, 2011). To this end, by implication, these frequent erupted religious crises or violence hinders the development process in Nigeria, inflicting human afflictions through death, obliteration of livelihoods, constant dislodgment of people due to insecurity, disrupting the process of production, diversion and application of resources meant for development purposes to servicing war which is manifesting in Nigeria today and not limiting to huge material and psychological damages alone but threatening every structure of the Nigerian nationhood as revealed in the recent selective structure of religious and political scruples and identity (Eboh, 2016; Ekpenyong, 2011; Nwabughio, 2016; Onududo,



Amujiri & Nwuba, 2013). Thus, it is noted that the religious leaders alongside the political actors are not doing as much as necessary in admonishing and encouraging their large followers towards embracing peace, dialogue, respect and tolerance among others as the preeminent doable means of resolving differences rather resorting to destruction of lives and property that can be detrimental to sustainable development in Nigeria.

Thus, it is obvious that there has been the existence of religion in the different continents, nations, and territories for millennia and religion has major impact on the adherents idea of belief, sincerity of purpose, contentment and selfless services while the religious leaders and political actors have made religion the cheapest tools used to deceive their followers in order to cover up their flaws. Hence, this study assumes that religion has not fully achieved its function as a catalyst for nation-building that can lead to sustainable development. In light of the above, it is pertinent to this study to highlight the basic role religion play towards the national development for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Conceptualization of Related Concepts of the Study

Religion

There is numerous meaning of the concept of religion as postulated by a number of scholars. Wali (1989) affirms that religion as the individuals' system of existence in their traditional and social relations and it is the basic mindset of a man's life. Adeleye (1988) put forward that religion brings to being principle compassion in a man to be mindful of the necessity to have an untainted heart. In this vein, Obilor (2003) sees religion as the capacity or power of man to be able to observe the laws of his nature, the natural law or the divine law. Hence, it can be noted that religion is a veritable tool for teaching and inculcating moral values in the society. Religion plays a significant function on daily basis lives of people such as the manner of interaction, choice of dressing, food, and politics among others.

In a related development, Anyika (2000) asserts that the religion of Christianity came into being in Nigeria shortly after the former slaves sent home from Europe and America were resettled and the Christian missionaries were set up for evangelism activities and the initial contact with people was in the coastal areas. Similarly, Ituma (2003) affirms that Christianity stands on the life and philosophy as well as death of Jesus Christ and he is considered as the founder of the Christianity religion and the foundation of the Bible which is the Holy Book of the Christians worldwide.



Islam is described as the complete way of life for its followers as noted by Abdulkarim (2014), Iremeka (2005) that Islam is a religion as well as a culture, it is by and large a complete way of life for its adherents and it was first introduced in the Kanem Borno Kingdom about 10th century AD gradually spread to Hausa land and other parts especially after the Jihad of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo and the Holy Book of Islam is called Qur'an.

African traditional religion according to Anyika (1998) is seen as the religion that is aboriginal to African land for a long period of time. While Ajayi (1981) put forward that traditional religion as the philosophy and traditions that are aboriginal to Africans. In the same vein, Ekwunife (1990) affirms that African traditional religion is the institutionalized philosophy and traditions of aboriginal religion of Africans which are entrenched in the precedent Africa religious culture passed on to the current generation by consecutive African ancestors essentially through oral traditions such as myths, folktales, songs, dances, rituals, proverbs, and names among others, it also includes sacred specialists or people, sacred space and objects and religious work of art, it is a religion which is gradually but continuously well-run from one generation to another generation.

To this end, it can be noted that Nigeria is a multi-religious country with a broad religious geography reflecting the historical exposure of its northern parts to Islam through the trans-Saharan trade and the success of Christian missionary enterprises in many of its southern parts while African traditional religion is also peculiar to both the northern and southern Nigeria, in addition, religion can be a catalyst for sustainable development if it can fully accomplish its role of inculcating the teaching and practice of moral values among its adherents in the society. Thus, the three main religions in Nigeria have a number of shared values that can enable them to serve as catalysts for sustainable development.

Politics

It is pertinent to mention that there is no common universally accepted definition of politics and it is conceptualized from a different perspective while man is observed to be a political animal. Aberian and Masannat (1970) assert that politics is an observable fact which has its foundation in the set of individual inclinations, its course of action in public demands for accommodating the competing targets and its productivity in the form of binding public policies. While Dzurgba (2008) assumes that politics need a constitution and political parties, ideology and criticisms as well as require the public and the state which made up of the people. Similarly, Onyekpe (1998) described politics as the great effort to get the power which implies the authority to establish or invent and



implement resolutions and policies which must be accepted by the people in the society. Thus, the term politics is being conceptualized differently by a number of scholars from different contexts of viewing it.

To this end, politics can be elucidated as the set of activities through which individuals make, maintain and improve the general rules for their existence or survival in the society. By implication, it is worth noting that politics in an everyday affair and it happens in our daily activities in our home, office, school, organization, places of worship among others. Therefore, the notion of politics is central to control, supremacy and authority that are vital to sustainable development and it is highly perspective in Nigeria being a multi-religious country while religion can be a catalyst for sustainable development if it can fully accomplish its role of inculcating the teaching and practice of moral values among its adherents in the society. Thus, the three main religions in Nigeria have a number of shares values that can enable them to serve as the catalysts for sustainable development as noted by Uche (2011) pointed out that religion not only serve the purpose of raising the values to the position of ultimate concern but equally serve as an evaluative feature in politics. Thus, religion is a foundation that can be termed as a reliable institution that can provide a stepping stone to sustainable development if its basic tenets are properly harnessed together and utilized.

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development has witnessed a number of developmental stages from the time of its introduction. It is highlighted that the main principle of sustainable development fundamentally on the incorporation of environmental, social and economic concerns into all features of decision making (Dernbach, 2003; Stoddart, 2011). Sustainable development can be described as the development that congregates the requirements of the current without comprising the capability of upcoming generations to congregate their own desires (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). Similarly, the term sustainable development can vary by virtue of the number of perspectives and relations to the context and field (Stepanyan, Littlejohn & Margaryan, 2013). Thus, it is pertinent to understand that the notion of sustainable development is centred on the combination of environmental, social and economic features that can congregate the wants of the current and upcoming generations and it varies according to context.

In the same vein, Barbosa, Drach, and Corbella (2013) affirm that despite the divergent views about the concept of sustainable development; but seen as the investigation for stability



between human being's needs and the environment in a generally conventional way and also to understand both sides to deepen and broaden its meaning. In addition, Gaussin et.al. (2013) maintain that sustainable development aims to leave to the future generations a capital reserve at least corresponding to the present one the current generation has received as a legacy from the previous generations.

To this end, it is pertinent to affirm that right from the origin until today the concept of sustainable development has been faced with a variety of interpretations and criticisms. The notion of sustainable development is central to development with reference to socio-economic development in connection with ecological constraint; redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life for all as notion of needs as well as the notion of future generation such as the likelihood of the long term utilization of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generation. Thus, religion and politics can be a catalyst for sustainable development if they can fully accomplish their roles of inculcating the teaching and practice of moral values among its adherents and political actors in society. Thus, the three main religions in Nigeria have a number of familiar values and if politics can be played according to the basic ethics they that can serve the purpose of the sustainable development in Nigeria in spite of the current challenges. While it is vital to state that sustainable development not limited to the provision and access to physical infrastructure in particular circumstances, but is an uninterrupted course of action in any given society.

Religion, Politics and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Some religious activities are frightened and on the increase and by implication detrimental to political development in Nigeria, harmful religious extremism in Nigeria has been revealed to be a barrier to national development that can lead to sustainable development in Nigeria. Religious uprising as noted by orchestrated by Ewetan (2013), Suleiman (2015), Umejesi (2011) that Mai Tatsine religious crisis of 1980s, Kafanchan of 1980s to present, Kaduna Shariah Crises of 2000s, Jos religious violence of the recent time, Oro Cultists and Muslim Community violence of 1999 in Sagamu and the present Boko Haram Insurgency among many others are holding doggedly to their religious system of belief as well as surrendering anything plus their own lives and those of other people in hunting of their horrible aims, have in no small way flustered the relative harmony and safety measures of the lives and property of the people of this nation.



It is also observed that in recent time, Nigerian political actors have been exploiting these ugly trends of politics of religious bigotry and violence to press forward their political ambitions. This is becoming more bothersome because it hinders the development progression in Nigeria, inflicting human afflictions through death, obliteration of livelihoods, constant dislodgment of people due to insecurity, disrupting the process of production, diversion and application of resources meant for development purposes to servicing war which is manifesting in Nigeria today and not limiting to huge material and psychological damages alone but threatening every structure of the Nigerian nationhood as revealed in the latest selective structure of religious and political scruples and identity (Eboh, 2016; Ekpenyong, 2011; Nwabughio, 2016; Onududo, Amujiri & Nwuba, 2013).

Sustainable development can be described as the development that congregates the requirements of the current without comprising the capability of upcoming generations to get together their own wants (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). The concept of sustainable development can be elucidated as living within the carrying capacities of the helpful ecosystem without compromising the requirements of the upcoming generations (Ntamu, Abia, Edinyang & Eneji, 2014). While Gaussin et.al. (2013) maintain that sustainable development aims to leave to the future generations a capital reserve at least corresponding to the present one the current generation has received as a legacy from the previous generations. Thus, The concept of sustainable development is central to development with reference to socio-economic development in connection with ecological constraint; redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life for all as notion of needs as well as the notion of future generation such as the long term utilization of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generation.

To this end, it is pertinent to state that in contemporary Nigeria, political stability, socio-economic development will be far away from accomplishing the required targets as pointed out by many scholars and political actors that Nigeria cannot survive another civil war and violence is becoming mirage due to number of bloodshed as observed by Ewetan (2013), Nwabughio (2016), Onududo, Amujiri and Nwuba (2013), Suleiman (2015) that the term religion symbolizes a noteworthy constituent of ethnicity and an imperative basis of identity as the source of group unfairness and grumbles in any society. While in addition, the term religion is significant in society and providing the essential trait that sets a group apart and has the potential of determining all forms of groups political and social activities and the rising circumstances from the above situations



can lead to the potential of propagation of prejudice against the minority religious groups by the dominant religious groups due to their unrelated benefits and aspirations in the society like Nigeria that is multi-religious in nature (Fox 2003; Umejesi, 2011; Nwabughogu, 2016). Thus, it is noted that religion has not fully realized its function as a catalyst for nation-building that can lead to sustainable development.

Therefore, it is vital to observe that in a situation where there is an apparent discrepancy, discrimination, displeasure, intimidation to the continued existence of a religion, by implication, consequently, the religious institutions can turn out to be a discounted recruiting ground for the conscription and enlistment of rebels or nonconformists for the purpose of grumble and uprising and it may further be troublesome when a particular religion encourages the use of physical force when matters relating to its interest or goals are at stake which is order of the day in Nigeria. In light of the above, it is pertinent to this study to highlight the basic role religion play towards the national development for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Religion and Development in Nigeria

Religion is an indispensable phenomenon in Nigeria and its influences all facets of life and Nigeria is a multi-religious country while Christianity and Islam make up the main religious climates in Nigeria due to a large number of adherents and much emphasis to is on these two major religions. It is worth noting that the task of religion regarding sustainable development in Nigeria has both positive and negative effects due to the fact that religion and development are persistently influences either positively or negatively. However, it is significant to declare firmly that none of the religions incite negative consequences to development; it is a few of the adherents or actors that distort the values of these religions to meet up with their selfish end. In the same vein, Ogonowole (2004) affirms that a factual pattern of measuring development must take the actual material and spiritual requirements of the people as well as the real material and spiritual possession reasonable to the individuals. Hence, it means for sustainable development to be feasible, the spiritual desires of the people must be met in all ramifications.

Abdulkarim (2014), Omobolaji (2011) pointed out that since the coming of Islam and inception of missionaries to the present, both religions in Nigeria has focused its development strategy on two areas namely education and healthcare. Abdulkarim (2014), Olakunle et.al. (2009) heightens that Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Christian Rural and Urban Development of Nigeria (CRUDAN), Justice and Peace Caritas



Organization (JDPC), People Oriented Development (POD), Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), Muslim Sisters' Organization (MSO), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Nasrul-Lahi-L- Fathi Society (NASFAT), and National Council of Muslim Youth Organization (NACOMYO) among others in numerous ways contribute to sustainable development of Nigeria. Due to the limitation of the Nigerian state and the ineffectiveness of its institutions to provide the human services to its citizens, then the Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) find it deems to supplement or complement the government's efforts in improving the standard of living of people in Nigeria. In addition, Abdulkarim (2014), Omobolaji (2011) elucidated those FBOs in Nigeria offer health and educational services through their hospitals, schools, and colleges, vocational training centres, orphanage homes, seminaries, and universities; similarly, these FBOs own economic institutions like bookshops, hotels, banks, insurance, mass media, and ICT companies, real estate in the form of sacred cities and prayer camps which cover thousands of hectares of land.

To this end, it is clear that in spite of the fact that some of the adherents or actors of these religions distort their values in order to meet up with their selfish end, it is important to elucidates that religious groups have been playing a vital roles as well as a catalyst in the national development in Nigeria through the provision of services to humanity such as schools, hospitals, microloans to people among others in order to supplement or complement the effort of the government for sustainable development.

Conclusion

The research work concludes despite the fact that some of the adherents or actors of these religions distort their values in order to meet up with their selfish end it is pertinent to affirm that it is difficult to attain sustainable development without religious values in Nigeria. Religion needs to be regulated according to its main tenets in order to achieve the much-expected dividend of democracy as a catalyst for sustainable development in Nigeria. Religion is a strong factor for peace and it should be practiced to overcome differences that will fit together into sustainable development. The accurate practice of the doctrines of religions will build Nigeria as a nation where peace and justice shall be the order of the day. Hence, there is the need for religiously minded leaders whose intellect is well in tune to honesty, right and just for the nascent democracy and religion must take its proper place in politics as a catalyst for sustainable development in Nigeria



since it is difficult to attain development unless we have religious men and women at the helm of affairs.

Recommendations

This study put forward the following recommendations:

1. Nigeria as a multi-religious society needs to harness together with the shared values that are fundamental in the different religious towards a feasible and peaceful coexistence as catalysts for sustainable development.
2. The government must ensure the study of moral education is made obligatory in all levels of learning in Nigeria.
3. The government needs to encourage and support the religious bodies in Nigeria in promoting the inter-religious exchange of ideas along with broad-mindedness through regular activities such as seminars, workshops, and conferences among others for the adherents as catalysts for sustainable development of the country.
4. Religious leaders or actors need to play the active role of watchdog to political officer holders by guiding them against undesirable practices that can hinder political development in Nigeria.
5. The basis of getting hold of political power in Nigeria must be centred on the ability to perform with excellent moral benchmark not on religious bigotry in order to attain sustainable development.
6. The government must curtail any form of religious extremism but encourage the teaching of the basic tenets of these various religious in Nigeria for sustainable development.
7. The National Orientation Agency must promote and inculcate religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence among the various adherents of the religions in Nigeria.



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