

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is the second largest economy after South Africa in African continent, with a GDP of US \$415 billion. It (Nigeria) has the record of being the largest oil producer in the continent and sixth in OPEC. A country endowed with vast mineral resources like petroleum, gas and many yet untapped mineral resources coupled with favorable climate suitable for agriculture. However, this developing economy is facing challenges of religious fundamentalism which has made its economy to be nose diving instead of improving. The current violent insurgency of Boko Haram (an Islamic religious fundamentalist group fighting to establish Islamic nation from Nigeria) is seriously taking toll on the economy. The activities of this Islamic sect have caused a serious damage to Nigeria's economy causing government to spend huge amount of money on security. Money that would have been used for job creation, provision of infrastructure, are being wasted with yearly extra budgetary on security of lives and property. It is in the light of this that this paper examines the impact of religious extremism on Nigeria's economy as it affects employment generation, foreign and local investors activities, agriculture, telecommunication, etc. All these affected sectors by the activities of these Islamic religious fundamentalists are the fulcrum around which Nigeria economy revolves. All hands must therefore be on deck to address the systemic failure that brought about a challenge on socio economic well-being of the people of Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria became independent from colonial rule in 1960. As a subtle way of maintaining her influence in Nigeria, British established Islam and Christianity in Nigeria as two dominant religions. It is interesting to note that the Christianity and Islamic presence in Nigeria is more domineering than in any parts of the world Alao,(2004) Nigeria as a developing nation is confronted with a lot of vices ranging from corruption, militancy, abductions, students cultism and other negative threats to the society, which hamper her speedy and sustainable development. As if the above mentioned factors are not enough, suddenly, religious fundamentalism began to launch another attack on Nigeria. Religious Terrorism is nearly as old as human kind but never before has Nigeria and the world been confronted with this monstrous phenomenon on its current scale.

Religious Fundamentalism is the maintenance of deep literal interpretation of the traditional beliefs of any religion in opposition to other religious beliefs or modern teachings. Religious fundamentalism in Nigeria began in the 80s when maitatsine virus sprang up in the north; this development became worrisome as it continues to take more dangerous dimension. Since 1980s till date, there are records of several dastardly religious bigotries influenced by religious fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalism impacting negatively on Nigeria's economy is not a recent development. There was a violent inter religious conflict in Kano in October 1982. This happened to be the first major uprising against Christians by fundamentalists. The problem started at Fagge (near the Sabongari) where some Christians attempted to reconstruct a dilapidated "Christ Church". The Muslim fundamentalists living around the area felt that the old

church was located too close to a mosque, rather than reconstructing it, they felt the Christians should relocate the church to another place Albert, (2005). Effort were to stop the rebuilding of the church as approved by the government, but under police protection, the church was rebuilt. The fundamentalists consequently reacted violently by burning down three churches and several others vandalized. The Federal government resolved the issue by paying seventy-five thousand naira (N75,000.00) as compensation to the Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Kano Adamolekun, (2012).

Viable economy is a vital tool in development. There can never be development when there is crisis and violence.

Peace is the platform upon which viable economy and sustainable development stand.

Development sustainability from religious perspective is rooted in the cardinal teachings of religions which is peace. Okotie, (2013).

In agreement with Ostebo, (2012) peace is an indispensable factor for sustainable development, any religion that does not propagate peace remains inimical to sustainable development. According to Ukwuoma, (2003) pg 7, "Preservation of developmental efforts and survival of humanity is predicated upon cordiality and peaceful atmosphere" this which religious fundamentalism does not provide.

Religious fundamentalism remains a set-back for any national developmental efforts of nations all over the world. September 11, 2001's attack on America by religious fundamentalists has economic backlash upon the entire world. Fortunes which would have been invested into advancement of the society are being channeled into the battle against fundamentalists. The latest onslaught of Boko Haram (Religious sect) in

Nigeria has a devastating effect on the economy, making Nigeria to devote the greater percentage of her yearly budgetary appropriation to fighting insurgency. It has been observed that Fundamentalism in the name of religion in Nigeria has the backing of some elites who sponsor these acts of violence for their selfish ends. It is in this context that Karl Marx developed a hostile posture against religion, when he argued that religion is “directly supported by the ruling classes to further their interests and to justify social inequality” Lenshie, (2010a:20). The ruling class in Nigeria sponsor Muslims for Hajj in Saudi Arabia and Christians to Jerusalem for pilgrimage in Isreal. According to Lenshie, these sponsored people rather than going for spiritual exercise, go as tourists to see historical relics and come back more polluted in thoughts and reasoning. Most of them instead of becoming agents of positive change for promoting peace and unity, they become tools for tearing the country apart. The enormous resources committed to control or checkmate activities of these centrifugal elements would have been channeled to ventures that impact positively on the living condition of many Nigerians. To further establish their dominance over the poor masses, both tertiary and elementary institutions of learning have not been spared, the ruling class creates religious sentiments by making policies that will set unsuspecting youths against one another in the name of religion, schools have now become training grounds for both Christian and Islamic religious radicals.

Religious Fundamentalism the Global Perspective

According to an American historian Lapidus,(2008), “Religious fundamentalism is an umbrella designation for a very wide range of movements” “some intolerants and exclusivist, some pluralistic, some favourable to science, some anti scientific, some

primarily devotional and some primarily political” “some democratic some authoritarian, some pacific, some violent”.

The difference particularly Islamism between fundamentalists and other religious group (particularly Islamic) is that fundamentalists are more passionate in their opposition to the perceived “corrupt” influence of Western culture avoiding Western dress, neck ties, laughter, the use of Western form of salutation, handshakes, applause e.t.c, while Islamists are subtle in their approach to rejection of Western civilization Islamist idea of revolution is the type that can only be carried out through social and political action. The fundamentalists are interested in violent revolution and less willing to associate with other religious groups

The modern Islamic fundamentalist movements started in the late 19th century. The Wahhabi movement and Arabian fundamentalist movements began in the 18th century and spread during the 19th and 20th centuries. During the cold war, following world-war II, some NATO governments, particularly those of United States and United Kingdom, launched covert and overt campaigns to encourage and strengthen fundamentalist groups in the middle East and Southern Asia. These groups were seen as a hedge against potential expansion by the atheistic Soviet Union and as a means to preventing the growth of nationalistic movements that were not necessarily favourable towards the interests of the Western Nations. In the 1990s the Islamists had become important allies in supporting government such as Egypt which were friendly to United States interests, by the late 70s however, some fundamentalist groups had become militaristic becoming threats to these existing regimes.

Islamic fundamentalists have emerged in recent years as a major political force in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, for example, it was fundamentalist who overthrew the pro-Western regime of the Shah of Iran, attacked the Grand Mosque in Mecca, assassinated Anwal Sadat of Egypt and blew up the United States marine barracks in Beirut. The attack of world trade centre in New York in Sept11, 2001 by Islamic fundamentalists led by Osama Bin Laden made religious fundamentalism to begin draw more attention of the whole world.

Today, activities of Islamic fundamentalists all over the world have made them to be branded terrorist groups whose activities have brought the entire world on its knees.

Fundamentalism as it implies believe in religious Puritanism such that religion must be practiced in its pure form and must be prevented from being adulterated by the society.

Ideological differences and manner of approach to Islamic and other religion's teachings and doctrines have led to fratricidal war between Islamists and other religions across the globe. Some of these Islamic fundamentalist groups include: Al-Qaeda, Abu Sayyaf, Ansar-al Islam, Armed Islamic group of Algeria, Army of Islam, Taliban, Egyptian Islami Jihad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Jemaah Islamiyah, Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islam, Harkat-ul-Muyahideen, Indian Muyahideen Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Isil, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakintan, Al-Shabab in Sumalia, Boko Haram, among many others.

Religious Fundamentalism in Nigeria, the Historical Perspective

At the inception of Nigeria, Islam and Christianity were co-existing peacefully as each competed for followers. The struggle to “win souls” was conducted in a peaceful manner. Both of them tolerated each other, believing that family solidarity was much more important than religious solidarity. This peaceful co-habitation of religious groups lasted till 1980s when fanaticism and fundamentalism began to manifest.

Although fanaticism and fundamentalism are peculiar to both Islam and Christianity, the latter is more subtle in its approach than the former. The first prominent show of Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria was Maitatsine riot of December 18-29, 1980 in Kano. Kano played host to many Islamic scholars both from Nigeria and outside Nigeria. The prominent among these scholars were Mohammed Marwa M. Salih, SalisuKoparWanba, M. DamnaKashi, IllyesuGwammaja, e.t.c,each of these scholars preached fundamentalist Islamic religion. Mohammed Marwa who was the founder of Maitatsine sect became the most deviant of all of them to oppose all efforts by government to stop these illegal and conflict prone Islamic teachings. Marwa preached against some contents of Holy Quran and moderation of Prophet Mohammed that pitched him against Kano State government and other Muslims who are moderate Islamists. The followers of Marwa attacked Police, non-Muslims and orthodox Muslims. Over 500 people including Marwa himself lost their lives while goods worth several millions of naira were destroyed.

Also in 1996 a leader of a sect called Shiite,Mallam Ibrahim El Zak-Zaky was detained by the Federal Government on account of activities considered to be inimical to public peace and order. This sect preached against political corruption and held anti-establishment view, they see Police and Judiciary as agents of Satan; activities of these

sect threatened Nigeria's peace and Unity. Violent activities of these sects in both Kano and Zaria generated a reprisal from both Muslim and Christian's brothers, from different parts of Nigeria.

The climax of activities of fundamentalist violent propagation of their religious belief is the emergence of Boko Haram sect considered to be offshoot of these sects with its penchant for violence as a means to establishing Islamic State.

Religious Fundamentalism and Nigeria Economy

An increasingly violence as a result of activities of religious fundamentalism has begun to have negative effect on Nigeria's economy. The latest and current activities of Boko Haram (Islamic Fundamentalist group fighting to establish Islamic State in Nigeria) is not only forcing the government to spend too much to protect and defend the territorial sovereignty of Nigeria but also has paralyzed economic activities in the northern part of Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general.

Right from the days of sectarian crises of 1980s in Kano to the present upsurge of Islamic sect called Boko Haram, Nigeria's economy has been suffocating, struggling for survival. The activities of these fundamentalist divert the attention of government away from economy. Although, security is one of the factors aiding development, economy like other a factors plays very important roles in development of a nation.

The distraction of government from other sectors economy in particular, portends danger for Nigeria's development. Nigeria has experienced increase in his security bill from 16% in 2010 to 20% of spending in 2012, which has even increased more significantly in 2016. This development has left less money for much needed infrastructure projects. Economy like other factors are equally important, since 2012,

infrastructure, education and health care are being allocated smaller budget than security. High government spending is also pressurizing on naira currency as exchange rate continue to skyrocket at the expense of naira. For example, after Nine hundred and sixty-five billion naira was allocated to defence in the 2014 national budget, the President had to make a request for approval of another supplementary budget to the sum of one billion dollar. Moreover, foreign direct investment into the Nigerian economy has been falling since Boko Haram insurgency intensified over four years ago. The experts argued that inflation will continue to rise because 20% of the country's land space is under siege by violent Islamists which has led to grounding of agricultural activities in the North East, thereby making food prices a major element of inflation to be on a sharp rise. Consequently, the Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P) a measure of how productive the economy is may be negatively affected.

According to the Chief Executive Officer Financial Derivatives Company limited, Mr. Bismarck Rewane, "Boko Haram Insurgency is having devastating impact on the economy" "Twenty percent (20%) of the land space of this country is under siege. We have no access to the area of cultivation, we have no access to their markets and their products cannot come here to the South" (*Punch*Feb. 6, 2015).

Corroborating Mr. Rewane, the Managing Director Cowry Asset Management Limited, Mr. Johnson Chukwu, insecurity in the North East has both primary and secondary effects on the economy, pointing out that level of economic activities in Nigeria had been drastically reduced as a result of Islamic fundamentalist activities for example, the attack on Kano has been very devastating because the city has always been the commercial Centre of Western Sudan for the past 500 years. The city had

been economic base of the North with neighbouring countries like Niger Republic, Chad and Northern Cameroun. But today the story is different as Kano which is reported to be the hub of business and commercial activities in the entire 19 Northern States and beyond is gradually losing steam. About 80 percent of the industries are said to close shops, due to power failure and the security challenges. Security challenges have made both private and public sectors to relocate their businesses from the city.

Investment Research analyst at Afrinvest, an investment, research and business advisory firm, Mr. EboAyodeji, observes that Foreign Direct Investors (FDI) into the economy had been falling partly due to the insecurity and socio-political instability in Nigeria. According to him, "Socio-political stability is a key determinant of offshore portfolio inflows, especially for frontier markets like Nigeria. Thus, the insecurity created by the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, together with the attendant distortion to the economic product in the North East, dampens the status of Nigeria as a global investment destination. Foreign Direct Investors will take caution when investing in the economy due to the uncertainty in the socio political sphere. As indicated by United Nations conference on Trade and Development, "Aggregate Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Nigeria's economy has been on the down trend, declining from \$8.9bn in 2011 to 7.0bn in 2012", This further dropped to 5.5bn in 2013, as a result of fear on the part of investors about security situation in Nigeria. This situation will affect the inflow of long term capital into the economy.

Nigeria is a good tourist country which attracts tourists from all over the world. Most of important tourists centres are located in the northern part of Nigeria particularly the affected areas by religious fundamentalists. Revenue being generated from tourism

has reduced drastically. The Durbar Festival in Kano which used to attract local and international tourists was cancelled since 2012 because of security issues. Kano State lost huge revenue to this cancellation. Jos Plateau that happens to be unofficial headquarters of the middle belt is not spared of woes of loss of revenue from tourism as a result of the activities of religious fundamentalists. Plateau is noted for its tourism potentials which contribute greatly to national economy. However, the once thriving tourism destination that was an attraction for local and international tourists is now a no go area for tourists as destination marketers and tour operators take their clients to destinations with relative peace. Some hotels have closed down while Jos museums, Jos wildlife and Amusement parks no longer witness visitors trooping there again.

Bauchi and Kaduna States are also having their own tale of woes as a result of Islamic religious fundamentalist activities. Many Banks have closed down hospitality businesses paralyzed while other businesses operate at low ebb. Impact on hospitality is so much that investors in the industry are looking elsewhere. Reprisal attacks that trailed the June 17, 2012 bombing of Churches in Kaduna and Zaria, caused very low patronage to hotel business. An hotelier once lamented "As you can see, the whole place is looking empty; we don't have customers as we used to have because people are afraid of coming to Kaduna". *Daily sun January 2015 pg 4*

A lot of Igbo traders have relocated from these hot spots to other places causing economic congestions while many people even put up their houses and business centres for sale because of fear of unknown.

Telecom operators have lost huge amount of money they would have generated as a result of vandalization of their equipment with operators losing about N8bn daily to

attacks on their infrastructure. Both MTN, Globacom, Airtel, Etisalat, Visafone, e.t.c. lose money both on their voice, short message service and internet data traffic which pass through their networks. Several masts and other big equipment have been damaged by incessant bombings by Boko Haram sect. Base stations belonging to indigenous telecoms companies like HIS Nigeria have been attacked and damaged in both Borno, Yobe, Bauchi and Gombe States with an average station costing about \$250,000 while controller station costing between \$500,000 and 1m, depending on the number of vertical and parabolic antennas on the mast. Over 1,776,657 subscribers in the north east out of total 22.83 million registered nationwide had been deprived regular access to use of their chosen networks resulting to conducting business with telecom which consequently lead to lose of revenue. The situation has become terrible and unbearable that the President Association of Licensed Telecommunications Operators of Nigeria. Mr. Gbenga Adebayo, lamented by saying “if it becomes impossible to continue to do business in the face of rising attacks on telecoms sites, operators will naturally suspend operations in the area”. *Daily Sun*, Jan 14, 2015.

Investments in telecoms sector have grown from 50m to 18bn. This sector is the livewire of the economy facilitating cross industries linkages particularly in the banking sector where electronic banking facilities such as Automated Teller Machine (ATM) online financial transactions are order of the day across the globe. All these are made possible through telecommunication. NCC, (2014)

Recommendation

Nigeria and the world should realize that fundamentalism is an idea, particularly when it involves religions, idea does not die easily. Nigeria should realize that the use of

naked force to quell Boko Haram insurgency will not bring a lasting solution to fundamentalism but will rather strengthen the “Spirit”. Great lesson should have been learnt about Maitatsinedisturbances of 1980s. Nigeria felt it has succeeded in wiping off the known members of the sect but several years after, it metamorphosed to a more deadly “monster” in the form of Boko Haram.

There is need for Nigeria to adopt other method or change strategy rather than force which can only kill believers but cannot kill idea as “idea is stronger than weapons” Dudley, (1968). Education still remains the most potent weapon, government should intensify efforts to liberalize education so as to be attractive. The idea of nomadic education and girl child education scheme introduced in the north by the present regime is a step in the right direction if properly and genuinely implemented.

All hands must also be on deck to overhaul the failed state and upstage the corrupt oligarchy that rules, so as to jump start the economy to create jobs. If the youth in particular are engaged economically they will not condemn western education. Sincere commitment to re-engineering of the Nigerian State will make religious extremism as solution to Nigeria’s failed state a thing of the past. Current activities of religious fundamentalism are reactions against failure of Nigerian State. If people enjoy direct benefits of Western education they will not see it as an aberration.

Conclusion

Religious fundamentalism has proven to be a great factor against Nigeria economy. Islamic fundamentalist crisis in northern Nigeria has a potential to destroy both socio economic and political fabric of Nigerian existence. Stake holders in

Nigerian State must therefore rise up to the occasion and consider the above recommendations aimed at rescuing Nigeria economy from total collapse from religious fundamentalists.

The war against the insurgency must be fought and won at whatever cost, this must be done as soon as possible, if Nigeria fails to bury insurgency, insurgency will bury Nigeria.

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