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UNLOCKING THE PERENNIAL ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN NIGERIA: A MULTI- STAKEHOLDER IMPERATIVE

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Abstract

Nigeria is polarized along ethnic and religious lines with an explosive political environment that has created unprecedented levels of animosity among the various ethnic and religious groups. With the dysfunctional socio-economic and religio-political turn of events in Nigeria over the years, the collective conscience that formed the crux of Nigeria's unity has been crushed to its lowest ebb, resulting in mistrust and hostilities. Consequently, Nigeria has known the type of bloodshed experienced from ethno-religious conflicts and violence, ethnic militias, political desperadoes and lynch mobs. It is against this background that the study betook itself to unlock the perennial ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria, using a multi-stakeholder approach. The study is, therefore, framed around the following research question: what are the factors associated with the ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria, and how can this monster be addressed? The paper contends that lack of true fiscal federalism, marginalization, domination, poverty, unemployment, religious isolationism, and perceptions of injustice by communities and social groups, among others, are responsible for the deepening ethno-religious conflicts and violence in Nigeria. Accordingly, the study illustrates how stakeholders can harness collective efforts, shared responsibility, greater stakeholders' engagement as well as rally political will to unlock the perennial ethno-religious crisis in the country. It concludes that inclusive governance based on equity, justice and fairness are core values Nigeria needs to apply to resolve many of her contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Ethno-religious crisis, Multi-stakeholder, Nigeria, Religious Tolerance, Unlocking

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-cultural society marked apart from each other by fundamental differences of culture, ethnicity, economics, language and religions, which in turn have created differences in attitudes, belief, character and outlook. The different beliefs and values cement about three hundred or more different nationalities into one indissoluble and indivisible sovereign state as stated in the opening chapter of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended (Uka, 2016; Sewakpo, 2018). With the dysfunctional socio-economic and political turn of events in Nigeria over the years, the collective conscience that “formed the crux of Nigeria’s unity has been crushed to its lowest ebb resulting in ethnocentrism, religious bigotry, nepotism and inhumanity” (Ahmad; 2022:1). Abdul (2020: ix) practically endorsed the position almost for identical reasons: “within the last two decades, Nigeria has grappled with a plethora of conflicts which have sapped enormous energy and resources meant for economic development and improving the living standard of its citizens”. These ethno-religious crises are associated with displacement, various forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV), food insecurity, kidnapping and trauma, loss of families and livelihoods as well as the responsibility of sustaining entire communities. Apparently, ethno-religious violence in Nigeria can be traced to the pre-colonial and post-colonial history of the country. Specifically, since the 1920s, Nigeria has experienced quite a number of ethno-religious conflicts such that the road to its

independence was characterised by conflicts with the use of dangerous weapons such as guns, arrows, bows and machetes and ultimately resulted in civil war from 1967 -1970 (Shuaib; 2014:2).

In recent times, matters relating to ethnicity and religion have gained momentum. Specifically, sectarian violence and drums of war are beginning to beat across the country and it is steaming towards an apocalyptic disruption. Bellicose rhetoric has returned and they are tightening their grips on the home front and lashing out at opponents. This is caused by the misunderstanding of the diversities that make up the over 300 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. The obstacle is compounded by the increasing abandonment of issues affecting the nation for religious intolerance. This is clearly manifested in Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the All Progressive Congress (APC) presidential candidate's selection of Alhaji Kashim Shettima as his running mate for the 2023 general election. This Muslim-Muslim ticket has baffled the sensibilities of the Nigerian Church. This is a clear example of sacrificing the country's unity, equity and peaceful co-existence on the altar of religious bigotry.

In this study, attempt will be made to unearth some factors associated with ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria. It will identify measures capable of ameliorating the crisis before concluding with a peep into the future. The study is therefore, framed around the following research questions: what are the factors associated with ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria? What multi-spectral approach can be employed to hammer out a valid solution?

The Charter of the Nigerian State and Ethno-Religious Crisis

Adeyemi (2011) contends that:

The character of the Nigerian state is responsible for the country's deepening ethno-religious contradictions. This plural nature originates a constant feeling of distrust between the component units and the fear of one ethnic or religious group dominating the other is real . . . the elites have sacrificed opportunities for initiating national integration on the altar of short term interest thus compounding the problem (p. 12).

The author further establishes that Nigeria is characterized by the diversity in religion, ethnicity and language, as well as in the level of social and economic development. As a result of this diversity, every Nigerian has multiple, interlocking and conflicting identities, some relatively permanent and others transitory. Seen against this backdrop, it is interesting to note that the Nigerian federal structure is an unbalanced and lopsided one in which the northern region is a bigger entity than a combination of the east, the west and the Niger Delta in the southern region. Predictably, the struggle for power sharing is reduced to a struggle of hegemony among the three main ethnic groups, namely the Hausa/Fulani, the Igbo and the Yoruba. In the course of this struggle, the smaller ethnic groups were regarded as minorities who were marginalised and oppressed not only in the allocation of power but of resources as well.

Noteworthy is that as a product of colonialism, the Nigerian state retains the character and structures of the colonial state which was repressive and meant to extract domestic surpluses for the overriding purpose of servicing metropolitan needs. Instead of forging a united entity and protecting national interests, the elite concentrated on sectional interests in order to perpetually legitimise their privatisation of national resources under the pretense of representing their constituency. The point must be established that the Nigerian state has failed "to build an appreciable degree of confidence among Nigerians to ensure

discipline within the ranks of the elite, manage the economy in the interest of the people or construct the much needed platforms of inclusion, tolerance and participation”(Aduba, 2011: 12).

To put it more concretely, several structural, institutional, political, and attitudinal factors lead to ethnic, communal and religious conflicts and violence in Nigeria. Precisely, the federal arrangement does not adequately recognise the identities, interests and needs of the minorities. Consequently, “segmentation of mobilisation has continued around ethnic or religious identity and citizenship such that exclusive claims to territory with great human and material cost are made by various groups in different parts of Nigeria” (Ajayi, 2022:1). This has resulted in perceptions and experiences of discrimination, exclusion, domination, exploitation, nepotism, oppression and injustice by communities and social groups. Notably, Nigeria had failed at building governance that prioritizes the welfare of citizens above any other thing. Kukah (2022) affirms that “the Nigerian state has proved itself to be incompetent, grossly malfunctioning, unwilling to commit to the welfare of the citizens as the principal basis of governance” (Raji, 2022:1). Ostensibly, poverty and unemployment have served as nursery beds for ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria because the country now has a reservoir of poor people who are thugs, warmongers and mercenary fighters. What this means theoretically is that:

Poverty and unemployment increases the number of people who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given cause at a token benefit. This explains why all ethno-religious crisis that ever occurred in Nigeria have a large turnout of people including under aged as fighters (Aduba, 2011:15).

Furthermore, the nation’s constitution and government policies have failed to promote citizenship and national integration, social welfare and social justice, good governance and democracy, equality and equity. For instance, government often tries to “destroy national integrated organisation’s like ASUU and NLC, organisations that have developed national consciousness beyond ethnic, religious and other primordial considerations” (Aduba, 2011:14).

Consequently, undue involvement of governments in, and patronage of religious and traditional institutions lead to discrimination, oppression and resistance. Lawal (2022) captures this fear of domination when he opined that:

It is now a recurring practice in the north whereby any Christian traditional ruler that dies is replaced with a Muslim prince, albeit from the ruling family even if the most qualified and preferred is a Christian. The recent case of Billiri Chieftdom in Gombe state is still fresh in our minds”(Olorok, Oyero, Okere Adebayo, 2022:1).

The above citation spotlights insincerity on the part of government. To demonstrate this insincerity on the part of the government as clog in the wheel of progress, peace and unity of the country with the following examples will suffice. The Oputa Panel, the Oronsaye report, the EL-Rufai APC-led constitutional amendment committee, as well as the 2014 national conference committee were established by the government. Their reports and findings were either manipulated or discarded. Even white papers are not implemented. Academic Staff Union of Universities was on strike for eight months recently because of the government’s failure to publish the Presidential Visitation Panels to federal universities, inter-universities centres, polytechnics and colleges of education recommendations. The foregoing factors demonstrate clearly that ethno-religious conflicts and violence in Nigeria have been largely the result of the failure of the state and the poor orientation of citizens,

especially the rulers and elite. Due to these failures, the acknowledged dividends of liberal democracy, such as the rule of law, electoral accountability, inter-institutional accountability, political participation, industrial development, social justice, equity and fair play, have been shown to always be in the negative in much of Africa, including Nigeria. Consequent to these failures is the promotion of nepotism, corruption, deviant behaviours, religious intolerance and ethnocentrism.

Apparently, Nigeria's ethno-religious plurality is complicated by her religious multiplicity (Dike, 2016, Kukah, 2016). Metuh (1999: 1) is very clear in his opinion that "most inter-religious conflicts usually develop out of inter-ethnic conflicts even though they claim to be purely religious disagreements. Conversely, socio-ethnic conflicts often are fought under inter-religious banner." Put more concretely, the boundary between ethnic and religious identities tends to collapse in times of conflict, thus making it difficult to differentiate the two conflicts in Nigeria. Accentuating this fact, Gofwan (2012: 14) maintains that the major cause of the protracted conflicts in Jos has been "the contention between the indigenous ethnic groups of Afizere, Anaguta and Berom on the one hand, and the Hausa on the other hand over the ownership of Jos and its traditional institutions." To substantiate this fact, Dukor (1988) affirms that "religion as a disintegrating force is attributable to the organisers, the organisation, the preachers, the preaching, the propagators and the propagation of religions" (Onah, Diara and Uroko; 2017:62).

The point being stressed is that Christianity and Islam do not seem to accommodate or tolerate others in their missionary enterprise. Their propagators, fired by zeal seek to destroy or at most cut other religious beliefs and political systems down to size. Thus, both religions are "seeking to take over the architectural design and construction of the Nigerian polity" (Kukah; 2016: ix). Although often marginalised, African Traditional Religion has a fair degree of followers and is not by any means insulated from religious violence. For instance, Ogo/Egbela cult activities associated with traditional religion have been a major source of conflicts in Afikpo and Edda in Ebonyi state as well as in Nkporo in Ohafia L.G.A. of Abia state. Another seminal case of this score is the Oro traditional worshippers' and church-goers clashes in Lagos and Ondo states. Upon the jaundiced reading of the above position, the problem of Nigeria is not religion, but adherents who have not separated their ethnic affiliations and sentiments from their religion. Therefore, they use religion as a tool of oppression, instead of liberation

However, the emphasis here is that "the reasons why Nigeria has chosen to interpret every crisis along the line of religiosity is to avert another civil war since no ethnic group will sit back to be eliminated by another ethnic group" (Dike, 2016). Perhaps the key insight is this: religion, economy, philosophy, and capacity-related factors play far-reaching role on the nature and extent of violent conflicts in Nigeria. It is therefore the position of this study that religion easily serves as moral cover for self-centered religious bigots, bellicose rhetoric and today's hardliners who are ascendant on all sides. Accordingly, it is this form of attitude which has caused and continues to cause many problems on the social, economic, political and religious life. This sets the tone for the spectral bite of ethno-religious crisis on Nigeria.

Examining the Spectral Bite of Ethno-Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Religious, ethnic and political conflicts have triggered a series of violence in Nigeria, resulting in the loss of lives and properties and a threat to the unity and peaceful co-existence

of the country. Ethno-religious conflicts and violence are the most manifest aspects of the socioeconomic and political crisis in Nigeria's history. In the words of Umezurike (2011: 54) they "have become most virulent in Nigeria's Fourth Republic owing to the unbridled pursuit of neo-liberal political economic reforms by political regimes in this Republic." Bature and Samari (2017:27), while supporting the submission, added that "ethno-religious crisis manifests in acrimony, assault, assassination, intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing.

Consequently, these affect the existing social relationships in society." Dike (2016:55) concludes that this "has stretched the bonds of unity, the fabrics of nationhood, as well as the ingredients of citizenship identity thin to snapping point." This scenario has become so worrisome that WhatsApp group discussions between students in Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto, Sokoto state or a mere argument between two traders of different ethno-religious backgrounds in a market in Lagos, Kano, Jos or Ibadan has been known to ignite widespread violent conflicts. Granted that scenario, the creation of an environment of violence, destruction of critical infrastructure, unleashing of fear, terror, bloodletting, incessant and unpredictable killings, kidnapping, hostage taking, carjacking, treats and bombings, by emissaries of violence have unwittingly or inadvertently put a clog in the wheel of industrial development and progress, peace and unity, social justice and fair play. Ethno-religious conflicts have given a spectral bite to national integration and will limit the quest of the country to achieve its constitutional mandate of security and welfare of the people. Although the impact of the phenomena on the country is miscellaneous, the following points will suffice.

1. Violation of Human Rights and Dignity

The pervasive and corrosive state of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria has passed the alarming state and has now entered into its fatal state. The problem here is the threat to Nigerian religious adherents' right to religious freedom which is guaranteed in section 38 of the Nigerian Constitution which echoes article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 8 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. Furthermore, Article 15(2) of the Nigerian Constitution affirms that "... discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited." The Constitution is even revealing when it goes on to echo Article 18 of the UDHR by stating that:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

Notwithstanding this legal framework, Nigeria's record of upholding religious freedom is wretched. Remonstrating more on the precarious situation, Uka (2016:295) confidently asserts that:

In spite of these provisions which ensure the secularity of the state, as it obtains in other democracies that are multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural like the United States, United Kingdom, India, yet the Muslim leadership in Nigeria flout these constitutional provisions with impunity and demand the implementation of the Islamic legal code.

This fact constitutes both the remote and immediate causes of ethno-religious persecution of Christians especially in northern Nigeria. Nigerian Christians are subjected to such episodic violence at the slightest rumor of ‘blasphemy’ or ‘provocation’, whether ‘committed’ in Nigeria or abroad. The barbaric and senseless killing of Miss Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a 200 level Home Economics student of Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto, Sokoto state on Thursday May 11, 2022 for allegedly insulting and blaspheming against Almighty Allah and Prophet Mohammed by her fellow students graphically illustrate the point.

These common practices of religious violence and discrimination accentuate the domination-subordination relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in northern Nigeria. This discriminatory religious practice also undermines a person’s dignity, development and religious liberty. It may also involve psychological, social, and/or physical harm.

2. Food Insecurity

Agriculture, the life-blood of the Nigerian economy, contributes to a third of the country’s Gross Domestic Product with more than 80 percent of Nigerians identifying as small holder farmers who produce over 90 percent of the country’s domestic output on thirty-three percent of its land (Chow; 2022:1). But, despite the sector’s significant contributions to the economic stability and employment, the resurgence of the armed banditry, terrorism, militancy and kidnapping by religious warlords, have led to hikes in food prices and increased reliance on imports. Kah (2017:1) drove the point home thus:

This insurgency has decimated whole communities, destroyed food crops, killed cattle and forced farmers to flee to protective camps. Many now rely on food aid from international organizations. As Nigerians try to contain the insurgents, a bigger problem has been created or further compounded that of food insecurity, which has ramifications beyond national borders. Markets have been closed and custom duties have dwindled.

Consequently, over one hundred million Nigerians faced food insecurity in Nigeria as at the end of 2020, while the number of malnourished Nigerians had almost tripled to twenty-nine million people. When the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations published the 2021 “State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World”, it put the number of moderately or severely food unsecured people in Nigeria at one hundred and sixteen million, a seventy-five percent increase from sixty-one million in 2016 (Odifa; 2022:1).

A major driver of food insecurity in Nigeria is the fact that the ethno-religious conflicts and insecurity in the nation do not allow people to have access to their farms or grow food. Expectedly, many farmers have abandoned their farmlands, fled their communities and relocated to urban areas, or taken shelter in Internally Displaced Camps. Many have become unemployed and can no longer care for their families, and in some cases they have resorted to criminality, leading to a vicious cycle of poverty and insecurity. These disruptions have hurt agricultural supply and have led to inflated prices of produce.

3. Disruption of Educational Activities

Ethno-religious conflicts and violence in Nigeria disrupts educational activities. It disrupts access to quality education that has been adopted as a fundamental human right and

Sustainable Development Goals Number 4. Abduction of pupils and teachers by ethnic militias has disrupted schooling in Abuja, Bauchi, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Nasarawa, Kebbi, Plateau and Taraba states. This depressing development has increased the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. To be precise, data released by UNESCO in partnership with the Global Education and Monitoring Report in September 2022, reveals that Nigeria's out-of-school children and youth population has jumped to 20.2 million. According to the Punch Editorial of September 14, 2022, reasons adduced for the increase include: rising insecurity across the country causing mass displacement; poor funding; rising poverty that forces parents to put children in the labour market and street hawking, and the breakdown in social and family life. In the same vein, UNICEF recently reported that more than 600,000 children have lost access to education due to disruptions in learning occasioned by kidnapping. The report said an estimated 2,295 teachers have been killed and over 19, 000 others displaced, while more than 1, 400 schools have been destroyed, damaged or looted since the insurgency started in the North East. In addition, from January-August 2021, more than 1, 000 children were abducted in the country for ransom, with so many of them still in the hands of their abductors.

The recent upsurge has triggered prolonged school shutdowns and in turn, led to a decline in school enrollment and attendance, as well as a rise in child marriage and pregnancies of school-age girls. Obviously, this is the agenda of the Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram, which opposes western education. Beyond the disruption of schooling and negative effects on affected students, many parents may not allow their ward to return to places they are not safe.

4. Crippling Economic Activities and Worsening Unemployment

According to Ekwowisi (2022:1) the old image of Nigeria as:

Citadel of a cultural and moral renaissance seems blurred. Amid the country's abundant human and natural resources, there is insecurity, disorderliness, poverty, fear, suspicion, hatred and chaos everywhere. On the social media, in the pulpit, lecture rooms, market place, stadia and other places, Nigerians soberly ask the following question: what do the future hold for us and our children? Amid the complete collapse of state machinery for the protection of lives and property, anarchy has been let loose upon Nigeria.

The point being strenuously affirmed is that ethno-religious conflicts and violence in the country is crippling socio-economic activities and making the unemployment rate worse. Therefore, the ethno-religious situation in the country is still a narrative of challenges, apprehension, anxiety, disrupted supply chains and increasing economic cost from the impact of insecurity. Mabogunje (2021) has furthered the quest by saying that these conflicts results "in death and injuries, paralysis of economic activities, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) losses, cost of peace-building and peace-keeping activities and refugees and Internally Displaced Camps"(Adenubi:2021: 1).

A Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Tackling Ethno-Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Tackling ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria requires public and private partnerships for development, cross-sector collaboration, and collective action on specific challenges in ways that achieve greater impact or a common goal. It requires commitment, resources and support from many stakeholders including government and security agencies. But it extends

to regional bodies, the international community, civil society organisations, the media, the academia, religious/traditional leaders, women and youth groups/network among others. Therefore, for space constraints, the study has summarised the roles stakeholders can play in fighting ethno-religious conflicts and violence in Nigeria.

The major single driver/actor of peaceful negotiation is the religious/traditional leader. They are “the rallying point for communities, especially those caught up in various conflicts. They are listened to, and therefore have become instrumental in any negotiation that will take place” (Abdul; 2018:5-6). Specifically, religious leaders must begin to look critically at ways to engage their followers and memberships, and guide them by correctly interpreting their scriptural beliefs, avoiding the temptation of invoking hate, bigotry, triumphalism, extremism and exploitation of religion with little godliness. Otherwise, they will raise a people without scruples. To fortify this point, Imhonopi and Urim (2016: 36) emphasises that:

There must be respect for other faiths and differences involved in worship. There must also be respect for human lives. Seminars, conferences and worship must be held by faith organizations to retrain religious leaders to abide by the true doctrines of their faith without violating the rights of others to freedom of worship.

The emphasis here is that religious and traditional leaders as well as political leaders must endeavor to promote Nigeria’s heritage such as; value for life, patriotism, nationalism, a life of modesty and sacrifice.

The government, her agencies and representatives of the contending groups in the ethno-religious conflicts are the key players in unlocking the perennial crisis rocking the country. Consequently, there must be local and inter-state, multi-ethnic and multi-religious engagements between previously conflicting communities to discuss issues affecting them. This constant engagement through programs in dialogue, joint community projects, and skill acquisition for economic empowerment programs could be facilitated by government to raise the capacity of Nigerian institutions, civil society organisations, the media, youth networks, women groups and gender equality advocates, among others.

Furthermore, civil society organisations are effective in peace building initiatives. They should be prominent in coordinating initiatives of early warning and early response. As influencers in peace building processes, they should serve as the nexus between the state and the communities in situations of conflicts across the country. There must be an appreciable level of collaboration between civil society and the government agencies involved in early warning and early response system, mostly through joint committees, regular meetings and information sharing.

In addition, women are critical decision-makers in peace-building as mobilisers at the community level. Therefore, they should be included in community peace committees, civil society organisations, peace communities and inter-religious peace councils. This point is much more clarified and emphasised by Abdul (2020:14) thus:

The important and strategic positioning of the role of women in any family or society – be it political, social or economic is tied down to development. Yet, women are the most victimised in times of conflict... Our traditional institutions, cultures and religions in any part of the country must respect the integrity of women.

Accordingly, in dealing with the issues of ethno-religious conflicts, women’s voices cannot be taken away. The study conceives this as a key building block in attending the Sustainable Development Goals: Building Blocks for Peace. On the other hand, youths are

important players in the peace and security architecture. Most especially, male youths have been considered important in resolving ethno-religious conflicts because they are perceived to be active parties to violent conflicts. Their involvement in peace processes is at the level of vigilantism. On this score, vigilantism is “mainly community-based and sometimes promoted by civil society organizations” (Abdul; 2018: 12). However, the exclusion of strategic groups from peace building processes such as the youths, women, religious or ethnic groups and political rivals have weakened collaboration and coordination.

Finally, the role of the media and the academia in engaging the citizens in the process of acquiring the necessary values and the knowledge; developing the positive attitudes, skills and behaviours which are necessary to live in harmony with oneself, with others and with the natural environment cannot be gainsaid (POOC; 2020:1; Onwubiko; 2022:1). Precisely, they are to roll out programs directed to address the present Nigeria’s ethno-religious and other persisting, destructive conflicts that have placed many communities under abject poverty. They should be involved in effective mobilisation and transformation of the people through education in its broadest sense. They should promote strategic advocacy and mass sensitisation on the subject matter at international, national, state and local government levels. Therefore, efforts by the media and non-traditional actors such as the NGOs, national and international donor agencies, development centres, public and private partnerships and businesses should aimed at “promoting the rule of law, good governance, and peace and security as well as the broader economic, social and political development of Nigeria and the sub-region” (Imhonopi and Urim, 2016:36). Meanwhile, these approaches will only work when Nigeria and her neighbours have leadership and political will at all levels to “ensure peace with justice; and will not discriminate against people on the basis of ethnicity, religion and gender” (Abdul; 2018:16).

Conclusion

This study examined how to unlock the reductive impact of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria using a multi-stakeholder model. It noted that as a result of ethno-religious conflicts and violence, Nigeria has known the type of bloodshed meted out by religious extremists, ethnic militias, political desperadoes, ritual killers, kidnappers, arsonists, cultists and lynch mobs. The precarious situation has been exacerbated by poverty of the vulnerable sector, illiteracy of the masses, youth unemployment, abuse of the constitution and constitutionalism, corruption, accusations of neglect, oppression, exploitation, marginalisation, discriminatory policies and actions that result in mistrust and hostilities. The study identified poor and bad governance, giving ethno-religious coloration to national issues, the repressive character and structure of the Nigerian state as the initiator and sustainer of the incidence of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria.

The study, hence, recommends a collaborative action between governments and its security agencies, international organisations, religious and traditional institutions, industry associations, civil society organisations, women peace network, the media, the academia as well as the creative industries in fighting the monster. The study concludes that the missing link to Nigeria’s peace, security and sustainable development is lack of equity, justice and fairness; thereby ensuring the predominance of people from a few ethnic and religious groups in the government and its agencies. Accordingly, it reveals that inclusive governance based on merit, equity, justice and fairness are the core values Nigeria needs to resolve many of her contemporary challenges.

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