

## **Ethno-Religious Conflicts: A Bane of Sustainable Peace and Development in Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract***

*Since her independence in 1960 from the British colonial administration, Nigeria has remained a country with multi-ethnic, multi-religious and regional diversity. This composition rather than being a blessing has become a serious threat to National unity, peace and socio-economic development. This is because the Nigeria socio-economic and political landscape is characterised by tribalism, nepotism, ethnic rivalry, favoritism, corruption, inter-ethnic and religious conflicts, amongst others. The result is the mistrust and suspicion and intolerance among the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria thus, impeding the much-needed peace and development. This paper, therefore, assessed the ethno-religious conflicts as a bane of sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. It drew its data from the secondary documents while conflict theory was used in the analysis of the subject matter. The findings showed that ethno-religious conflicts stemmed from fear of exclusion, domination by majority groups, and unequal access to opportunities, intolerance, elites' manipulation among others. These have led to loss of lives and property, thereby obstructing the peace and development in the country. Arising from this, the paper recommended an end to Elite manipulation of ethnicity and religion for personal aggrandizement; promotion of tolerance among citizens; and an inclusive government for the interest of the minorities.*

**Keywords:** *Ethno-religious, Conflict, Peace, Development, Nigeria.*

### **Introduction**

Nigeria has all the potential for greatness given its endowments in natural and human resources; however, it has been grappling with the problem of forging national unity, peace and development in a sustainable manner since independence in 1960 due to its myriads of conflicts occasioned by ethnic and religious groups. As a country with an estimated 250 ethnic groups and approximately 400 languages and dialects, with Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo being the most dominant groups (APRM Country review report, 2008), Nigeria is not only a multi-ethnic entity but also a multi-religious state dominated primarily by Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). The clash of interests among these groups often resulted in deep crises as witnessed in the several ethnic crises such as the Tiv-Jukun (Benue-Taraba), Ife-Modekeke (Oyo) and Mangu- Bokkos (Jos), as well as religious riots in the north, particularly in the North West where attempts to impose Shariah law in Kaduna State, and other parts of the Northern Nigeria in early 2000 polarised most communities in the North, resulting in bloody violence (Abdu, 2002).

Endemic conflicts rooted in ethnicity and religion often emanate due to intolerance, chauvinistic tendency and the quest for domination by one ethnic or religious group over another. As noted by Nwagwu (2018, p.242), "historical sources of inter-ethnic conflicts and religious upheavals in Africa anchored on religious intolerance, ethnic chauvinism, and lopsided distribution of society benefits, cultural and political domination or exclusionism. These social viruses breed conflicts in Africa." Intolerance in particular, among ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria, has led to the formations of "many ethnic militias like the O' dua People Congress (OPC); the Bakassi Boys; the

Egbesu Boys; the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC); and the Igbo People Congress (IPC)...the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); and the Ohanaeze N'digbo” (Salawu, 2010. p.345).

The propensity to cause religious and ethnic divisions by the ruling elites as a tool of control at either federal and state levels cannot be ruled out completely as this has become the only viable strategy to garner supports for their selfish ambitions. The persistent divisions fueled by ethnic and religious propagandists after over six decades of self-rule are worrisome. Today, ethnic clashes start and dovetail into religious and vice versa, disrupting peace and harmony that would have engendered development in Nigeria. For instance, Zaki-biam, Jukun, Tiv and Fulani conflicts of 2001 began as a communal squabble, but later snowballed into an ethno-religious leading to the deaths of many Christians and Muslims in Benue state (Johnson, 2021).

Also, the Boko Haram menace in several part of northern Nigeria, which main objective is to institute sharia rule and do away with western education (Patrick & Felix, 2013), has become a serious threat to national peace and development as it caused the deaths of several Nigerians Christians and Muslims, bombed several churches in Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri, Yobe and Bauchi, with thousands of people killed and injured (Kwaja, 2011; Dauda, 2011). Public buildings are not spared as the Nigeria police headquarters in Abuja, the United Nations’ building have also been attacked by the group (Alegbeleye, 2014). These are in addition to several communal clashes that have occurred in Nigeria, including the Tiv-Jukun (Benue-Taraba) Ife-Modekeke (Oyo) and Mangu- Bokokos (Jos). Such conflicts have led to deaths of thousands of Nigerians (Abdu, 2002; Effiom, Unimna & Ele, 2024) thereby hindering the needed peace and development in the country.

While various efforts have been on, including that of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIRC) to promote religious tolerance among the different religious bodies as well as the inter-tribal marriage promotion to reduce ethnic tension and foster unity by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, they are yet to yield the desired results for the enthronement of peace and development in Nigeria. Hence this paper, which intends to take a deeper look at the effects of ethno-religious conflicts on peace and development in Nigeria. Accordingly, the paper has principally three objectives as follows: namely, to:

- i. Assess the major causes of ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria.
- ii. Examine how the ethno-religious conflicts have impeded sustainable peace and development in Nigeria
- iii. Proffer solutions on how Nigeria can foster peace and development among its diverse ethnic and religious groups.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Conflict Theory**

The paper aligns itself with the conflict theory. This theory is often attributed to Karl Marx, a great German Thinker whose philosophies have continued to permeate the world politically, economically and socially. Marx’s conflict ideology, according to Ritzer and Stepnisky (2014) is a belief system that examines disparity under free enterprise and how to transform it through showdown. They argue that conflict is an inherent feature of capitalism, because of conflicting interest between the two opposing classes. The purpose of this theory according to Cose (1956) cited in Bekelcha (2019, p.3) is that “conflict theory seeks to scientifically explain the general

contours of conflict in society: how conflict starts and varies, and the effects it brings. The central concerns of conflict theory are the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power.” The adoption of conflict theory in this paper is apt in that each of the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria always strives to access and control the resources of the country. Those who are not able to achieve these feels isolated and become aggressive those others whom they believe have marginalized them, thereby manifesting in form ethno-religious conflict among others. And since, the resources are not enough the struggles become the only means to access them.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Peace**

Peace could mean a condition devoid of trouble, war and commotion; a situation where people live in harmony and enjoy life without fears. However, in reality, this seems to be far from the truth. In the opinion of Webel (2007, p.5), “perhaps ‘peace’ is like ‘happiness’, ‘justice’, ‘health’ and other human ideals, something every person and culture claims to desire and venerate, but which few if any achieve, at least on an enduring basis.” According to Hamza (2019), the peace enjoys by an individual is very vital to the peace a country is supposed to enjoy. “Peace is a concept that can be viewed first at the individual and family level before even going further to look at a broader concept involving the countries and nations. One has to be at peace within oneself to be at peace with neighbour” (Hamza, 2019, p.110). Among the pillars of peace stated by Alo (2019, p.79), “a well-functioning government” and “equitable distribution of resources” are very important. The reason for this is because without a well-functioning government to address the needs of the citizens and check the excesses of ethnic and religious champions, as well as the inability of government to equitably distribute resources has led to breakdown of law and order contributing to lack of peace and development in the country. It is instructive to note that the world is now campaigning for a culture of peace to make it a better place for everyone. Accordingly, in 1999, the General Assembly of United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) adopted a declaration of Culture of Peace which Alger (2007, p.316) explains below:

The Declaration defines the culture of peace as a set of values, attitudes, traditions, modes of behaviour and ways of life based on respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and co-operation; commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts; respect for and promotion of the right to development, equal rights and opportunities for men and women, the rights of everyone to freedom of expression, opinion and information; and adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, co-operation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations.

It is important to stress that strict adherence to the “declaration of culture of peace” will go a long way towards ensuring peace, stability and development in Nigeria.

### **Development**

Development is a concept that connotes progress, increment, transformation and expansion. In the words of Okunloa and Olaniran (2021, p.52), “development refers to the act or process of growth, progress and improvement within a physical setting. This definition throws some light on the concept of development. However, it is limited to physical setting whereas aside from the physical setting, development can still occur in other realms. According to Babatunde (2003) cited in Dele, Achimugu & Kankara (2017, p.153), “development involves the progressive unfolding of the potential contained in something so that it could reach a well-grown condition, a state in which that

thing is in vigorous life or action.” This implies a change in status or expansion from an original state to an improved version or level. It is important to note that the process of development is not automatic, but gradual. This brings us to definition of development by Adesina (1984) cited in Dele, Achimugu & Kankara (2017). According to him, “development has come to mean the gradual expansion of available facilities and resources both quantitatively and qualitatively so as to bring to a fuller, better and greater state” (p.153). In a nutshell development means improvement in the standards of living, infrastructure, and other areas of human endeavours that make them better than the previous stage.

### **Ethno-Religious Conflict**

Generally speaking, many scholars have defined conflicts differently. According to Ochoga & Tsuwa (2021) “conflict can be conceptualised as the violent expression of disagreement among groups over values and hard held interests interest resulted in the use of dangerous weapons against unarmed civilians which leads to the destruction of lives and property (p.71). For Musa (2019, p.91-92), “conflict, is by definition, central not only to politics but also social life and even to nature as a whole. Indeed, conflict is not evenly necessary bad, it is the central force behind all kinds of progress and advancement – economical, political, social and natural.” In another definition of conflict, it shows that “conflict is present when two or more parties perceive that their interests are incompatible, express hostile attitudes or pursue their interests through actions that damage the other parties” (Adimula, 2019, p.55-56). This aligns with the views of Adie, Nwokedi, Adeboye, & Marwash (2021), thus: “it is also true that when two or more people have incompatible goals/objectives and none of them is ready to compromise, conflict is bound to occur” (p.3). One thing is certain about conflict, which is that conflict is old as man himself. Also, conflict is inevitable and can occur at any point in time (Mohammed, 2021).

Ethno-religious conflict on the other, refers to “a situation in which the relationships between members of one ethnic or religion and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterised by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation” (Salawu, 2010, p. 345; Abdul & Maiwada, 2017, p.134). Such conflicts are usually caused by suspicion and mistrust among various ethnic groups and among the major religions in the country. As further defined by Udom & Okolie (2022, p.70), “Ethno-religious conflict is the clash, contention, confrontation, battle, rivalry, controversy or quarrel among ethno-religious groups. Ethno-religious conflict stem from an irreconcilable posture with regards to symbolic values to the groups concerned.” These conflicts have become common in Nigeria, occurring across different states as discussed below.

### **An Overview of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria and their Causes**

Ethno-religious conflicts have become a common occurrence among the various ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. As observed by Salawu (2010), Nigeria has over 400 thousand ethnic groups that are also members of different religious bodies, and that, since her independence, the country has continued as:

... a multi-ethnic nation state, which has been grappling and trying to cope with the problem of ethnicity on the one hand, and the problem of ethno-religious conflicts on the other. This is because over the years the phenomena of ethnicity and religious intolerance have led to incessant recurrence of ethno-religious conflicts, which have given birth to many ethnic militias like the O' dua People Congress (OPC); the Bakassi Boys; the Egbesu Boys; the Ijaw

Youth Congress (IYC); and the Igbo People Congress (IPC). Others include the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); and the Ohanaeze N'digbo (Salawu, 2010, p.345).

Ethno-religious conflicts have occurred in states like Kaduna, Benue, Ibadan, Lagos, Abia, Kano, Bauchi, Nasarawa, Jos, Taraba, Ebonyi, and Enugu (Abdul & Maiwada, 2017). A publication by Udom & Okolie in 2022 identified several ethno-religious conflicts across 13 states in Nigeria to include: "Zangon kataf in Kaduna State; Tiv- Jukun in Wukari, Taraba State; Ogoni-Adoni in Rivers State; Ijaw/Urhobo in Delta State; Ife-modakeke in Osun State; Aguleri- Umuleri in Anambra State; Yoruba-Hausa community in Shagamu, Ogun State; Ijaw-Ileja in Ondo State; Hausa/Fulani in Jos and Fulani/Irigwe and Yelwa Shedam, both in Plateau State; the intermittent clashes in kano State; Hausa/Fulani Sawanya in Bauchi State; Hausa/Yoruba clashes in Idi-Araba in Lagos State; Boko Haram-Christians in North-East and the Fulani/Herdsman in Benue State" (p.70).

### **Causes of Ethno-religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

The causes of ethno-religious conflict are many, some of which include: "inability of leaders to tackle development challenges, distribute state resources equitably" (Abdul & Maiwada (2017, p.135). In the north-west region of Nigeria, the religious conflicts there can be classified into two main causes: the intra and inter-religious conflicts. While the former refers to aggressive actions or clashes between or among different Islamic sects, particularly the sunni and Shiite groups, the later involves a clash between the Muslims and Christians at various times and places (Danjuma, Gwaza, Omale & Nafiu, 2022). Similarly, in Jos, the "conflict is often characterised as inter-religious or inter-ethnic, mainly between the Christian-dominated ethnic groups of the Anaguta, Afizere, and Berom, and the predominantly Muslim Hausa and Fulani groups" (kwaja, 2011, p.2).

**Colonial legacy:** Colonialism created Nigeria, with its legacy of centralised governance, uneven development patterns and boundaries that group different peoples together without their consent. These historical constructs continue to affect contemporary Nigeria socio-political and economic realities. Ake (2002) stated that the Nigeria state is a colonial creation, organised and structured for British interests. The adoption of the Federal System dates back to the Bourdillon's constitution of 1939 which partitioned the country into three regions along the three major ethnic tribes, this was consolidated by the Richard Constitution of 1946, McPherson constitution of 1951 and the 1954 Lyttelton's constitutions. At independence in 1960, Nigeria continued with its Federal Structure due to the diverse ethnic, religious and cultural differences, subsequently in the independence constitution of 1960 and the republican constitution of 1963 the federal principles were reflected, clearly spelling out power sharing between the federal and regional governments, further Constitutional amendments in 1979 and 1999 retained the Federal System, despite agitations for review. Rather than fostering unity in diversity, this contributed to the various competitions and agitations as each group (ethnic or religious) fights to dominate others.

**Political and Religious Leaders manipulations:** Many of the ethno-religious conflict are precipitated by the elites for their selfish interest to continue to hold on to power. The various conflicts that abound in Nigeria such as The Ijaw-Urobo (Warri) crises, the Tiv-Jukun crises (Taraba) the Ife-Mangu-Bokkos (plateau) crises of indigeneship are manifestation of who controls an area or jurisdiction of power. In the north eastern region of Nigeria, both political and religious leaders have perfected their acts on this. The leaders "...have consistently taken advantage of the gullibility and ignorance of their followers to preach hate messages on their pulpits, radios and

television programmes and openly given their tacit support to those from their religious communities...such actions instigate crises or worsen existing tension” (Momodu, Ayuba, Chaimang, & William, 2022, p.44). Additionally, a study by Takaya (1992) cited by Nwagwu (2018, p.249) identified the following factors that have been used to politicise ethnicity and religion among the developing countries which Nigeria is a part as seen below:

- a. The existence of two or more ethnic and religious groups with numerical strengths that can significantly affect the outcome and direction of a democratic political process;
- b. The instrumentalisation of ethnicity and religion as legitimising tool of hegemony in instances when the interest of the political class is under threat;
- c. When there is an ascendant radical thinking within a politically significant ethnic or religious group capable of upstaging hegemony; and
- d. When the society is characterised by political, social or economic hardships that can cause alliances along ethnic and religious fault-lines.”

**The Issuance of Resident Certificate:** As narrated by Kwaja (2011) Plateau state used to be home to different migrants that came there for work and settlement. Its strategic location and ambiance have always attracted these migrants to it. As usual, people who migrated there and their children were giving certificate of residency, a document that qualified them to stay in their new environment. This was on for several years without hitches. “However, during the late 1980s falling government revenues, increasing economic pressures and steadily increasing migration to one of Nigeria’s fastest growing regions prompted some local authorities to revise indigene certificate policies. In 1990, several local jurisdictions in Plateau, including Jos, began to restrict the distribution of indigene certificates” (kwaja, 2011, p.3), an exercise that seemed to be advantageous to the Muslims and ethnic group from the northern part of Nigeria than others, hence, the Jos conflict.

**Accusations of non-inclusivity/mistrust:** Scholars have identified the causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria to include non-inclusivity, victimisation and mistrust among others. In the words of Salawu (2010,p.348), “a major cause of what we now see as ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has to do with the accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimisation, discrimination, marginalisation, nepotism and bigotry. In every nation (Nigeria inclusive), there is no complete agreement on how wealth, power and status are to be shared among individuals and groups. Also, Abdul and Maiwada (2017, p.134) have argued that, “these conflicts are caused by suspicion and mistrust among various ethnic groups and among the major religions in the country.” Whenever there is a deficit in trust, suspicion of domination can occur. This will lead to agitation and from there if it is not properly handled conflict can arise as the Nigerian case typified.

**Nepotism and favoritism:** Nepotism is one of the major causes of ethnic tension in Nigeria this is because employment slots into public service is often shared among top government officials who most times favour those from their regions or ethnic backgrounds. This is also applicable to contracts and other procurements for public organisations. Successive governments have not helped in dousing this notion. As government appointments are often criticised for favoring particular region or ethnic groups. For example, President Bola Tinubu, the current Nigeria president has been criticised for giving juicy appointments to his Yoruba kinsmen such as the Central Bank Governor, Minister of Finance, Interior, Education, Powers and so on (Johnson, 2024, December, 13). Similar accusation was labeled against his predecessor, Muhammadu Buhari (Shehu, 2021, May 29). This is partly responsible for why power struggle sometimes results to bloody violence.

**Economic Disparities:** The economic disparity between different parts of the country is a reason why there are struggle between different region and ethnic groups. There are sharp and

disproportionate provision of infrastructure, education, and poverty reduction. It is established by the National Bureau of statistics Report 2022 cited by Michael (n.d) that there are more of out-of-school children in the northern Nigeria than south. Also, unemployment and poverty, poor healthcare infrastructure, and fewer economic opportunities are more in the north compared to many southern states. Similarly, oil-rich southern Niger Delta states suffer environmental degradation and feel under compensated. Such an uneven development creates the feelings of marginalisation and may lead to agitation and conflict by ethnic and religious groups in the country.

**Lack of rule of law, Poor Governance and Corruption:** Corruption and patrimonial political systems weaken institutions, reduce effectiveness of state policies, and diminish trust. Where access to resources or favours depends on personal relationships rather than institutional norms reinforces ethnic/region/religious loyalties over national identity. Just recently Farouk Lawan a convicted ex-lawmaker was granted pardon along with several drug pushers and criminals, through a prerogative of mercy by the president (State House Press Release, 2025, October 10). These trends erode citizen's confidence in the country and further create disunity and anger.

**Lack of fiscal federalism:** The practice of federalism in Nigeria has created more problems than solving it, due to the over concentration of power at the federal level to the detriment of the federating units, according to Okpoh (2003) fiscal federalism is synonymous to true federalism with each region/ states having their economic independence. The over bearing influence of the federal government has given rise to the agitation for the restructuring of the country, as the various ethnic and regional groups jostle for power and control within the Nigeria federation, for example the agitation for resource control by the Niger Delta people amongst others. The distortion of the Nigeria federal system was facilitated by the intermittent military intervention in the politics of the country in 1966 to 1979 and then 1984 to 1999 led to distortions of the practice of federalism in Nigeria by concentrating power at the centre and negating the practice of fiscal federalism. According to Dafinone (2001) the military regimes in Nigeria should be blamed for distorting federalism in Nigeria and concluded that the hierarchical command structure of the military government undermined federalism.

Another reason for Nigeria distorted federalism is the continued use of a constitution foisted on the country by the outgoing military Junta in 1999, which further enhance the clamour for the restructuring of the country in line with true universal federalist principles, the constitution concentrated power at the centre and leave the federating units as mere appendages. For example, many of the security challenges cannot be effectively addressed because there are no state police in place, as the commissioners of police takes directives from Abuja, leaving the state governors as mere spectators instead of chief security officers they are meant to be.

**Lopsided state, Local Government and constituency delineation:** The creation of States by the military was lopsided and created a lot of room for discontentment because the state and local government structures were created arbitrarily, rather than assuaging or reduce agitation of marginalisation it worsened it. For example, in Jos the mistrust between the indigenous tribes and settlers led to serious conflict following the creation of Jos North local government area by the military in plateau state. Similarly, the sighting of the capital of Delta state in Asaba instead of Warri created a lot of disaffection in the area. Ola (2001) asserts that the over conceptualisation of power and resources has made many states and nearly all local governments to become complacent and indifferent to sources of revenue in their territories and how to generate income and revenue for themselves. There have been also sustained agitation for creation of more states to correct the

perceived imbalance in state creation in Nigeria, the north west has 7 states, the north east has 6 states, north central 6 states, south west 6 states, south- south 6 states and south east 5 states this arrangement has not gone down well with other zones they argue for a federation with equal number of states in each region, especially that the south east has only five states.

The factors of intolerance among ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria, fake doctrines, lack of proper orientation/understanding of the religious citizens professed and external influence are among the prominent causes that trigger ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria with attendant consequences on peace and development in the country.

### **Ethno-Religious Conflicts as a Bane of Sustainable Peace and Development in Nigeria**

Ethno-religious conflicts such as “the Christmas bombing of a catholic church in Madala, Niger state in 2020 and the bombing of United Nations house in Abuja, attacks on processions, police station and military formations in Jaji, Kaduna state, the kidnapping of a French family of seven, the Shettima of Borno (Alegbeleye 2014, p.143) have significantly affected the peace and development of Nigeria in a negative way. In fact, due to the “violent nature of ethno-religious conflicts, which often take the form of riots, sabotage...assassination, armed struggles, guerrilla warfare and secession in Nigeria, they no doubt have implications (Salawu, 2010, p. 345) on the peace and development in the country. One such implication is the loss of lives as confirmed by Effiom, Unimna & Ele (2024, p.76): “Sixty-two thousand Nigerian Christians have lost their lives as a result of acts of terror by Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, and other groups since the year 2000.

Again, these “conflicts have led to injuries, deaths, and destruction of private and public property on both sides of the divide (Danjuma et al, 2022, p.2). And, as Oduwole and Fadeyi (2013) cited by Effiom, Unimna and Ele (2024, p.82) have observed, “the most painful consequence of religious violence is the reckless destruction of lives and property. It is a painful outcome of religious fanaticism and violence because no known scriptural religion tolerate murder, but at the slightest act of provocation, many religious bigots and fanatics deploy the latest and most sophisticated weapons of war available to destroy and maim human beings.” To Igbede and Adesiyani (2023, p.42) “ethno-religious conflict has affected the fabrics of genuine Nigeria national integration and thus, a threat to the stability, development and future of the state. Ethno religious conflict has deepened the north-south dichotomy. The north-south debacle has made Nigeria a theater of conflict interest.”

When people are divided against themselves, been killed and their means of livelihood are destroyed, how can peace and development reign in such a place? According to Akinwumi (2021) cited by Danjuma et al (2022, p.11), “the intricacy of diverse faith, beliefs traditions and languages coupled with religious fundamentalism and fanaticism has led to religious communalisation, looting, killing, rape and property damage. In a similar vein, (kwaja, 2011, p.1) notes: “while large-scale violence has occurred periodically over the past decade, in recent years attacks have become more frequent, widespread, and efficient. Over 200 people were killed and nearly 100 more went missing during near daily attacks in January 2011. Many victims were killed or seized by Muslim or Christian youth gangs at impromptu roadside checkpoints and taxi and bus stations, their bodies later found in nearby shallow graves.” A further insight into the effects of the conflict on development has been captured by Udom and Okolie (2022, p.75) as seen below:

The resultant effects of religious crisis in Nigeria are enormous. It pervades all the sector of the economy. Generally, crisis breeds insecurity, discrimination, mutual distrust and slow economic development. This is the case in Nigeria where in addition to gratuitous killings

and maiming of thousands of persons properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed. Certainly, these huge losses have deprived the nation of needed manpower and services for the growth of it are wobbling economy.

Besides, this erodes investors' confidence in the economy as a result; foreign investors will not want to come in because of lack of peace that will guarantee security for their investments. It is not only religious conflict that slow development, ethnic conflicts also cause development to suffer as confirmed by Ayo (2019, p.4): "intra-ethnic conflicts have occurred in various communities in Nigeria at different times. At any time they occurred, such as the case of the Ezza-Ezzilio land dispute in Ishielu LGA of Ebonyi state, development suffered ruinously." Same applies to the conflicts in Tivland which have taken tragic toll on the already impoverished people's means of livelihood. As observed by Ojo and Bello (2022, p.133) "a country that is enmeshed in ethnic crisis cannot but experience monumental loss of lives and property worth billion of naira." Nigeria has experienced monumental losses in the areas of peace and development owing to ethno-religious conflicts in the country.

### Conclusion

Nigeria's quest for peace and development has been disrupted by the frequent occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts across different regions of the country. These conflicts which are rooted in a complex mix of ethnic, religious, regional, historical, and socio-economic factors have not only polarised the country but also thwarted its developmental trajectory as evidenced in the destruction of several property and obstructions of daily activities both of which are essential for peace and development. While several differences exist given the diversity of the Nigerian society in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, etc, these should be harnessed to promote unity, peace and progress among its citizens rather than being manipulated by the political class for their personal gains. The death of an individual as a result of ethno-religious conflicts does not only create a circle of violent conflicts that disrupt peace; it also represents a loss in human capital that is vital to Nigeria's development not to talk of the massive destruction of properties usually witnessed during such conflicts. Therefore, citizens must learn to tolerate/accommodate one another irrespective of their differences in order to end the constant bloodlettings in the country.

### Recommendations

To address the ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria and enhance peace and development the following recommendations are necessary:

- i. **Elite manipulation of ethnicity and religion:** The manipulation of ethnicity and religion by political class for personal benefits should be discouraged in Nigeria. Leaders who have succeeded should help others to grow and become better and not to teach their followers to be violent to other faiths or ethnic groups.
- ii. **Tolerance:** In a country of diversities like Nigeria, what can assist the people to live together is tolerance. This should be taught in churches, mosques and at homes for citizens to embrace and live as one. Both the Christians and Muslims should remember that they are serving one God and they will give account on the last day for their actions and non-actions while on the earth.
- iii. **Inclusive Political Participation of Minorities:** Ensure marginalised and minority groups get representation in political parties, appointment to public offices, involvement in decision

- making or possibly reserve seats or quotas in legislative bodies or local councils for underrepresented ethnic groups are a sure way to ending ethno-religious in Nigeria.
- iv. **Government Institutions:** The various institutions of government, including the NIRC and NYSC should continue to promote inter-faiths cooperation and inter-tribal engagements among the citizens to ensure unity and peace in Nigeria.
  - v. **Constitutional Amendment:** There is the need to amend the constitution to enshrine practices like rotation of major political offices, especially presidency and governorships among the geopolitical zones, to reduce fears of domination or monopolisation of power by particular groups, as well as address other colonial legacies that are now affecting the country's peace and progress.
  - vi. **Decisive actions by government:** Governments at all levels should take decisive actions and punish those in the habit of promoting ethno-religious conflicts in the country to serve as deterrence to others.
  - vii. **Total Commitment:** There should be a deliberate commitment by all Nigerians to enthrone peace and development to bring Nigeria at par with other developed countries for the good of all the citizens. This can start with what we say, how we say them, what we do and the intentions behind those things.

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