

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN WUKARI, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Jukuns of Wukari have engaged in several expansionist conflicts in the past. In spite of these exploits and conflictual relations especially with their neighbours, Wukari which serves as the ancestral home of all the Jukuns has remained relatively peaceful in the past. With the Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, Wukari appears to have endured recurring ethno-religious violence, leading to killings, destruction of lives, business investments, and properties worth several millions of Naira. Within the past six years in the present democratic governance, several incidences of ethno-religious conflicts have occurred in Wukari. Incidentally, efforts at ensuring the restoration of lasting peace have only provided a seemingly ephemeral peace. The Documentary method of data collection is employed, while using qualitative descriptive analysis, the study relied on Marxian conflict approach as its theoretical compass. This paper argues that the inability of the Nigerian state to utilize strategic democratic response in engaging the warring parties has deteriorated conflict situations in Wukari. It concluded that military response alone may not sufficiently address grievances. It recommended reintegration and transformation of the devastated communities, dialogue based on democratic principles and re-orientation to end frequent slide back to conflicts in Wukari.

Keywords: Conflict management, Democratic governance, Ethnicity, Poverty, Religion.

Introduction

Nigeria is a nation with diverse ethnic nationalities and religious plurality. There are over 250 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria with several religious affiliations (Otite, 1979). For instance, Gandonu (1978), estimated 161, while Odetola (1978) estimated it to be 143 ethnic groups. The implication is that the number of ethnic groups in Nigeria is still unknown. However, these ethnic nationalities with diverse religious inclinations tend to have played significant roles in development and governance of the Nigerian State. Thus, governance in Nigeria is characterized by competitions among these groups and sometimes stiff ethno-religious rivalry ensued in the process of extraction, allocation and distribution of the state resources. Indeed, the way and manner in which some people indulge in mobilization of ethno-religious sentiments and solidarity seeking to gain or retain relevance has fueled anxiety, suspicion, fear of domination and outright conflicts (Osumah & Okor 2009). In this regard, Jega (2002) argued that Nigeria is one of the nations in the world whose political landscape has been inundated, suffused with and deeply enmeshed in spectrum of recurring complex conflicts ranging from resource, communal, to political and ethno-religious conflicts.

With the return to democratic governance in 1999, optimism was upbeat that the State will engage democratic principles and strategies in creating a more tolerant and united society in Nigeria. But whether this optimism is well founded remains to be seen. Nigeria has been enmeshed in security situation arising from ethno-religious, inter-group, communal conflict and insurgency. For instance, Nwanegbo & Odigbo (2013) posited that series of resource based conflict (Niger Delta), ethno-religious crisis (Jos crisis), and communal conflicts persisted in Nigeria since the return to democracy.

The Northeast geopolitical zone is made up of states, namely: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe, with various ethnic affiliations and religious differences. Ethno-religious conflicts in

the Northeast dates back to the late 1980s, which later spread to schools. Violent ethno-religious crises have been witnessed in areas such as Bullumkutu, Maiduguri (Borno State) Kala-Kato and Maitatsine, Dobeli Ward, Jimeta-Yola (Adamawa State) , Pantami Ward, (Gombe) Muslim-Christian students clash(Bauchi State) , Hausa Muslim-Jukun conflict at Ibi, Taraba State, Jukun-Muslim clash, Rafin Kada, Taraba state , Fulani Muslims-Christians clash in Donga Taraba State.

Thus, the history of Wukari has been characterized by ethnic-religious conflicts. Mustapha (2002) explained that the manifestation of the conflict in 1959, 1980, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, and 2001 between the Jukuns and the Tivs, Kutebs and Hausa settlers tend to have impacted negatively on the development of Wukari. In 1994, the Tiv/Jukun conflict in Wukari led to the death of an estimated 5,000 people (Hudgens and Grillo 1995 cited in Egwu, 2013). Incidentally, between 2013 and 2014, Wukari crisis occurred six times. National Emergency Agency (NEMA) puts the number of the displaced at over 3,000 persons in the Wukari crisis of 2013, (Itodo, 2013 in Nwanegbo, Odigbo & Ngara, 2014). In fact, in the aftermath of three conflicts in 2013 in Wukari, there were 13 Internally Displaced Persons camps (IDPs) in Wukari with some of them hosting as much as 400-500 persons (Itodo 2013).

Secondly and perhaps more importantly is the fact that the recurring crisis appeared to have increased humanitarian crisis, dislocated several families and indeed hindered socio-economic activities in Wukari. While several businesses have been relocated, the violent situations seem to have hampered social relations among several ethnic groups that have co-existed in the area. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the contradictions that have sustained ethno-religious violence in Wukari and the extent the deployment of democratic principles can assist in the management of ethno-religious conflict in Wukari.

Statement of the problem The greatest threat facing the survival of Nigerian nascent democracy and the unity is general insecurity occasioned by various ethno-religious conflicts, communal clashes, violent crimes and terrorist activities across the country in the last decade (Eke, 2013).Ethno religious conflicts in Wukari, Taraba state have presented many challenges that border on security and a potential threat to the corporate existence of the country. Obviously, the crises have weakened patriotism, commitment to national ideals and true nationhood, giving rise to bitterness and rancor, hatred, animosity, ethnicity and other cleavages which 'ethno-religious' advocates exploit for their narrow interests and advantages.

More so, the Wukari crises have had enormous negative consequences on all the sectors of the society. It thus appears that failure of the Nigerian democratic leaders to ensure good governance and sound policies has resulted to poverty and unemployment. Invariably, this seems to fuel ethnic-religious conflicts. Within the space of six years, several violent ethno-religious conflicts have occurred in Wukari, Taraba state. These violent ethno-religious conflicts have compelled many researchers to attempt a redefinition of the democratic governance and its role in management of ethno-religious conflicts. It does appear that the apparatus of democratic governance is inefficient in handling ethno-religious conflicts. To this end, it becomes important to examine the extent to which democratic governance has contributed to the management of ethno-religious conflict in Wukari. In order to efficiently and effectively do this, the paper seeks to find out how democratic governance has influenced management of ethno-religious conflict in Wukari?

Theoretical explication Wukari crisis can be explained from different theoretical standpoints. This can be possible owing to the fact that there are myriads of factors that engender crisis in Wukari. Over the years, increasing manifestation of violent situations in Wukari indicate that the crisis has become complex as a result of multifarious causes and huge negative implication on the communities in Wukari. As a result, this study adopted Karl Marx conflict theory. The theory is predicated on the assumption that class relations and social conflicts are not mutually exclusive from a materialist interpretation of historical development, and a dialectical view of social transformation.

Following from the above, Dahrendorf (1959) explained that Marxist methodology uses economic and socio-political inquiry and applies that to the critique and analysis of the development of capitalism and

the role of class struggle in systemic economic change. Interestingly, Marxist analyses and methodologies have influenced multiple political ideologies and social movements. It therefore encompasses an economic theory, a sociological theory, a philosophical, and a revolutionary view of social change.

Evidently, Marxism is built on three basic assumptions. First, it emphasizes the primacy of material conditions especially the economic factors. Marx is of the view that man is mostly concerned with meeting his economic needs. Therefore man must eat before he can think of anything else. Ake (1981) stated that when an individual achieves a level of economic well-being such that he can take the basic economic necessities, particularly his daily food, for granted, the urgency of economic need loses its edge, even though the primacy remains. The implication here is that economic activity is man's primary activity and so economic productivity is the 'corollary of the primacy of economic need'. So if man must eat, he must work in order to make eating possible (Ake, 1981). It is also pertinent to assert that materialist understanding of societal development in every society remains the basis for necessary economic activities required to satisfy the material needs of human society. In this view, Bruce (2007) explained that the form of economic organization or mode of production is understood to give rise to, or at least directly influences, most other social phenomena including social relation, political and legal systems, morality and ideology.

The above explains that the economic structure is not autonomous and strictly determines the others but that all the social structures are interdependent and interact in complex ways, (Ake, 1981). Marxist theory assumes that it is the economic system that lubricates the wheel of other systems and imparts certain orderliness to the interaction. It therefore lays emphasis on the relationship between the social systems such as the religion, politics, education, family and especially economic structures and indeed, all other social structures. The theory assumes the primacy of the economic structure over and above other structures. According to Dahrendorf (1959), an understanding of the economic system of a society explains the political, belief and other systems of the society.

The foregoing assumptions are germane in the understanding of severity, causes, sustenance and underlining contradictions that have continued to re-ignite ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari. Indeed, the vicarious ethno-religious conflicts ravaging Wukari cannot be isolated from the unending struggle and manipulations over resources. This is however traceable to the colonial policy of divide and rule consolidated by post colonial elite drive to exploit ethno-religious gap for political reasons and to sustain class competition among the various ethnic elite groups (Nwanegbo, Odigbo & Ngara, 2014).

As can be seen, Wukari ethno-religious crises have been linked to the attempt by those excluded economically based on religious affiliations and ethnic background, struggling to assert or integrate themselves into the mainstream of social, economic and political life of their community against the resistance of those at the mainstream. The ownership, share and distribution of lands in Wukari (as in the case of Jukun/Tiv conflicts), the determination of economic and political influence or power that is tied to ones religious attachment are fundamentally driving forces behind the conflicts. Indeed, ending the tide of violence in Wukari, there must be sustained effort towards eliminating these intrinsic tribulations.

Democratic Governance and Ethno-Religious Conflict: Conceptual Explanations

The literature is replete with mammoth scholarly submissions on the need for democratic governance and its problem solving capacity. Since the emergence of what was described as the third wave of democratization especially in the Latin America and Africa, democratic governance tends to be seen as prerequisite condition for development (see Nwanegbo, Odigbo & Nnorom 2014). Scholars such as (Olufemi & Adejuwon, 2016; Agbodike, Osawe & Igbokwe 2015; Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013) tend to view democratic governance as a process of ensuring harmonious relations among independent but coordinated arms of government and opening democratic space for inclusive political participation to enhance growth and development.

More specifically, Olufemi & Adejuwon (2016) are of the opinion that democratic governance involves promoting the sustainability of democracy which includes an enduring capacity for: the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government; the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law; the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; and, the transparency and accountability of a responsible civil service, functioning at both the national and local levels. For them, democratic governance is one of the keys to development in any society. They further posited that in democratic governance it is acknowledged that political processes, regulations and institutions play a major role in economic growth and human development (Olufemi & Adejuwon, 2016).

In view of the above, Agbodike, Osawe & Igbokwe (2015) contended that democratic governance requires that public officials and elected representatives of the people carry out their responsibilities to generate transparency, particularly in the flow of information from government to the people and vice versa. Basically, accountability, responsiveness and dynamic character of state institutions in the discharge of public duties seem to be critical in instituting stable democratic governance. Accountability in this sense is twofold. First, there must be effort to instill accountability on the part of the operators of the state (both the rulers and the ruled). Secondly, it has to translate into acceptable responses and behavior of state institutions on issues in the socio-economic and political spheres of a nation.

In fact, democratic governance has to do with the range of processes through which a society reaches consensus on and implements regulations, human rights, laws, policies and social structures in pursuit of justice, welfare and environmental protection. Policies and laws are carried out by many institutions: the legislature, judiciary, executive branch, political parties, private sector and a variety of civil society. In this sense democratic governance explains how a society organizes itself to ensure equality of opportunity and equity for all citizens.

On the other hand ethnicity seems to be pivotal especially within the context of acquisition of political power in Nigeria. Osaghae (1992), viewed the term ethnicity as a social formation resting upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology. According to Nnoli (1978) ethnicity refers to a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups. He further held that ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by communal character (i.e. language and culture) of their boundaries. In his view, Otite (1990) sees ethnicity as categories of people characterized by cultural criteria of symbols including language, value systems and normative behavior, and whose members are anchored in a particular part of the new state territory.

Following from the above, ethno-religious conflict can therefore be seen as the most common form of armed violence in Nigeria especially since the return to democratic governance in 1999. Ethno-religious conflict means a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation (Salawu, 2010). In fact, ethno-religious conflict is the clash, contention, confrontation, battle, rivalry, controversy or quarrel among ethno-religious groups (Uhunmwangho & Epelle, 2011). Essentially, there is general assumption that the enthronement of democratic governance will be crucial in mitigating ethno-religious violence in multicultural pluralist societies. While this assumption may be true, it is however important to note that the Nigerian state has defied all democratic prescriptions to ending ethno-religious violence. For instance, in 2008, the Jos ethno-religious crisis consumed the lives of hundreds of Nigerians. Yet, the impacts of such fratricidal violence have not deterred recurring violence of that nature and magnitude. Wukari in the last few years has become the hotbed of ethno-religious conflict. Indeed, the Nigerian state, groups and individuals have greater role to play in ending the tide of ethno-religious conflict in Northeast Nigeria.

Ethno-religious Conflicts, Socio-Economic and Political Development in Wukari

Earlier studies on ethnicity, ethnic conflicts and ethno-religious disturbances in Nigeria especially in the Northeastern Nigeria have separately presented a gory picture of the devastating impacts of the

scourge in Nigeria (Nnoli, 1978). Consequently, poor attitude towards addressing the causes and putting in place preventive institutional and structural mechanisms tend to arouse and indeed rekindle the intention for group or individual utilization of unlawful approach in the actualization of specific objective.

Thus, its persistency appears to engender psychological fear of discrimination and domination. In this regard, the increasing fear of deprivation and marginalization of some groups from the largess of national share of revenue becomes the yardstick for mobilization and participation in ethnic based conflict. Such mobilization is apparently visible at the political level in which arguments revolve around constitutional imbalance, group denial to ascend at the highest echelon of political position as well as uneven distribution of resources, unequal educational opportunities and development.

Incidentally, Wukari seems to be enmeshed in these challenges. Nnorom & Odigbo, (2015) stated that the genesis of Wukari crisis could be traced to 1959 prior to Nigeria's independence. For instance, Nnoli (1995) observed that the emergence of overt ethnic conflicts between the Jukun and Tiv ethnic groups, particularly from 1959, and their continuation since then, have turned this feud into "the deadliest inter-ethnic clashes" (cited in Nnorom & Odigbo, 2015). Since then, ethno-religious crisis in Wukari has occurred in several dimensions with each characterized by destructions and thus, threatened the continued survival and existence of the people living in the communities.

Wukari ethno-religious crisis has strong link to community resources and political development of Wukari communities as well as Taraba State and Northeast Nigeria in general. For instance, Nnorom & Odigbo, (2015) had argued that the state government seems to also be implicated in complicating the violence. According to them, this could also be seen from the perspective of political drama from the period of former Governor Danbaba Suntai plane crash that seems to have incapacitated the Governor, and the growing agitation by some sections and groups to confirm the former acting Governor Garba Umar as the Governor of the State. This suddenly led to violent confrontation alleged to have been instigated by groups loyal to the former acting Governor, Umar.

The implication of this violence is the destruction of lives and properties. The conflict crippled economic activities as several businesses have been relocated to neighboring states and communities close to Wukari. The violence tends to prevent investment as Wukari seems to be perceived as most unstable for economic activities. Also, politics in the community has assumed a 'Hobbesian' structure and appears to be dreadful adventure hence 'do or die' becomes the guiding ideological principle that determines the action and inaction of political leaders and followers. As a result, development has continued to elude the ancient city of Wukari.

Security Agencies and Violence in Wukri

Nigeria's security agencies (police, army and other paramilitary agencies) just as other developing and African states are constrained in so many aspects. First, there seems to be challenges of logistics in emergency situation. These logistics problems ranging from lack of patrol vehicles, poor maintenance of the existing ones to aid quick response in emergency situations, divided loyalty, politicization of conflict situations, poor attitude towards sticking to the professional modus-operandi and negligence of vital aspect of security such as intelligence etc. As an institution of State entrusted with the duty of maintaining peace and safe guiding lives and property, declining availability of these physical infrastructures predisposed the agencies to fail.

It is important to note that while most of these challenges may not have contributed to perennial conflict situations in Wukari, yet it is the opinion of this paper that the level of carnage recorded in each of the confrontations may be attributed to the challenges above. Perhaps, the failure of these security agencies (the police, army, the state security services etc) despite their large number and visibility during crisis is largely due to their failure in the area of intelligence gathering and sharing of such intelligence reports with other relevant security agencies for proper implementation. Incidentally, some intelligence reports, in most cases cannot be passed to a senior officer for fear or sometimes completely disregarded by security authorities especially when it borders on their religious, ethnic and political interest.

Additionally, the present system where all the intelligence gathering and crises response mechanisms are concentrated in a few locations, usually very far away from the well-known flash points of crises appears not helpful in emergency situations. These plans naturally lead to extremely slow response to early warning signals, and in fact, it is so slow that it has become counter-productive (Gomos, 2011). Evidently, the recurrence of the violent ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari has been blamed on significant gap in the inability of the security agencies to guarantee security of lives and property as well as bring those responsible for the conflict to book (Abah, 2009).

Poverty, Unemployment and the Sustenance of Wukari Crises

Most of governments all over the World still battle poverty and unemployment. This is not unconnected to the fact that the two problems undermine individual capacity to realize full potentials of life. Also, poverty and unemployment are national issues that if not carefully addressed tends to hamper national development. Indeed, there seems to be a nexus between increasing poverty, unemployment and violence. Poverty, inequality and instability are strongly influenced by limited economic opportunities, spatial inequities and ethnicity, age and gender inequalities (Holmes, Akinrimisi, Morgan & Buck 2012).

However, the growth and devastating impacts of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria is an indication that there is need for a concerted effort towards reducing the challenges posed by poverty. It can be stated that the rate of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria tends to stimulate conflict. The larger the number who are poor and unemployed, the greater the number who will be willing to engage in illicit activities to scuttle peace and security in the State. For instance, the figure below shows a pathetic unemployment situation in Nigeria even under democratic governance.

There is no gainsaying the fact that Poverty and massive youth unemployment is a dangerous trend that distorts the process of conflict resolution and peace building anywhere in the world. Taraba State is one of the States in North East that has large number of unemployed youths and has attained an unenviable poverty ranking position in Nigeria. Wukari is one of the Local Government Areas in the Southern part of Taraba State, populated by large number of farmers but harbor large number of unemployed youths. This has contributed immensely to recurring violence in the area, (Nwanegbo, et al, 2014).

Figure 1: INCIDENCES OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA BETWEEN 2000 AND 2016

| S/N | YEAR | PERCENTAGE |
|-----|------|------------|
| 1 | 2000 | 31.1% |
| 2 | 2001 | 31.6% |
| 3 | 2002 | 12.6% |
| 4 | 2003 | 14.8% |
| 5 | 2004 | 13.4% |
| 6 | 2005 | 11.9% |
| 7 | 2006 | 13.7% |
| 8 | 2007 | 14.6% |
| 9 | 2008 | 14.9% |
| 10 | 2009 | 19.7% |
| 11 | 2010 | 21.1% |
| 12 | 2011 | 23.9% |
| 13 | 2012 | 24.90% |
| 14 | 2013 | 21.4% |
| 15 | 2014 | 34.44% |
| 16 | 2015 | 39.94 % |
| 17 | 2016 | 34.2 % |

Source: Adopted with additions from Alumona & Odigbo, (2015, p.6).

As can be seen, ethno-religious crises that recently occurred in Wukari had a large turnout of people including under-aged as fighters. For instance, (Nwanegbo, Odigbo & Ngara 2014) explained that the immediate cause of the 2013 crisis was the accidental shooting to death of one Musa Luka, a Christian, by a Muslim during an

argument over the use of football pitch by two opposite teams. Indeed, Poverty and unemployment have therefore served as nursery bed for many ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari because the country now has a reservoir of poor people who have become warmongers as well as mercenary fighters. What this implies in principle is that poverty and unemployment increase the number of people living in Wukari who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given cause at token benefit.

Ethno-Religious Crisis in Wukari, 2010-2014

The Crisis of July 2010 On July 13, 2010, the town witnessed a minor crisis over an attempt to erect a worship place at the Police Area Command. The crisis was provoked by the unwarranted destruction of Mosque built by Muslims, within the premises of Police Area Command, Wukari. Thus, several bands of heavily armed Jukun Christians went to town, attacking Muslims and destroying their properties in different parts of the town. By the time the mayhem was brought under control by a combined team of army and police personnel, the toll on the Muslim side was seven dead (three of whom were innocent commuters passing through the town). Generally, twenty three persons were wounded, eighteen Mosques, one church and thirteen houses completely destroyed.

The February and May 2013 Crises The year 2013 and precisely February 13 and May 4 would go down the memory lane for the Jukuns as one of the most turbulent years in which they killed each other, inflict monumental injuries among themselves and destroyed property worth millions of Naira (Nwanegbo et al, 2014). In their view, one of the remote causes of the Wukari ethno-religious conflict can be linked to an accumulated animosity and grievances among the Jukuns arising from several years of ill-feelings and frustration orchestrated by ethnic and religious bias. Thus, what triggered the recent violence was a mere argument between two football enthusiasts which snowballed into a bloody battle with deep religious sentiment (Mkom, 2013; Itodo, 2013; Ayodele, 2013 in Nwanegbo et al, 2014). The immediate cause of the crisis as earlier stated was the accidental shooting to death of one Musa Luka, a Christian, by a Muslim during an argument over the use of football pitch by two opposite teams. Explaining further, Nwanegbo et al, (2014) stated that:

In the heat of the altercation, one person used pistol and killed his opponent which immediately attracted mob action. The angry mob lynched the accused and the act aggravated the crisis. Hundreds of private residential houses, business shops were burnt and many people perished. The violence and carnage was brought under control following the deployment of troops and the imposition of a twenty four (24) hours curfew which lasted for over a month (Nwanegbo et al, 2014, p. 10).

The above illustrates a clear picture of the existing gap in the capacity of the security agencies to make violence perpetrators face the wrath of the law which contributes to the threats of the recurring ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari. The situation degenerated to the worrisome stage of civilians taking laws into their hands without any recourse to the security. The legitimate process of resolving conflicts was relegated to the background due to alleged loss of trust and confidence in the security agencies.

This lackadaisical attitude of the security operatives despite widespread rumours of reprisal attacks paved way for yet another round of violent crisis in May, 2013 amidst heavy presence of the military and mobile policemen. During the burial rites procession for a deceased traditional Chief, Abe Ashumate, (the Abon Ziken of the town) some Muslim youths were alleged to have violated the directive from the Traditional council barring people from opening for business till 12 noon of the day. Apart from violating such directive, the Muslim youths were accused of making unguided utterances that were abusive and damaging to the culture of the Jukuns. This eventually led to violent crises that started in the Karofi area of the town following the attempt to prevent some traditionalists from carrying out the rites.

The Crisis of April and June 2014 The wave of Fulani herdsmen attack that affected most states and communities in the North central and the North East took a different negative dimension when it

eventually got to Wukari. Specifically, the Wukari crisis of April 15, 2014 was said to have been caused by the killing of one of the Jukun Warriors by suspected Fulani herdsmen at Nwonkyu village. The crisis started shortly after the corps was brought home for burial as the two warring parties (Muslims and Christians) started exchanging fire and gunshots. While the town was yet to recover from human and material losses another crisis erupted on June 16, 2014. The crisis was said to have been ignited by the incidence of burning a phone booth belonging to a Muslim youth by unknown persons in the night.

These crises were characterized by the same pattern of killings, destruction/burning of houses and heavy gunfire experienced during the previous crises. Many indigenes and non-indigenes were victims as they sustained various degrees of bodily injuries, destruction of their houses, vehicles and had their belongings burnt or looted.

The Crisis of September, 2014 The crisis that erupted in the early hours of 2nd September, 2014 was said to have resulted when a bus suspected to be loaded with arms made its way to one of the Mosques in Wukari. The bus was allegedly followed by mobile policemen on patrol that made fruitless efforts to stop the bus driver. At the time the bus got to the central Mosque, the Mobile policemen were alleged to have shot in the air and the gun shot was replied immediately by an unknown person. It was gathered that the exchange of gunfire attracted the attention of both the Hausas and the Jukuns who were battle ready. The scenario eventually escalated leading to another round of ethno-religious conflict.

From the above, it could be argued that there was a conspiracy and set up of the two warring parties (Jukuns and Hausas) by bad elements in the security outfit. This is because the Mobile Police officers who started shooting gun from one of the suspected flash points of the town ought to have understood the implication of such action knowing fully well that the town has been tensed. In other words, the crisis could be linked to suspected sabotage and poor coordination of the security officials.

Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Wukari: The Causative Factors

Having established the theoretical focus, it is pertinent to look at the possible causes of ethno-religious crises in Wukari with emphasis on the remote and immediate causes of the several recurring crises. Most of the violent crises in *Wukari* have been easily veiled under religious intolerance and ethnic cleansing motives. But underlining the spate of intolerance and violence are more fundamental reasons. Apart from the immediate cause of the Wukari ethno-religious crises, there are remote causes which can be summarized as follows:

Religious animosity among the Wukari people There is existence of perceived high level of religious animosity between the Muslim and Christian faithful in Wukari. This has led to gross intolerance and hatred among the dwellers in the community. As a factor, it has been seen to be one of the key remote causes of the ethno-religious crises that have destroyed seemingly development trajectories in the town and its neighborhood. There has been invisible battle for domination and superiority among these religious groups prior to the manifestation and outbreak of the crises.

Negative exploitation of ethnic multiplicity *Wukari* is a product of the amalgamation of cultural diversities. It is a configuration of Jukuns, Tivs and Hausas. Unfortunately, instead of finding strength in these diversities, it has however been exploited to create ethnic and religious rivalries and intolerance as is exhibited in the numerous ethno-religious violent crises that have been reoccurring for the past few years. Such exploitation of the ethnic multiplicity has been observed as one of the remote cause of Wukari crises.

Lack of quality leadership/ leadership tussles There is no doubt that Leaders make things happen; they are wave makers. A society without talented and committed leaders will retrogress or at best remain stagnant. Indeed, leadership has been the problem with Nigeria (Achebe, 1983). A careful examination of the attitude and behavior of the leaders of post-colonial Nigeria shows that many of the leaders were mired in the pursuit of selfish personal goals at the expense of broader national interest or needs. In other words, they were 'instrumental' leaders, or what David Apter called "consummatory" leaders (Apter, 1960). Thus, Achebe (1983) argued that there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character, there

is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else, but lack of quality leadership.

Leadership tussles has to do with political leadership of the state. The people of Wukari especially the Jukun Christians perceived the installation of the Acting Governor, Umar Garba in 2013 as a ploy by the Muslims to take over the political leadership of the State and Wukari. Such sentiments in 2013 led to several political manipulations to ensure that former governor Danbaba Suntai returns to power to ensure that the status quo is maintained ahead of the 2015 general elections in the state.

High level of unemployment and poverty There are many able-bodied young men and women who are unemployed in Wukari. This state of idleness and hopelessness has been seen as one of the contributing factors to the recent ethno-religious crises ravaging the Wukari community. It is generally believed that *Nigeria* has a record of one of the countries with the highest levels of poverty. Wukari is not isolated from this ugly trend of high level of poverty. As much as 70% of *Wukari residents presumably* live below poverty line, that is, within the bracket of those earning less than one Dollar per day, Nwanegbo et al, (2014). Such situation exposes the hungry and angry youths to crises following any slightest provocation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the analysis, this study has examined democratic governance and ethno-religious crisis in Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria. It explained that ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria has to do with the accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and sabotage. It is our view that in spite of the fact that the contending issues characterized the nature of politics and conflicts in Nigeria, Wukari crises have been fought on religious and ethnic lines. In each of these conflicts, there seems to be a manifest alliance between the Christians and the Traditional Jukuns against their Muslim counterpart. Killings and destructions tend to be carried out along religious bases, thereby dividing the community in two settlement patterns. The one cohabited by the son of the soil (Christian and Traditionalist) that is acceptable and safe and the other inhabited by those described as settlers that is seen to be more dreadful. Indeed, this has resulted to the prevailing social dislocation and religious animosity among the Wukari people. Following from this the study recommended as follows:

Massive re-orientation of the youths There is need for government at all levels, stakeholders and community leaders in Wukari local government to sensitize the youths on the benefits of peace, conflict prevention, peace building and reconciliation. This could be achieved through aggressive investment in education especially now the community hosts three Universities (ie Federal University Wukari, Kwara University Wukari and the National Open University of Nigeria Wukari, Centre). Prioritizing educational development of the youths will enhance their understanding of the dangers associated with conflicts. Stakeholders and agencies should ensure a sustained re-orientation programmes that will transform lives, belief system and encourage cordial relations among the Jukuns.

Strategic integration The relevant stakeholders should develop strategic integration platforms and frameworks. This could be done through setting up of collective development mechanisms or bodies in the community. For instance, the Jukun Development Association should be expanded to incorporate all Jukuns and the recognized religious bodies. Secondly and perhaps more importantly is the fact that our culture immensely plays a significant role in defining individual and group character, social relations and degree of acceptability in a community. In this sense, unifying various cultural heritages in Wukari will reduce the level of disunity.

Town Hall Meetings Convening town hall meetings will improve dialogue and understanding of contestable issues. It will serve as a platform of checkmating issues that will lead to violence. In Wukari, such meetings will be essential if not the bases for eliminating and addressing grievances before they escalate.

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