

Ethnic Militias and Insurgency in Nigeria: A Threat to National Development

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Abstract

The phenomenon of ethnic militia and insurgency has become a household discussion in Nigeria. These groups has over the years promoted humanitarian crises ranging from refugee, poverty, misery, diseases, malnutrition and epidemics mainly concerning the health of children and women thereby inhibiting the process of development which is hinged on provision of basic infrastructural facilities and investment opportunities which are threat to our national development. Our major concern in this paper therefore is to examine ethnic militias and insurgency in Nigeria and how it has negatively impacted on our development. Some literatures on the subject matter were reviewed while secondary sources were employed to analyze the issues therein. State fragility and frustration aggression theories were adopted as our theoretical framework in explaining the issues that are involved in the paper. The paper reveals that the activities of ethnic militias and insurgents have negatively impacted on our country's development in various ways spanning from volatile investment climate, destruction of properties, instability and drift towards disintegrations. The paper however points out that the inability of the Nigerian state to effectively cater for her citizens has been the responsive factor for the emergence of ethnic militias and insurgency. The paper recommends that construction of industries should be pursued by Nigerian state in such a way that unemployment and inequalities are addressed across the nation. The paper concludes that government should focus fundamentally on addressing the underlying socio-political and economic triggers of domestic violence.

Keywords: Ethnic, Militia, Insurgency, Nigeria, Development

Introduction

One of the fundamental challenges that have constrained or hamstrung development in Nigeria is the preponderance of ethnic militias and insurgency which have engulfed the nation for over a decade now. The continued existence of violence expressed between these groups (ethnic militias and insurgents) who feel excluded and marginalized from existing power structures on one hand and central authority on the other hand have indeed affected not only peace, and security but also undermined the countries national development. This development according to Felix (2011) appears to be the direct fallout of the internal problems of the Nigerians state with the manifestation of frustrated expression by defiance violence of ethnic militias and insurgency; which the state is unable to effectively protect the lives and property of her citizens. A common denominator recorded by these violence is that they have promoted humanitarian crises ranging from refugee, poverty, misery, diseases, malnutrition and epidemics mainly concerning the health of children and women thereby inhibiting the process of development which is hinged on provision of basic infrastructural facilities and investment opportunities etc. (mimiko 1999: Adetula 2006).

The scenario of this ethnic militia and insurgency is tragic, spanning from the North, East, and South of the Nigerian state. In the North, the activities of Boko Haram sect which claims millions of lives in the region cannot be left out. The Obatse Cult activities in Nasarawa state in north central Nigeria remains so volatile. In the east, issues of kidnapping by gang men remain also volatile in that region. In the South-south area, the activities of Niger Delta militants who in spite of the amnesty offered to them by the late President Yar Adua is still shaky hence the environment still remained threatened day by day.

Equally, the violent confrontations with security personnel, and the deliberate vandalization of public utilities by both ethnic militias and insurgency seriously undermines the safety of lives and properties, and instill fear and sense of insecurity on the populace. This impact negatively on the development of the Nigerian state.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to unravel the phenomenon of ethnic militias and insurgency in Nigeria. For ease of analysis, the paper has been structured in such a way that, we shall first undertake the definition of concepts, an expression of our theoretical framework, differentiate between ethnic militias and insurgency, examine the possible factors responsible for ethnic militias and insurgency in Nigeria, consider the effect of ethnic militias which constitute threat to national development; makes conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Elucidation

Three major concepts shall be considered in this paper. These concepts are; Ethnic militias, Insurgency, and Development.

Ethnic Militia

It is imperative to first and foremost understand the concept of ethnicity before we can conceptualize ethnic militias. The word ethnic can be traced to its Latin and Greek origin "Ethnos" which means nation or race. Toland (1993:3) defines ethnicity as the sense of people hood held by members of a group, sharing a common culture and history within the society Thomson (2000; 58) in the same vein defines ethnic group as a community of people who are convinced that they have a common identity and based on issues of origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language. Babawale, (2001) see ethnicity as a highly inclusive group identify based on some notion of common origin, recruited commonly primarily from kinship and typically manifesting some measure of cultural distinctions.

Ethnic militia as a concept cannot be boxed in a single definition. This implies that divergent conceptualization of the term abound. In the words of Olukotun (2003:58) ethnic militias are paramilitary forces that performed police functions within their locality while the government considers militia group as insurgent groups that engage in subversive activities against the state. To Falana (2003: 185) Ethnic militia in the Nigerian context is viewed as a militant organization set up to protect the interest of a particular nationality within the Nigerian federation.

In this paper, ethnic militias can therefore be seen as paramilitary actors in a given community who make political demands on the state as citizens. They are also particularistic in nature and are characterized by subversion of the capacity for deliberations, usurpation and incivility. Adejumobi (2002:2) sees these organizations as 'youth based formations that emerged with the intention of promoting and protecting the parochial interests of their ethnic groups and whose activities sometimes involve the use of violence'.

Ethnic militias therefore are organised violence-oriented groups populated by diverse elements, cutting across different age strata, but drawing membership exclusively from an ethnic group and established to promote and protect the interests of an ethnic group. Ethnic militias is an extreme form of ethnic agitation for self-determination and occurs when the ethnic group assumes militant posture. They serve as a social pressure group designed to influence the structure of power to the advantage of and call attention to the deteriorating material condition or political deprivation and perceived marginalization of their group or social environment.

Insurgency

Insurgency is derived from Latin word, meaning rising upon or against. According to Anold (2013;126) insurgence could be defined as individuals who rise in forcible opposition to lawful authority, especially when it engages in armed resistance to a government or to the execution of its laws. In the words of David (2012;26) insurgency is 'an organized resistant movement that uses subversion, sabotage, and armed conflict to achieve its aims. Insurgencies normally seek to overthrow the existing social order and reallocate power within the country.

In this paper insurgency is seen as individuals or group who destabilize the development of a country by posing threat and act of aggression on other members of the society. They also seek to overthrow an established government, and also form an autonomous national territory within the borders of a state.

Development

As a concept in social sciences, there is no clear, all inclusive definition of development. To Rodney (1972), development is considered to be many sided process. At the level of individual, it implies increase in skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline responsibility and well-being.

To him, development thus descends economic indication. In the words of Todaro (1980) development is a multi-dimensional process involving the organizational and co-orientation of the entire economic and social system. Abduraheem (2002) also considers development as the improvement in the general standard of living of the people of the society. This means that development does not only involve economic growth, but also a condition of people in a country, for example adequate food, jobs and income inequality.

Considering various views of developments, we can define in this paper that development encompasses social, economic and political process. National development therefore means harnessing both social political and economic development of the country in such a way that individuals lives are improved. It could also be seen as a sustained level of socio-economic and political maturity in which people, institutions have attained satisfactory conditions (material and spiritual) in a manner that they can eschew inequality, divisions for national spiritedness or oneness.

It is imperative to point out that in a nation where ethnic militias and insurgency are the order of the day the development process of that country is dwindled.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical explanations and analyses of issues in this paper are based on two broad, but mutually complementary theories, namely the state fragility perspective and frustration aggression approach. Our choice of these theories is predicated on the desire to understand how the inability of the state to cater for her citizens has triggered ethnic militias and insurgence in the country thereby inhibiting the level of development. The fragile state as articulated by Sara (2008) is the term used for countries facing severe developmental challenges such as weak institutional capacity, poor governance, political instability, unemployment, poverty and low level of economic development.

It is a theory that describes how extreme poverty is concentrated in a given state, how low level of human and social development are linked to weak institutional capacity, governance and to internal conflict, all of which undermine the capacity of the state to deliver basic social and infrastructural services and offer security to citizens. More fundamentally, a fragile state is the one that is trapped in a vicious circle of violent conflict and poverty or suffer from a natural resource curse; others face a legacy of not providing the most basic services to their citizens. Such basic services include among other things, good health facilities, good roads, quality education, electricity, good water supply etc.

Slater (2012), a leading proponent of this theory has observed that a fragile state is significantly susceptible to crisis in one or more of its subsystems. According to him, a fragile state is a state that is particularly vulnerable to internal shocks as well as domestic conflicts. This implies that in a fragile state, institutional arrangement embodies and perhaps preserves the conditions of crisis both in economic and social terms. In economic terms, this could be institutions, importantly property rights that reinforce stagnation or low growth rates, or embody extreme inequality in wealth, in access to land or access to the means to make a living. In social terms, institutions may embody extreme inequality or lack of access altogether to health or education. In fragile states, statutory institutional arrangements are vulnerable to challenges by rival institutional systems be they derived from traditional authorities or devised by communities under conditions of stress that see little of the state (in terms of security, development, or welfare).

The frustration aggression hypothesis formulated by Dollard et al (1939) has the central premise that aggression is always the result of frustration. According to them, frustration produces instigations to a number of different types of responses, one of which is an instigation to some of aggression. Expantiating on the above postulation, Anifowose (2003: 48) submits that, 'given the requisite conditions, individuals or groups who feel frustrated in the attainment of their desires and demands often react by direction aggressive behavior at what is perceived as being responsible for depriving or thwarting those desires, as a substitute. He further submits that, it is not utter lack but unfulfilled hopes and expectations that engender violent conflict'.

It could be argued from the above vantage points that, the emergence of the ethnic militias and insurgence in the country could have resulted in part from the inability of the Nigerian state to meet the yearnings and aspirations of its citizens. The truth remains that there is poverty, unemployment and lack of basic infrastructure in the country. In view of this, the provision of basic services, poverty eradication, employment opportunities and so on, can help reduce the scale of violent insurgency that has gripped the country in recent years.

This is because as Anifowose (1982) posits; When groups feel alienated and there is further feeling that such alienation is entrenched, it could degenerate into violence as the groups increasingly resort to desperate measures to break the Yolk. This state of deprivation and social injustice may have driven this group to take up arms against the state to break the yolk as a counter measure to address their grievances.

Difference between Ethnic Militia and Insurgency

It is trite to state that, Ethnic militia and insurgency are similar to each other. This is predicated on the fact that both of them carry out military acts in projection of their issues, they destroy lives and property, they destabilize the country and also weaken the economic activities of the state.. Notwithstanding the similarities of ethnic militia and insurgency there exist some differences. Insurgency responds violently much more quickly, and with much greater frequency, than ethnic militia, even when holding abuse levels. Secondly, insurgents quickly retaliate in an action but ethnic militia due to organizational process they delay in there reprisal attack. Ethnic militias are tribal based while insurgency comprises members from all facets of life to form the group.

Possible Factors Responsible for the Emergence of Ethnic Militias and Insurgency in Nigeria

Just like any other country which is faced with this challenge, the fundamental underpinning factors which are frequently cited as contributing to the phenomenon of this groups may include inter alia repressive and exploitative regime, phenomenon of failed states, political and religious intolerance and extremism, corruption and poor governance, political alienation, human miseries and injustice across the Nation. For the sake of this paper we will hinge on the following factors though not exhaustive.

- (a) **Unemployment-** The increasing level of unemployment in Nigeria is one issue that has been responsible for the resurgence of militia groups and insurgents in the country. The introduction of privatization liberalization and deregulation of the economy by Obasanjo and Yar-Aduas administration deepened social crises of unemployment, and illiteracy. Consequently, the rank of the unemployed and idle youths increased the number and people who had recourse to ethnic formations to gain livelihood, define their identity and promote ethnic nationalism.
- (b) **Poverty-** Poverty is one of the factors responsible for the emergence of ethnic militias and insurgents. It has become a major problem widely acclaimed nationally and internationally as deserving urgent attention especially in Sub-Saharan African countries, Nigeria inclusive (Jega, 2007). In these countries, the poor living conditions of the people has reached phobic dimensions and has defied all solutions offered due to the institutional fragility of these states.

It is apposite that poverty can be easily cited in Nigeria just like an Elephant in a river. It is another form of modern slavery. Majority of these poor people live in rural areas that are neglected and almost forgotten in this country especially in the Northern states. The effects of poverty are pervasive. A poor man is a problem to the society and even unto himself. He is always angry, never productive and seeks succour in religion. According to Pwul (2004) poverty is a vicious circle and it is the root cause of militias, corruption, fraud and embezzlement in the society.

- (c) **Bad Governance-** Bad governance is the exact opposite of good governance. It is exercised through bad leadership. It is complete absence of good leadership and good governance. It means lack of respect for the fundamental human rights of citizens, lack of judicious use of natural resources, fraud and other corrupt practices; in short, it has no respect for principles of accountability and transparency. Just as good governance promotes the accumulation of financial, physical, social and political capital, bad governance inhibits or drains away that accumulation. For development to take place in any society there must be serious transformation in the quality of governance. Babawale, (2001) . For every governed country, corruption must be present throughout the system of government. Public infrastructure decay or are never built the resource at the state disposal are diverted to private ends.

In the context of bad governance, individuals seek governmental positions in order to collect rent and accumulate personal wealth through the conversion of public resources into private goods. There is no commitment to the public goods and no confidence in the future. There is no respect for law and no rule of law. This is the hopeless situation we found ourselves in due to bad leadership exercised through bad governance. The only way to generate truly sustainable development, according to Diamond (2004:226), is to bring about fundamental transformation in the nature and quality of governance.

To him, governance permeate the entire environment of development, merging with attitudes, value to the expectation to the point where it is hard to know culture ends and institutions begin

The leaders that came to power after independents did not come with any ideology of their own. The colonial master too did not leave them with any. They come to power without any agenda of development for the people. They where only handle political independence without economic independence. This political independence they saw it as do or die affair. For one to control the power. This power, they use arbitraritry for their own selfish ends to the detriment of people they are suppose to be serving,. There is absence of political will, the people are empowered and there is complete breakdown of trust between the leaders and the people. The leaders have complete abandoned the people

It is not easy to eradicate poverty in any society no matter the amount of resources available in the country but as Marshall (2013: 714) observed there is no moral justification for extreme poverty side by side with great wealth". It is the opinion of any people that the problem with Nigeria is in the area of instability, policy implementation and corruption. All these can be solved through good purposive leadership excised through good governance which Nigeria is in dare need for all round development to take place. .

- (d) **Fear of Domination/marginalization-** One of the factors that gave rise to militia activities and insurgence in Nigeria is fear of domination, marginalization and social deprivation expressed by some sections of the Nigerian State. The complaint against official negligence, environment degradation and denial of access to resources by the South-south, the cries of marginalization, alienation and discrimination by the South-East, and the North since the demise of Yar Adua, the lamentation of injustice, political harassment and domination by the South-West are issues responsible for the emergence ethnic militias and insurgence in Nigeria. Driven to frustrated heights as a result of the use of official violence against their protests and demands, these ethnic militia groups and insurgents such as Niger Delta militants, Ombatse Cult, kidnappers, and Boko Haram sect resorted to armed reaction ostensibly for self-defense and counter measure against the state leaving the Nation in the state of comma.
- (e) **Insecurity-** Insecurity of life and property of Nigerians is another factor responsible for the increasing cases of militia activities and insurgence. The hostility, non-chalant and growing ineptitude of the security agencies towards the welfare and proper protection of the ordinary citizens of our country made some ethnic groups to seek alternative means for the security of its people and their property. This is evident in the formation of vigilante groups by different ethnic groups.

The Effect of Ethnic Militias & Insurgency in Nigeria; A Threat to National Development

It is trite to state here that, the activities of ethnic militias and insurgents in Nigeria has no positive effect rather it possed a lot of negatve effect on our development. some of these negative impact are shown bellow.

- (a) **Volatile investment climate;** this is one of the negative effect of ethnic militias and insurgency in Nigeria. In Nigeria , threat to life, lost of life and act of aggression especially from militias like the Niger Delta, the Ombatse, and insurgents like the Boko Haram, sect has already scared some foreign investors coming in the country and it is very bad for a nation that is thriving to meet the vision 2020.
- (b) **Instability-**Another negative impact of ethnic militias and insurgents activities on Nigerian development is that renegades among them have been engaged in subversive activities against the State which is capable of destabilizing the political process. For instance some renegades have been used by politicians as thugs, assassins and kidnappers to deal with their political opponents.
- (c) **Destructions of life's and Property-**Another negative effect of ethnic militia groups and insurgents activities is the deliberate vandalization and destruction of public utilities such as oil pipe lines, electrical installation, telecommunication equipment etc. for example, in May 2013, militia group in Nasarawa State destroyed a police station and killed a number of police officers. The destruction of these public utilities, especially the disruption of electricity and telecommunication negatively impacts on the development process in the affected areas.
- (d) **Drift towards Disintegration-**Equally, the violent activities of militia groups and insurgents which instill fear and insecurity among the citizenry discourage the people from active participation in political activities such as rallies and campaigns for fear of being attacked, kidnapped or killed. The violent activities of militia groups and insurgents often negate the fundamental tenets of democracy, which among others include; freedom of association and unhindered participation in the electoral process.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made in this paper to take a critical look at the ethnic militias and insurgency in Nigeria which is one of the threat to our national development. It is found that the emergence of these groups is as a result of the inability of Nigerian state to effectively cater and protect the lives and property of the citizens. It is also found in the paper that the phenomenon of ethnic militia and insurgents with their activities, constitute a challenge to our development. Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and material resources which if well tapped and harnessed should achieved a decent living for her people. There is no reason why the citizens of this country carry out arms against the state and other citizens if there is good leadership.

Recommendations

Having analyzed the phenomenon of ethnic militias and insurgency in the country, the following recommendations though by no means exhaustive, are suggested for consideration as a way of addressing or possibly bringing a lasting peace in Nigeria.

First and foremost, industrialization should be pursued by Nigerian state in such a way that unemployment and inequalities are addressed. Across Nigeria lack of industrial site for job opportunities have made life to be an insult to human dignity to the extent that most people have lost hope. Poverty is at the root of most evils and unethical behaviors like ethnic militias and insurgents. The government should therefore make concerted efforts to empower the citizens, most of whom are married with children, yet with no means of livelihood. Given the extent of despair and disillusionment, little disagreements that would have been resolved often attract violence leading to protracted conflicts. In situations like this, it is the army of the unemployed that are recruited or conscripted as armed militia groups or bands of insurgent to challenge the state. Secondly, integration framework should be practice which is based on power sharing to the extent that groups can be accommodated in the framework or machinery of governance. The political elite should carry out a reinforcement of values and norms that encourage the thriving of political culture that encourages political cooperation and integration than exclusion and marginalization. Value such as integrity, ethnic and religious tolerance, cooperation, consensus and accountability should be the dominant ones in the polity instead of ethnic chauvinism which forms the basis of political engagement in Nigeria. Only in doing this can ethnic militias and insurgents will be minimize.

More so, government should ensure the observance of the rule of law, adherence to constitutionalism, and respect for individual and collective rights, which are germane to good governance and democratic practice, these would greatly reduce crisis that exacerbate the resurgence of ethnic militias and insurgents in Nigeria.

Furthermore, government should always adopt dialogue instead of violence in the management and resolution of conflicts and differences between the state and the various ethnic nationalities. Dialogue as a means of conflict resolution ensures peace and stability, conditions necessary for democratic development and consolidation in the society.

Finally our government should shun corruption which is the most serious element of bad governance which has remained a formidable factor militating against development thereby leading to increased militias and insurgents groups in the country.

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