Promoting Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Review of Literatures on Parameters to ensure Positive Peace in Nigeria

[1]Adekunle Emmanuel ADENIJI, and [2]Magareth Oluwatoyin ABRAHAM & [3]Senimetu ILEUMA

[1]*adenijiadekunle1@gmail.com : +2348077005385*
[2]*magareth.o.abraham@gmail.com: +2347038064682*
[3]*ileumaesther@gmail.com : +2348038047958*

[1,2&3]*Department of Educational Management Lead City University Ibadan, Nigeria.*

Sustainable development refers to all forms of positive changes that a society experiences. The pursuit of social justice, intertwined with religion, plays a vital role in fostering peace and security for sustainable development. Religion, as a powerful social institution, often advocates for social justice by promoting compassion, empathy, and solidarity among individuals and communities. Security, which is freedom from danger and risk, peace of mind or absence of fear, and the certainty or assurance of the good life as well as religion determines sustainable development of any nation at any given time period. Therefore, this paper addresses the issue of sustainable development as well as the interplay of social justice, religion, peace and security within the Nigerian context. The paper also put forward suggestions on how equitable distribution of resources, provision of security for life and properties of citizenry by government and religion could be engaged as viable tools for attaining sustainable development in Nigeria. Recommendations were put forward on how the elements standing against the achievement of sustainable development could be addressed through social justice, religion, peace and security.

Keywords: Social Justice, Religion, Peace, Security, Sustainable Development

Introduction

The Pursuit of Social Justice, intertwined with religion, play a vital role in fostering peace and security for sustainable development. Sustainable development can be broken into two terms; 'development' and 'sustainable'. Development refers to all forms of positive changes that a society experiences. It is conceptualized as a process whose output aims to improve the quality of life and increase the self sufficient capacity of economies that are technically more complex and depend on global integration. The fundamental purpose of development is a creation of stimulated environment in which people will

enjoy and have long, healthy and creative life Adelekan, I. (2020). On the other hand, sustainability means a capacity to maintain some entity, outcome, or process over time Oyebade, A. (2019).

Promoting sustainable development is a critical global concern, and Nigeria, as Africa's most populous country and largest economy, plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable development goals. Sustainable development encompasses economic growth, social justice, environmental protection, peace and security. In Nigeria, these aspects are interconnected and require a multifaceted approach to ensure a sustainable and equitable future.

Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal, economic, political and social rights and opportunities. It is also the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources and obligations in the society to all people regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender ability, status, sexual orientation, religious or spiritual background. Inclusion, collaboration, equal access and equal opportunities are fundamental principles underlying social justice. Nigeria rank low in social justice; it is currently measure 158 out of 190 countries with a score of 0.534; where 1 is the perfect score (Uzoma Okoye and Chinyere Ondu, 2022).

Religion is a phenomenon that defies a universally acceptable definition. Dauda and Bongottons, define religion as a social and spiritual phenomenon which involves the grouping of people around a faith perspective. In other words religion is an issue of faith. Religion influences human actions and activities in Nigeria; including violent and non-violent activities. Therefore, according to Prof. Joseph Haruna Mama, religion can serve as an integrating or disintegrating for peace. Among others, religious conflict may be regarded as the greatest threat to global or national development. Religious conflict is the most intractable conflict among all conflicts in Nigeria. Religious ignorance and intolerance has been identified as the major cause of religious conflict in Nigeria and a major hindrance to attainment of sustainable development in the country Galtung, J. (2013). Absence of religious conflict will always pave way for actualization of sustainable development goals in Nigeria.

Peace as a concept refers to absence of violence but it must be noted that there is no absolute peace anywhere in the world, the only thing we have is relative peace. It means there is no country of the world that is absolutely free from crime and violence but the rate at which crime is being committed vary in degree from one country to another. According to Kwasau (2006), peace implies "Lawfulness, order, harmony, amicability, goodwill, friendship and nonviolence. Peace could be negative or positive peace, peace does not in any way, suggest that no conflict exists in any given situation. Positive peace is the peace in the presence of social justice and freedom while negative peace is peace in the presence of injustice, tyranny and oppression. Scholars opine that the peace in Nigeria can best be described as negative peace.

In terms of security, the current happenings in Nigeria show clearly that the security situation in the country is nothing to write home about. Incessant killings of innocent citizens, banditry attacks,

kidnapping, insurgency etc. are clear indications that the security situation in the country needs to be addressed. Absence of peace and security will always hinder actualization of sustainable development goals.

The Interplay between Sustainable Development and Social Justice

"Social justice is a critical element in achieving sustainable development goals in Nigeria, as it involves ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities for all citizens" Oyebade, (2019). Although social justice courses like social work and law, Ethno-cultural relations, and the Nigeria state, social work intervention, social policy, social work practices with the youth, Social work practice with children orphans and vulnerable children, field work practicum, and social work and gender was inculcated in course curriculum; there has not been significant positive impact on sustainable development. Scholars opine that the problem may be with the teacher's proficiency in delivery and teaching these courses. (Joseph Haruna M. 2019).

Sustainable development can never be achieved without proper social justice system in operation. Social justice refers to proper distribution of available resources without any sentiment or bias. Nigeria as a country has witnessed a lot of injustice in the area of resource allocation, equality before the law and political appointments just to mention a few. In the absence of justice, neither the silence of guns and bombs nor the absence of flying missiles and war planes can be said to guarantee peace (Joseph Haruna M. 2019). What obtains in such situations can be described as calm before the storm. The normal order that social justice represent is achieved where one and all get fully involved in the intelligent regulation of common life for the sake of common good, not where the balance of power is used as a means of working against the legitimate aspirations of the weak or less powerful. As Vatican II affirmed;

> "Peace on earth cannot be obtained unless personal well-being is safeguarded and men freely and trustingly share with one another the riches of their inner spirits and their talents. A firm determination to respect other men and women and peoples and their dignity, as well as studied practice of brotherhood, is absolutely necessary for the establishment of peace. Hence, peace is likewise the fruit of love which goes beyond what justice can provide"

Social justice connotes fair distribution of a country's available resources between all the states. Any country that wishes to actualize sustainable development must take into cognizance the importance of social justice system that is not bias; one that does not marginalize one segment of the society and place them at disadvantage. In order to actualize sustainable development goals in Nigeria, social justice must be well upheld and practiced in a way that social injustice will not be able to penetrate into our system and destroy our society.

Sustainable development is a holistic concept that seeks to balance economic growth, social well-being, and environmental protection. Social justice, on the other hand, entails the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and benefits among individuals and communities. The interplay between sustainable development and social justice is crucial in Nigeria, where income inequality, poverty, and social exclusion are prevalent. Promoting sustainable development requires addressing these social disparities and ensuring that marginalized groups have access to education, healthcare, clean water, and other essential services (World Bank, 2020). By prioritizing social justice, Nigeria can enhance social cohesion and create an inclusive society that empowers all citizens to participate in and benefit from sustainable development efforts.

Religion and sustainable Development

Religion is a fountain of moral and spiritual guidance and that without it sustainable development cannot be sustained in Nigeria. In accordance with Kasmen and Dung, every society needs sound religious education and moral instruction to create conditions for peace, harmony, unity, stability, progress and prosperity. Religion plays a significant role in Nigeria, as the country is home to a diverse population comprising various religious groups, including Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions. Religion can both facilitate and hinder sustainable development. On one hand, religious institutions can promote ethical values, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship, inspiring individuals to engage in sustainable practices (UNDP, 2019). On the other hand, religious tensions and conflicts can undermine social cohesion and impede sustainable development efforts (Omotoso &Olutola, 2018). Moreover each religion has its moral education, for Christianity it is Christian Religions Studies (CRS) ,for Islam it is Islamic Religion Studies (IRS). African Traditional Religion (ATR) has its own moral education which offers African religions and traditional/indigenous instructions and values necessary for peace and development. The fact that all religion have identical elements of moral instructions and codes make it easier for religious studies education to be a fostering factor towards sustainable development in Nigeria. Therefore, it is crucial to harness the positive aspects of religion while addressing its potential negative impacts, fostering interfaith dialogue, and promoting a shared understanding of sustainable development goals. The commodification of religion for economic and political upward mobility makes it impossible for religion to be an agent of justice, peace and authentic sustainable development (Joseph Haruna M. 2019).

Absence of sustainable development at the local, state and national level, can be attributed to political domination, or inequality, socio-economic injustices, human right abused, resource mismanagement, terrorism, violent civil protest, ethnic and religious riots, poor leadership extreme deprivation and marginalization, ethnic and religious riots, unemployment and all manner of ethnic agitations. Religion as a tool has the potential of externalizing the aforementioned sources of crises, as specified in National Policy on Education which affirms that an education infused with religious instruction is believed to be capable of developing our country.

Efforts are underway to harness the positive influence of religion on sustainable development in Nigeria. Interfaith dialogues, religious teachings on environmental conservation, and partnerships between religious organizations and development agencies are fostering collaboration and promoting values of compassion, justice, and responsibility towards the environment and society (Adegbiji& Adejumo, 2020).

The interplay between Sustainable Development, Peace and Security

There is a strong connection between sustainable development peace and security. Any society or country that lack peace and security can never enjoy sustainable development. Nigeria with 380 ethnic groups has witnessed and still witnessing escalating rate of violent conflicts spread across the land OniguOtite (2000). The six geopolitical zones of Nigeria were bedeviled by one violence or the other (Idayat Hassan, 2018). Boko Haram crisis in the North East, cattle rustling and banditry in the North West, harder crisis in the North Central, secessionism in the South East, youth military in the South-South, ritual killings in the South West, kidnapping and hostage taking everywhere. The situation is worse and there is no concrete assurance of a better tomorrow. According to former COAS Buratai;

> 'This security challenge, has penetrated the communities, the terrorists have won the communities to their side, that is why you see a small hamlet keeping Boko Haram in those location' (Premium Times 2021)

To address peace and security challenges, Nigeria has taken steps to strengthen security institutions, engage in peace-building initiatives, and promote conflict resolution mechanisms. It is crucial to address the root causes of conflict, including social inequality, poverty, and religious tensions, to build sustainable peace and create an enabling environment for development (Salihu, 2018).

Peace and Security as Catalysts for Sustainable Development

Peace and security are indispensable prerequisites for sustainable development. In Nigeria, ongoing conflicts, such as insurgency, ethno-religious conflicts, and farmer-herder clashes, pose significant challenges to sustainable development efforts (Adelekan, 2020). Insecurity disrupts economic activities, hinders investments, and exacerbates poverty and social inequalities. To promote sustainable development, Nigeria needs to prioritize conflict resolution, promote social cohesion, and ensure the safety of individuals and communities. Building trust, addressing root causes of conflicts, and investing in conflict prevention and peace-building measures are essential steps towards achieving both peace and sustainable development (UNDP, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The structural conflict theory provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding the interplay of social justice, religion, peace, and security in promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. This

theory, rooted in sociology, focuses on the power imbalances and structural inequalities within society that contribute to social conflict and perpetuate social injustices. The structural conflict theory provides a lens to understand the power imbalances and structural inequalities that perpetuate social injustice, thus highlighting the need to address these issues for sustainable development (Collins 2018).

According to the structural conflict theory, social, economic, and political structures create and maintain inequalities, leading to conflicts and tensions between different groups within society. In the context of Nigeria, structural inequalities based on factors such as wealth, ethnicity, and religion have been significant sources of conflict and social injustice. Social justice, as a core aspect of sustainable development, requires addressing these structural inequalities and power imbalances. By critically examining the social structures that perpetuate injustice, the structural conflict theory provides insights into the underlying causes of social, economic, and political disparities in Nigeria. It highlights the importance of redistributive policies, equal access to resources, and addressing systemic barriers that hinder equitable development.

Applying the structural conflict theory to religion in Nigeria, it becomes evident that religious differences and competition for resources can exacerbate existing inequalities. Religious institutions may hold varying degrees of power and influence, and their interactions can contribute to conflicts or promote social cohesion. The theory highlights the need to critically analyze the role of religion in society and how religious institutions may either perpetuate or challenge structural inequalities. Moreover, peace and security are central to sustainable development, and the structural conflict theory sheds light on the underlying structural causes of conflict. It emphasizes that addressing the root causes of conflicts, such as social and economic inequalities, is essential for building sustainable peace. By challenging oppressive structures, promoting social justice, and providing avenues for meaningful participation, peace-building efforts can contribute to sustainable development goals.

Summary

Promoting sustainable development in Nigeria requires addressing the interplay of social justice, religion, peace, and security. By tackling income inequality, poverty, and ensuring access to basic services, Nigeria can create a more equitable society. Leveraging the influence of religious leaders and institutions can foster a sense of collective responsibility towards the environment and social well-being. Peace and security are crucial prerequisites for sustainable development, necessitating comprehensive approaches that prioritize conflict resolution and the rule of law. Integrating these factors through an integrated approach can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes. By incorporating policies that address social disparities, engage religious communities, invest in peace-building, and ensure security, Nigeria can work towards achieving sustainable development goals and creating a more prosperous nation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, promoting sustainable development in Nigeria requires a holistic approach that considers the interplay of social justice, religion, peace, and security. By addressing income inequality, poverty, and providing access to basic services, Nigeria can create a more equitable society. Engaging religious leaders and institutions in promoting environmental stewardship and ethical behavior can foster a sense of collective responsibility. Furthermore, investing in peace-building efforts and ensuring security will create a conducive environment for sustainable development. By integrating these factors and implementing coordinated policies, Nigeria can work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and create a brighter and more prosperous future for its citizens.

Suggestions

This paper therefore makes the following suggestions.

1. Comprehensive social protection programs that address poverty, income inequality, and provide access to essential services such as education and healthcare should be implemented.
2. Policies and programs that foster inclusive economic growth, ensuring that marginalized populations have equal access to employment, entrepreneurship opportunities, and economic resources should be developed
3. The effectiveness and efficiency of the justice system should be enhanced to ensure that it upholds human rights, protects property rights, and provides a fair and transparent legal framework for sustainable development.
4. Investment in education and skill development programs that equip individuals with the knowledge and skills needed for sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment should be prioritized.
5. The government should encourage interfaith dialogue and collaboration among religious leaders and communities to promote shared values of environmental stewardship, social justice, and peace-building.
6. A secure and safe environment for all citizens should be ensured by addressing internal conflicts, combating crime, and ensuring the protection of human rights.
7. Collaborations between the government, private sector, civil society organizations, and religious institutions should be fostered to leverage resources, expertise, and innovative solutions for sustainable development.

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