

# **Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies**

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## **Abstract**

There is a consensus of opinion among observers that Nigeria provides one of the best examples or case studies of ethno-religious conflicts. With over 400 ethnic groups, distributed among the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), Nigeria since independence, has produced a catalogue of ethno religious conflicts that resulted in an estimated loss of over three million. lives and unquantifiable psychological and material damages. This paper examines the manifestations of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, their causes and provides proposals for new management strategies for the control of this social phenomenon, which is fast becoming a permanent feature of the Nigerian social map.

## **Introduction**

With over four hundred (400) ethnic groups, belonging to several religious sects, Nigeria since independence has remained 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 Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); and the Ohanaeze N'digbo (Daily Trust;'20/8/2002! p.; 16). With the emergence of these ethnic militias and the deep divides between the various ethnic groups, religious intolerance has become more violent and bloody with more devastating results using the ethnic militias as the executors of ethno-religious agenda.

While it is true that it is not possible to know the exact number of. ethno-religious conflicts due to lack of adequate statistical data on this issue, it is interesting to note that about forty percent (40%) of ethno-religion based conflicts are credited to the fourth Republic of Nigeria. The fact that there is a recent increase in the number of ethno-religious conflicts in the country makes it a relevant issue of discussion in the contemporary Nigeria and lesson for other nation in the world that are multi-ethnic and multi-religious in their composition. Also because of the violent nature of ethno-religious conflicts, which often take the form of riots, sabotage,. assassination, armed struggles, guerilla warfare and secession in Nigeria, they no doubt have implications for political and economic development of the country and thus making it an important issue for discussion. The discussion of ethno-religious conflicts in whatever context even becomes more necessary given the fact that there is a phenomenal recurrence of ethno-religious conflict across the nation thereby increasing the level of general insecurity particularly in the areas where such conflicts had ever occurred. It is against this background that the remaining part of this paper examines the manifestations of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, their causes, and proposals for new management strategies.

## **Manifestations of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

By ethno-religious conflict, it 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. In Nigeria, it is interesting to note that ethnicity and religious bigotry have become a fulcrum of various forms of nationalism ranging from assertion of language, cultural autonomy and religious superiority to demands for local political autonomy and self-determination. All these sometimes lead to some forms of contextual discrimination of members of one ethnic or religious group against another on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols and religion. Therefore, in a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse society like Nigeria, with some forms of contextual discrimination, relationships between people may be characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear as it is the case among the ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. In fact, this mutual suspicion and lack of cordiality among the various ethnic components explains why ethno-religious conflicts have become a permanent feature of Nigeria as a nation as far back as 1980s to date.

Thus, before the present democratic experiment in Nigeria, there were ethno-religious conflicts that claimed so many lives and property (Mohammed, 2005). Notable among such crises are the maitatsine religious disturbances in parts of Kano and Maiduguri in the early 1980s; Jimeta-Yola religious disturbances (1984), and Zango Kataf crises in Kaduna State (1992). Others are Kafanchan College of Education Muslim-Christian riots; Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim-Christian skirmishes (1981-1982); and the cross vs the crescent conflict at the University of Ibadan (1981-1985). Yet other early ethno-religious conflicts include the Bulumkutu Christian-Muslim riots (1982); Usman Danfodio University Sokoto (1982); and the Muslim-Christian Clash during a Christian procession at Easter in Ilorin, Kwara State (1986).

Against the background provided above, it then means that since a long time ago, many parts of Nigeria have become theatres of war, characterized by an increasing number of ethnic and religious crises. The spate of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria has however, increased with the birth of Fourth Republic. The frequent occurrence of ethno-religious conflicts with the coming of democracy is due to freedom provided by democratic rule. The first leg of ethnic and religious riots in Nigeria in recent time was in July 1999, when some Oro cultists in Sagamu, in Ogun State accused a Hausa woman of coming out when the cultists were outside with their gnome. This led to some altercations, which eventually led to full-blown crisis. Many people, majorly of Hausa and Yoruba tribes lost their lives. The infamy was however, temporarily put to check only when a dusk to dawn curfew was imposed on the sleepy town of Sagamu. Unfortunately, however, as the infamy was put off in Sagamu, reprisal killings started in Kano, a major Hausa city. As a result, many people died and property worth billions of Naira destroyed. Kano residents of Southern extraction who had lived, all their, adult lives in the ancient city of Kano had to return to their native land to count their losses. When Kano City was settling down for peace, Lagos erupted with another orgy of violence, visibly as a mark of vengeance of the Kano mass killing of the Yoruba tribe men. This time, the O'dua People Congress moved against the Hausa/Fulani traders in the popular 'mile 12 market' and for two days, the area was turned to a killing field.

Another ethno-religious conflict that left a remarkable mark in Nigeria was the Kaduna/Enugu riots. The root cause of this set of riot was the introduction of the Islamic Legal Code (Sharia) by some governors of the northern states of Nigeria. Governor Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State first introduced the Islamic Legal Code in October 1999, which was greeted with pockets of unserious protest. Initially, no many harms were committed as a result of the protests over the introduction of the Sharia code. However, the hitherto subdued fire was ignited when Governor Mohammed Makarfi of Kaduna State tried it in February 2000. Because of the deep seated animosities between the Muslims and Christians in Kaduna State in general and the state capital in particular, coupled with the fact that both are almost at par in population, the two went for their swords and many were slain in cold blood.

In the Kaduna riots, the Igbo tribe (a predominantly Christian ethnic group) was mostly affected. However, like the Sagamu incident, and as it should be expected, Enugu and other Igbo cities erupted in violence when many Igbo returned dead and those who were lucky to escape had tails of woe to tell, as they too were targets of attack by the Hausa/Fulani in Kaduna. It is important to note here that the Kaduna/Enugu ethno-religious riots presents some features that look like the prelude to the 1967-1970 civil war in Nigeria. In other words, the riots constituted sufficient force that could lead to a civil war as law and order collapsed in the two areas.

In October, 2000, another ethno-religious conflict occurred. This was the Lagos-(Idi-Araba/Oko-Oba) Kano myhems. The cause of this was the misunderstanding between the Hausa residents and the Yoruba in Idi-Araba in Lagos over the use of a convenience by a Hausa resident, as a result of this misunderstanding many Yoruba residents of the area were killed with bows, arrows and machetes. Responding; the O' dua People Congress (a Yoruba militia) came into the picture and things worsened. Later, Oko-Oba, another Lagos suburb with a high population of Hausa/Fulani stock joined the fray of madness. The violence later spread to Kano and as expected the southerners were mostly the victims.

In September 2001, the ethnic tension between the Tivs and Iunkuns in Plateau State reached a head after decades of fighting. The September 2001 ethnic tension was caused by what can be called a mistaken identity. What this means is that some Tivs took some nineteen soldiers to be Iunkuns but in fake army uniform. The Tivs youths captured them and slaughtered them one by one. The reprisal attacks by the men of the Nigerian army in Zaki Biam was devastating. Also in the same month Jos, the Plateau State capital city, joined the madness. The cause of this was the appointment of a Christian as a Local Council Chairman. It is interesting to note that by the time sanity found its way back to the city, more than hundred and sixty (160) lives had been lost in the mayhem.

In the following month of the same year, that is October, 2001, there was another 'mayhem in Kano. This was, however, caused by an international event when some terrorists attacked the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in the United State of America. Shortly after the United States launched an offensive against the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Kano erupted with another round of ethno-religious conflict. In this case, some Islamic fundamentalists who felt that the United States of America had no reason to bombard Afghanistan decided to set the city of Kano on fire. Like the earlier crises in the city, the Southern tribes in Nigeria were mostly the victims of the Kano ethno-religious conflict. All the crises events presented above and which occurred before and since the coming of democracy in 1999, remain stark reminders that the conflict hotbeds around the country are always steaming and ready to explode at the slightest provocation. From the various examples of ethno religious conflicts cited, it can be seen that there is no sharp distinction between ethnic conflict and religious conflict. What this means is that a Conflict that begins as an ethnic 'conflict may end up as a religious crisis and vice-versa. This explains why ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are always devastating in their effects.

### **Causes of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: A Review**

The events of ethno-religious conflict that have pervaded the country as reported above are also stark reminders that the conflict hotbeds around the country are many and may still be waiting to explode. This shows that, the ethno-religious conflicts are evils that are always around us and which as claimed by Jega (2002:36) tend to always stretch the bounds of unity to a potentially snapping point. The most logical question that arises from the above is what are the causes of these ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria?

As we have seen so far in this paper, ethno-religious conflict is distinguished from other types of social conflict in that it involves ethnic groups, which are of different religions. In discussing the causes of ethno religious conflict in Nigeria therefore, it is important to mention at this point that both religious and ethnic factors are present in the majority of social conflicts the Nigerian people have witnessed. Religion and ethnicity as they present themselves in Nigeria have therefore become critical

factors in ethno-religious conflict. At different levels and times people experience religious or ethnic discrimination, people complain of past and present religious and ethnic discrimination, people demand for religious or ethnic rights in their state, and more importantly, the state uses religion or ethnicity in political discourse or action. What the above means is that ethno-religious conflict is a multi-causal variable. For effective discussion of the causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria therefore, there is a need to put this into consideration.

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, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, 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. There is also no agreement on how to effect necessary changes and reforms. This is because, different groups and individuals have diverse interests in which case, some groups will have their aims met, while others will not. What this means is that conflict (ethno religious ones inclusive) usually occur when deprived groups and individuals attempt to increase their share of power and wealth or to modify the dominant values, norms, beliefs or ideology. Thus, in Nigeria and going by the various examples of ethno-religious conflicts cited earlier in this paper, there seems to be a divisive interplay of politics, ethnicism and religions, which has consequently led to the rising nationalism and militancy of various ethnic and religious movements. It is interesting to note that the overall consequence of this is the escalation of various ethno-religious conflicts that are witnessed all over the country today which are meant to correct any perceived form of marginalization, oppression or domination.

It is important to note here too that the failure of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governments, forge national integration and promote what can be called real economic progress, through deliberate and articulated policies, has led to mass poverty and unemployment. This has resulted into communal, ethnic, religious and class conflicts that have now characterized the Nigerian nation. Poverty and unemployment have therefore served as nursery bed for many ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria because the country now has a reservoir of poor people who warmongers as mercenary fighters. What this means theoretically is that poverty and unemployment increase the number of people who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given course at token benefit. This explains why all ethno-religious crises that ever occurred in Nigeria have a large turnout of people (including the under-aged) as fighters.

A very important cause of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is the breakdown of such vehicles of social control that characterized the traditional African societies such as. the family, education, law, religion and political system that cared for the well-being of ail citizens. Indeed, the malfunctioning of all these important institutions has actually increased ethnic and communal conflicts in Nigeria. For instance, the inability of many homes to make the ends meet with the family income tends to increase immorality, broken fatherless/motherless homes, divorces and drunkenness, leading again to a large reserve of youths who could be employed for execution of ethno-religious conflicts. It is also important to note that the school system in Nigeria today is in shambles and cannot impact even sound knowledge, let alone instill discipline and desired type of morality. The religious institution is also not playing its expected roles, while the law enforcement agents indulge in crimes, demand bribes and collect illegal levies from motorists openly and, shamelessly. All the above constitute a wrong signal to the social and encourage social vices in the society thereby laying the foundation for conflicts in general.

The long military intervention in politics tends to encourage and legitimize the use of force and violence as instruments of social change and attainment of set goals and demands. From this, it is customary to see that as a hangover from the military era, the use of coercion and force in settling conflicts has become a tradition in the Nigerian body politics. Strongly related to this is the uncontrolled arms supply, which has quickened the outbreak. of; conflicts, and encourage belligerents to go on fighting rather than find peaceful settlement to disputes. Lastly and very importantly, and not the least, the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria also have some historical antecedent. This is because

many governmental actions during the colonial rule and after independence encouraged, to a large extent, the sowing of the seeds of ethno-religious conflicts that are found to be rampant in the Nigerian nation today. As noticed by Ikejiani Clark (2005) over the years, many events in Nigeria have led to the politicization of mistrust, intolerance, violence and acrimonious relations between the mainly Moslem north and the Christian south of Nigeria. To this extent, Ikejinai-Clark contended that there has been an unfortunate insertion of ethno-religious discrimination and incompatibility in the structures of the Nigerian State since the colonial period. In 1931 for instance, the colonial administration under the leadership of Governor Donald Cameron did not encourage intermingling of religions. An advice given by the governor is indicative of this. The Governor advised the Christian missions to thread softly in Moslem areas so as to maintain the stability of indirect rule. The political events of the January 15, 1966 coup and the July 1966 counter-coup further entrenched ethno-religious configuration in Nigeria. This is because the killings and counter-killing that follow the coups which took ethnic and religious colorations as the Muslim dominated tribes in the north were set against the Christian dominated tribes of the southern region.

The ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria also have some connection, with a number of politico-religious developments at the international scene. According to Albert (2005), religious crises in Nigeria could be traced to the developments in the Middle East. In this regard, he pointed out that religious issues became particularly phenomenal since the late 1980s with the death of the cold war and replacement of communism (a global social and political ideology) with Islamism. With this new Islamic ideology, the Muslims worldwide, and particularly in the Middle East, were determined to resent the 'socio-economic impoverishment and psychological alienation that stem from failed modernization and excessive westernization in the post cold war world (Ayubi, 1991, Dekmejian 1995; Faksh, 1997). The contemporary increase in the incidences of terrorism around the world has also been linked to this new ideology of Islamism (Cordesman, 2003; Booth and Dunne, .2002).

It should be understood that the problem created by the new Muslim ideology was not limited to the Middle East as the increasing feelings of relative deprivation and alienation around the world makes developing states with large Muslim populations susceptible to militant forms of Islamism in the Middle East. This explains why the increased rate of religious violence in Northern Nigeria (a Muslim dominated region) since 1980s can be understood from this perspective. The influence of foreign factor on ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria become obvious in 1983 when the then Nigerian Minister for International Affairs attempted to link the development crises in Nigeria to the global political economy. It was the opinion of the Federal Government of Nigeria that many of the ethno religious crises had foreign backing and as such ordered that aliens without valid permit must leave the country within a fortnight. The main reason given for this expulsion order was that the presence of the aliens at the time threatened the economic and political security of Nigeria (Albert, 2005). Particularly referred to, as the justification for the government action, was the 1980 maitatsine riots led by Marwa, a Camerounian by nationality. In 1985 too, major General Tunde Idiagbon pointed to the foreign connection in the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. In this regard, he alerted Nigerians about the impending crisis and the foreign supports some religious fundamentalists were receiving (Ilori, 1987:25).

The foreign connection in ethno-religious crises in Nigeria is also evident in the involvement of non-Nigerians in a number of urban insurgencies. These foreigners have been found to actively participate in the ethnic conflicts around the country and particularly in the Northern part between the Hausa- Fulani Muslim hosts and their Christian dominated southern Nigeria 'strangers' who reside in their midst. A scuffle that started between an Igbo trader and a Fulani security guard at the Sabongari Kano market developed into city-wide ethno-religious conflicts in which many non-Nigerians from the neighbouring African 'states were arrested fighting on the side of the Hausa-Fulani Muslims (Kano state, 1995:1617).

In addition to the above, it is important to note that foreign preachers often contribute to the insurgence of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. For instance, in 1991, the religious crisis in Kano was

traced to the plan of Evangelist Richard Bonnke, to conduct a crusade tagged 'Kano for Jesus' in Kano'. Simply because the government had earlier denied access to Kano a Muslim cleric from South Africa to preach in the city, serious crises loomed up between the Muslim and Christian populations.

The causes of ethno-religious conflicts discussed so far can be summed up under the theoretical framework developed by Ted Rober Gurr used by him to explain ethno-religious conflicts. Gurr's theoretical approach combines the relative deprivation approach pioneered in his classic book, 'Why Men Rebel' with the group mobilization approach. Gurr's basic model is very simple and is found to be useful in explaining ethno-religious conflicts, the types we have in Nigeria. Gurr's model has three steps. First, he opined that discrimination against an ethnic or religious minority causes the minority to form grievances. Second, these grievances contribute to the mobilization of the ethnic or religious minority for political action. Third, the more mobilized a minority, the more likely it is to engage in political action including protest and rebellion.

It is instructive to say here therefore that in Nigeria and from the various examples of ethno-religious conflicts cited earlier, religious discrimination and religious grievances based on such discrimination affect the level of protest and/or rebellion in which the various ethno-religious groups in Nigeria engage. In the case of the introduction of Sharia in Zanzara State and some other parts of the Northern Nigerian for instance, it was the religious framework that caused a group to take actions, which affect groups that do not subscribe to the same religious framework. Such actions as we have seen infringed upon those other groups and provoked a conflictive response. This is true irrespective of whether the group that is infringed upon occupies a dominant or subordinate role in society. This analysis is also true of all the ethno-religious conflicts that we have witnessed in Nigeria.

### **Proposals For New Management Strategy of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

The various events of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria as reviewed and discuss in the earlier section of this paper show that ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria are many and continue to increase in number. The frequency of these ethno-religious conflicts and their impacts on the socio-economic life of the Nigerian people have always challenged the government and have thus demanded for one form of management strategy or the other to put them under control. Therefore, ever since, the Nigerian governments (past and present) have been responding to the challenges posed by the various ethno religious conflicts in the country. However, the various governments responses these ethno-religious conflicts have been ad-hoc and were not organized. According to Omorogbe and Omohan (2005) for instance, only two major strategies of conflict management are often employed by governments in Nigeria to tackle the problem of ethno-religious conflicts each time they occur. The two strategies as mentioned by them are the coercive and the judicial methods.

The coercive method as the name suggests has to do with the deployment of troops to the areas of conflict with the objective of controlling the crises. In Nigeria, this method of managing the ethno religious conflicts has taken many forms depending on the magnitude of the crises in question. In a light ethno-religious crises for instance, the conventional policemen are the first to be drafted to the crisis point and to be assisted by the mobile police-men in case the conventional corps cannot cope. But in a very serious ethno-religious conflict, government may be forced to make use of combined military force made up of the army, navy and the air-force. Because of the military nature of this kind of intervention however, the coercive method is usually associated with many vices such as rape, beating and in some cases shooting of innocent citizens (Omorogbe and Omohan, 2005; 556). Consequently, this method of intervention in ethno-religious conflicts has not been successful as a mechanism. While commenting on the problem with the deployment of security forces (troops) to conflict areas to quell the crisis, Oromareghake and Akpator (2005) have this to say.

*...the problem with the deployment of security forces that are not backed by intensive mediation effort is that it unnecessarily prolongs the stay of such security forces deployed in different parts of Nigeria. This is because the units of mobile police*

*or armies frequently deployed to quell disturbances in Nigeria have neither the mandate nor the training to act as conflict resolution facilitator (p. 601).*

What the above quoted passage means is that the deployment of troops to crisis spots is never a competent method of dealing with this phenomenon of ethno-religious conflict. Because such troops lack adequate training in conflict management, they always cause more problems than the ones they are expected to solve. In other words, they become part of the problem they have been invited to curb.

The establishment of judicial commission or panel remains the second major management strategy used by government in Nigeria to intervene in ethno,..religious crises. The method involves the selection of people from varied backgrounds to investigate the problems and submit report to the government based on the terms of reference given to the panel to work with. Such commission often operates by calling for memoranda, organizing public hearing and paying visits to the areas of crises. The objective of such visits is to get first-hand assessment of the extent of the crises (Ibid: 557).

The judicial method of conflict management in Nigeria has failed to resolve the problem. According to Oromarehake and Akpator (2005), such method has created more bitterness than bringing relief. Commenting on the reasons for the alter failure of these two methods of resolving or managing ethno-religious conflicts in the Nigerian case, Omorogbe and Omohan (2005) said:

*. . .the main reasons for the poor performance of the often used conflict management mechanisms are poor logistics, delay in deployment of troops to the crises areas, lack of cooperation by parties to the conflicts, non-implementation of white-paper or recommendations submitted to the government by the panel of inquiry etc (P.577).*

Due to all the reasons given above, the two conflict management strategies which have been used constantly at different crisis points in Nigeria gave not yielded much positive results in terms of effective resolution of ethno-religious conflicts that have characterized the Nigerian political system.

In view of the aforementioned facts, there is a need for mote integrated and more articulated programmes of conflict resolution and conflict prevention. Such programmes should be able to effectively resolve and prevent ethno-religious conflict as the case may be. Hence, the paper suggests the following conflict management proposals that will help to resolve or prevent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. As a first step towards solving the problem of ethno-religious conflict, the government at all levels should jointly move from conflict resolution to the stage of conflict prevention. To effectively succeed in this new process, the government should be more committed to the provision of adequate and effective security in each state that should be able to respond promptly to any insurgence of ethno-religious crisis anywhere at any time. It is important to point out here though that the security outfit that will serve this purpose effectively should be the type that will have adequate and modern security facilities and training that will enhance their quick response to ethno religious conflicts.

Another step towards managing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is that government at all levels must encourage, in their domains, effective and functional platforms for ethno-religious leaders so that through them it would be possible to establish a network for conflict prevention and management. This proposal is necessary because in Nigeria, the various political, religious, traditional and ethnic leaders in most areas of conflict hardly sit together to discuss the causes of ethno-religious violence and how to prevent future conflicts. What this means is that in Nigeria, with a bad history of ethno-religious conflicts, leaders hardly met to build bridges of understanding that could lead to the establishment of mutual confidence that could sustain a multi-ethnic society. Thus, rather than being part or initiators of the solution, they (leaders) often become part of the conflicts, which they suppose to resolve. The recent government resolution to establish a National Council of Traditional Rulers is a move in the right direction, which will go a long way in building bridges among religious and ethnic divides. It is however suggested here that such body should be expanded to include ethnic leaders, opinion leaders and religious leaders, while the government should strengthen the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), which is already in existence.

The civil society also has important roles to play in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Imobighe (2003) and Ikelegbe (2003) have stressed the need for the civil society to intervene in ethno-religious conflict. The civil society can effectively intervene by focusing attention on the social organization and structural patterns of interaction; the modes of violence employed, the values of the parties in conflict; the genesis of conflict, and the degree of incompatibility of goals among others (Omorogbe and Omohan, 2005:557-558).

Just like the civil society, the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have special roles to play in conflict management in Nigeria. Therefore, governmental organizations or institutions at all levels should encourage the NGOs to embark on research and programmes of, environment, civic, religious, and peace education for neighbourhood communities (Enukara, 2005: 633). In particular, the NGOs should be organized in such a way that they will serve as facilitators of dialogues between, conflicting groups.

In addition to all the above mentioned mechanisms, the government in Nigeria should strengthen the institution of Public Complaint Bureau which already exists in each state of the Federation through appropriate legislations. With this establishment, the parties in dispute will be able to lay - bare their grievances for on-ward transmission to appropriate government agencies for necessary action. There should also be a deliberate programme of political and social reorientation of the entire citizenry. Such political and social orientation will go a long way in changing the negative stereotypes and negative values that have characterized the Nigerian peoples. In particular, the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIP~S), Political Parties and National Associations (like National Youth Council, Nigeria Council of Women Society (NCWS) should be strengthened in the various assignments as bridge builders that will discourage the spirit of division among Nigerians and foster oneness which is necessary for building one nation with one destiny as contained in the Nigerian constitution.

Above all, in order to solve the problem of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, the government should be pluralistic, representative, and just in their treatment of the Nigerian citizens. It should discourage all forms of discrimination, neglect and marginalization in dealing with development and religious issues. The government should also target to reduce poverty among Nigerians so that the reservoir of recruits for ethno-religious conflicts will be punctured.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have examined the problem of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria with emphasis on its causes and management. Starting from a theoretical stand point that ethno-religious conflicts which are widespread in Nigeria have a long history and are characterized by violent confrontations among the various ethnic and religious groups that make up the Nigeria nation. The article argues that the causes of these ethno-religious conflicts, are multi-dimensional. Some of the., causes mentioned and discussed in this paper are accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism and bigotry; the inability of the Nigerian leaders to establish good governments; breakdown of traditional vehicles of social control; the long history of military intervention in politics, which legitimizes the use of force and violence as instruments of social change and attainment of set goals and demand; and historical antecedent.

In spite of the widespread of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria and their long history, the paper has shown that the Nigerian governments (past and present) have failed to tackle this problem through articulated and well organized policy actions. The country record in conflict management has been poor as the government continues to rely on coercive method and always resorts to the use white-paper emanating from them are often not implemented. Since ethno-religious conflicts are inevitable in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria, the paper has suggested the following mechanisms of conflict management: government should move from conflict resolution to the stage of



conflict prevention; provision of adequate and effective security in each state that will respond promptly to any ethno-religious insurgence; establishment of functional and effective platform for ethno-religious leaders where grievances can be discussed before they escalate into ethno-religious crises; involvement of the civil society which will intervene in some critical areas of ethno-religious conflict; strengthening of some conflict resolution institutions through appropriate legislations; government should resolve to be pluralistic, representative, and just in dealing with ethno-religious issues; and above all the government should strive to reduce poverty among the Nigerian citizens.

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