

# Social Structural Changes as Prerequisite for Social Transformation and Peacebuilding in Nigerian Fragile Democracy

Dr (Mrs) V. N. Effiom Ambe, Benjamin Ayua Opoh, Fredrick Awhen  
Department of Curriculum And Teaching, Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar-Nigeria

## Abstract

Peace has become the most essential and scarce commodity in Nigeria and the world over. The political and economic development of Nigeria today anchored on peace. This paper therefore, examines social structural changes as prerequisite for social transformation and peacebuilding in Nigerian fragile democracy. The paper resumed with clarification of the concepts of peacebuilding and democracy where Nigerian democracy was described as defective, nascent and fragile. To change this ugly face ascribed to Nigerian democracy, approaches and needed changes for peace building in Nigerian democracy was the core of the paper. In line with the thought of this paper, peacebuilding through economic dimension and democratic education were captured as ways forward.

**Keywords:** Peacebuilding, democracy, social structural change, development

## Introduction

About six decades after independence, Nigeria like most other African countries is still experimenting her nascent democracy characterized by politic of sentiment, rigging, thuggery, godfatherism, zoning, purposeless pursue of announced “mandate” in court just to mention but a few. All these sharp practices are against democratic ethos and threaten peace and security in the nation. Duru cited in Ahmad (2010) once reported that Nigerian electoral process is at times long, slippery and perfidious. This has turned Nigeria into a zoo of senseless and heartless individuals who conceived politic to be a do or die affair. To Olofu (2003), these situations are fanned by religious bigotry, tribalism, racism, political wills aggravated by poverty and illiteracy. At this point, it is very important to point out that the peaceful co-existence of the different ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria have a lot to do with the national security, sustainable democracy, productivity and wealth of the nation.

Even with the global concern for peacebuilding, as 2015 general election approaches, fears and warnings has emerged from different quarters that Nigeria is sitting in the proverbial keg of gunpowder ready to explode on or before 2015. Even with these warnings and prophecies, Nigerians political elites are not yet ready to turn a *new leaf* from this culture of manmade woes. Poverty, ignorance, literacy, ethnic and religious loyalty have become instruments in the hand of these egoistic and egocentric political upper dogs to manipulate the under dogs to perpetuate violence.

Peaceful co-existence is a necessity in any given society in order to ensure progress. Unfortunately, Nigeria as a nation have been witnessing verifying degrees of crises at any slight provocation which had often led many citizens of this envisaged nation into very lugubrious condition of lost of human and materials resources (Nuhu, 2009). It is therefore glaring that democracy and development cannot strive in such a crisis laden society. It is from this background that this paper seeks to explore needed social and structural changes for social transformation and peacebuilding in Nigerian fragile democracy.

## Concept of Peacebuilding

The concept peacebuilding is used to describe the interventions that are designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict by creating a sustainable peace. According to Maiese (2003), peacebuilding includes a wide range of efforts by diverse actors in government and civil society at the community, national and international levels to address the root causes of violence and ensure civilians have freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom from humiliation before, during, and after violent conflict. Peacebuilding activities address the root causes or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution and stabilize society politically and socioeconomically. The central idea behind peacebuilding is improving human security.

Peacebuilding to the view of Maiese (2003) consists of a wide range of activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation, and societal transformation. Peacebuilding is a long-term process that occurs after violent conflict has slowed down or come to a halt. Thus, it is the phase of the peace process that takes place after peacemaking and peacekeeping. However, peacebuilding is not only reactive but could be proactive. In this view, peacebuilding includes early warning and response efforts, violence prevention, advocacy work, civilian and military peacekeeping, military intervention, humanitarian assistance, ceasefire agreements, and the establishment of peace zones.

### **Social structural change**

In a technical sense, the concept social structure is the designed social arrangements in society that are both emergent from and determinant of the actions of the individuals. Social structure also involves the system of socioeconomic stratification (e.g., the class structure), social institutions, or, other patterned relations between large social groups. The concept encompasses the pattern of relationships, size of institution, income distribution, and concurrency of social relationships which therefore implies the idea that society is separated into different strata and is guided by the underlying structures in the social system. Social structural change is also crucial in preventing further protracted conflict in a social system. However, Maiese (2003) revealed that social structural change cannot adequately address injustice, put an end to violent conflict and contribute to peacebuilding unless this human dimension receives significant attention as well.

### **Democracy**

Democracy is a system of rule by laws. A government is said to be democratic when the people choose their leaders and hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office. In democracy, the people are sovereign—they are the highest form of political authority. In other words, power flows from the people to the leaders of government, who hold power only temporarily. In a true democracy, elected representatives listen to the people and respond to their needs and suggestions.

The people have the power to constructively criticize their elected leaders and representatives, and to observe how they conduct the business of government. Laws and policies require majority support in parliament, though the rights of minorities are protected in various ways.

One strong element of democracy is election, though any country can hold an election, but for an election to be free and fair requires a lot of organization, preparation, and training of political parties, electoral officials, and civil society organizations who monitor the process. For elections to be free and fair, they have to be administered by a neutral, fair, and professional body that treats all political parties and candidates equally (Wikipedia 20014). Anything outside this is not a true democracy, hence can be described pseudo-democracy or defective democracy. And as such Nigerian democracy can be said to be fragile, defective and experimental whereby elections are characterized by rigging, thuggery, bloodshed etc. Enu (2007) captured it about Nigeria thus:

*A thorough examinations of the moral value accepted as what is right and what is wrong reveals that Nigeria as a society is highly defective. Defective in governance and institutional arrangement, in addition to moral integrity, honesty and truthfulness, defective in justice, consideration for others, culture and indeed educational values.... Moral values are compromised under the after of alter of greed, insincerity, sycophancy, mediocrity, corruption, official high handedness, religious intolerance, government abuse of the citizens' fundamental human rights, disrespect for judicial procedures, incessant constitutional breaches by the government and institutional failure (p.147).*

This is without reasonable doubt a picture of the Nigerian system and sub-sectors. This scenario creates atmosphere of tension, waste of human and material resources and brings a complete absence of peace like the Niger Delta militancy and deadly arrows of the Boko Haramism which had turned the country into a cemetery of serial mass burial. It becomes necessary that patriotic citizens of this nation to call for a peacebuilding agents to salvage the country's fragile democracy that has been in the race of one step forward one step backward.

### **Approaches and needed changes for peacebuilding in Nigerian democracy**

**Institutional development approach:** Stable institutions allow for peace to be secured. These are institutions that guarantee democracy, justice, equity, etc. Many argue that the existence of injustice and oppression in established power structures must be recognized and confronted for peace stability. According to Duke (1999), if violent conflict and revolution is to be avoided, inequities in political and economic power cannot be ignored. To Amenta and Ramsey (2005) Institutional arguments are not about aggregations of individual action, but higher-order factors above the individual level that influence political processes and outcomes and tend to produce regular patterns or stasis.

This also entails the provision of fundamental services to the citizens through strong executive, legislative, and judicial institutions. Many point to democratization as a key way to create these sorts of peace-enhancing structures (Maiese 2003). The source further reiterated that democratization seeks to establish legitimate and stable political institutions and civil liberties that allow for meaningful competition for political power and broad participation in the selection of leaders and policies. As a matter of fact, it is important for governments to adhere to principles of transparency and predictability, and for laws to be adopted through an open and public process for peaceful democratization especially in a fragile democracy like that of Nigeria.

**Root causes/justice approach:** It is necessary to address the underlying causes of war, such as injustice, oppression, lack of security, and threat to social identity. Socio-economic and political deprivations have been identified in recent times as remote causes of social unrest in Nigeria. Even political tussles associated with Nigerian electoral processes can be traced to abuse and denial of peoples' mandate.

For instance, Thovoethin and Yusuf (2010) report that, the Niger Delta crisis that rocked the Nigerian political and economic atmospheres in the fourth republic was initially indexed on a prolonged alienation marked by poverty, hunger, disease and environmental degradation. To them, the Niger Delta – especially in the oil-producing communities – featured perpetuated human insecurity (basic needs), lack of infrastructures, wanton ecological damages, theft and unjust distribution of revenue from the sale of oil, coupled with perceived apathy on the part of government and the multinational oil companies in spite of significant contribution of crude oil to the enhancement of Nigerian and global economy.

Thus, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta, instead of serving as means of blessing for the region brought total deprivation of the people from their own property and consequentially endangered meaningful growth and development. For the purpose of peacebuilding, the need for sustainable equality should be part of a comprehensive project to rebuild society's institutions.

**Individual change approach:** Transforming individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and values will lead to peace. This approach entails peace culture. Peace culture to the words of Lawal in Ahmad (2010), is a way of life where there is harmony among individuals and within various facets of that society. The media can be used to change public attitudes of intolerance and prejudice, and this shift will contribute to peace. Agencies can also be established with the sole responsibility of value and attitudinal orientation and reorientation of the people.

Nigeria and Nigerians need a culture that can promote a peaceful co-existence and life that reject and prevent conflict in every facet of the society. Such a life must be life of dialogue and negotiation among the different elements that made up the complex whole. Peace culture is not just a personal phenomenon but emphasizes interpersonal and intergroup acceptance, hence it is a collective responsibility.

The experimenting Nigeria fragile democracy need people with the culture of peace to reposition its attributes of thuggery, rigging, sentiment among other negative characteristics associated with it. It is therefore high time to think about initiating the culture of peace among Nigerians than banking our hope and resources on the corrupt agencies saddled with the responsibility of conducting and monitoring election in Nigeria. We are living witnesses of the selective justice practice by political monitoring dogs like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and even the judiciary.

**Withdrawal of the resources for war approach:** One of the best ways to make the society free from unrest and conflict is through disarmament. Interrupting the supply of materials that support war will collapse the war-system and bring about peace. To Ering (2005), given the adverse consequences of the arms race, it has become necessary to ensure that certain measures are put in place to bring about a control or reduction of the arms race. This approach can be instituted through negotiation just like the Niger Delta Militancy amnesty initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2009. Unfortunately, Nigerian political elites encourage the production, intensification and delivery of armaments in the hands of youths without minding that this predisposes them into war like character.

**Political elites approach:** Peacebuilding needs to address and change the attitudes of elites so that peace is in their interest. To this approach, conflicts or wars as the case may be, are not caused by biological nature nor ordinary man but narrow segment of the humanity who according to Ering (2005) are leaders who seek to become world historical personalities or great men through victories in conflict. These are people who desired to protect their own status and as well frustrate others' efforts through wage of wars against them. In a national sense, Enu (2008) states that war are fought to protect economic interest. They do these by forcing their decisions upon essentially passive and pacified people in the society.

#### **Peacebuilding Agents**

Though peace is said to be expensive to build and maintain, there exist measures at all levels of existence for peace maintenance. The core measure of liberal peacebuilding is to address the root causes of civil war or conflict in order to prevent its recurrence for the interest of the entire society. Because peace-building measures involve all levels of the society and target all aspects of the social structure, they require a wide variety of agents for their implementation. Some suggest that governments, NGOs, and intergovernmental agencies need to create categories of funding related to conflict transformation and peacebuilding (Maiese, 2003). Also, concerted effort of concerned individual and group of individuals can sustain peace. These agents advance peace-building efforts by addressing functional and emotional dimensions in specified target areas, including civil society and legal institutions. While external agents can facilitate and support peacebuilding, ultimately it must be driven by internal forces. It cannot be imposed from the outside.

Peacebuilding measures should therefore integrate civil society in all efforts and include all levels of society in the post-conflict strategy. All society members, from those in elite leadership positions, to religious leaders, to those at the grassroots level ie the traditional rulers, parents and teachers, have a role to play in building a lasting peace. Winning peace may call for sacrifice, humility, hit-or-miss efforts and great diplomacy on the parts of these peace promoters (Denga 2008). The source re-echoed that tolerance, accommodation, level-headedness, compromise, tactful negotiation and the fear of God will broker peace among the people.

### Ways forward

There is need for economic peacebuilding targeted both at the micro- and macro-level and aims to create economic opportunities and ensure that the basic needs of the population are met. On the microeconomic level, societies should establish micro-credit institutions to increase economic activity and investment at the local level, promote inter-communal trade and an equitable distribution of land, and expand school enrollment and job training. On the other hand, in the macroeconomic level, the post-conflict government should be assisted in its efforts to secure the economic foundations and infrastructure necessary for a transition to peace.

Another dimension for sustainable peacebuilding is democratic education which involves the dissemination of concepts and practices that result in integrated democratic awareness essentially through public institutions (Abdulghani, 2008). Democratic education is concerned with the socialization and articulation of specific content and knowledge on democratic awareness, enriching what people believe and have established on democracy, improving people's perception regarding democracy and their relationship to the political system and institutions of governance for instance, with the legislature, executive and legal systems (Abdulghani, 2008). When this concept is applied in the process of teaching and learning, the citizens will be able to acquire knowledge which will enable them to understand how they should relate with political objects, issues and events around them, in order to adjust their behaviour accordingly to realize democratic purposes and good governance (Cowan, 2006).

Democratic education is therefore more of critical rather than passive learning. When properly developed in learning institutions, it may be useful in laying the framework for shaping the Nigerian political cultures as a core basis and an integral part of the shared culture of society.

### Summary

Considering the usual unrest that characterized the announcement of general election results in the past, the need for peacebuilding in Nigeria should become the concern of all Nigerians especially as 2015 general election draws nearer. It is pertinent we remind ourselves of this missing link in our democratic process that has left this nation in the dark before the eyes of international communities.

This paper therefore is the efforts and contribution of these authors to reposition Nigerian nascent and fragile democracy through social transformation and peacebuilding. The formula requires public-private partnership in addressing conflict and greater coordination among the various actors. To achieve the mission of the paper, approaches and needed changes for peacebuilding in Nigerian democracy such as institutional development approach, root causes/justice approach, individual change approach, withdrawal of the resources for war approach and political elites approach were considered verifiable tools for transitioning to peacebuilding.

It is high time, we raise standard, advice ourselves and make prophets of Nigerian disintegration come 2015 prophets of doom. If this peacebuilding mission is not harkened to, the prophesy of Nigerian disintegration on or before 2015 general election is a child of necessity.

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