

CHURCH RESPONSES TO SECURITY CHALLENGES IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF THE NIGERIAN CHURCH

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Abstract

This paper examined the response of the church to security challenges in Africa with special focus on Nigerian. The perplexity of the Nigerian church as well as other African neighbouring churches over the heightened insecurity challenges is outrageous. It was discovered that, terrorism, conflicts, border closures, health challenges, economic crises, political uproar, boko haram insurgency, banditry, the alarming rate of kidnapping, Fulani herdsmen attack and so on have rendered church and national development almost unattainable. Security challenges have caused human death, economic down-turn, plaques on religious congregational meetings that led to poor church income, disrupted social life and health-insecurity and so on in Africa, especially in Nigeria. This paper therefore, investigated the causes and concomitant effects of security challenges on the church in Nigeria. The paper further recommended some ameliorative measures to curb, cushion the effects and combat security challenges in Nigeria. In addition, it examined church responses and recommended that the church and the government could organize programmes that could heal the wounds of the victims of security challenges. In the same vein, the global community with the empowerment of the United Nation Organization (U.N.O) could device advanced methods of curbing these abnormalities that are plaguing the African continent.

Key: words: Security Challenges, Church Responses, Government, Nigeria

Introduction

The Effects of global insecurities are outrageous. Nations and people of different cultural backgrounds are victims of security challenges. A variety of emotional, physical economic psychological, health and sexual abuse are facts of global security challenges which in turn have negative effects on the church and national developments. The Church

in the present day Nigeria is a victim of security challenges; many Christians in Nigeria have lost their lives, properties and many are permanently traumatized. This has further made development unattainable. Today, Africa is faced with many challenges, which have adverse effects on the church and other sectors of the nation (Jesutunwase, 2022).

Security challenge is characterized with violence. Violence can take various forms and could be physical, psychological or sexually. It can also be in form of threats such as, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. The emergence of boko haram insurgency, the alarming rate of kidnapping, Fulani herdsmen attack and so on doubtlessly have adverse effects on Africa's growth and development. One would think that security challenge is prevalent in Nigeria because of the wrong opinion of the northern political elites; among many other factors they believe that they are the majority in population, hence they want to dominate by force. Moreover, the prevalent security challenges in Nigeria suggestively could be connected to the current agenda of the northern Muslims political elites who allegedly want to Islamized the country.

Therefore, this paper aimed at investigating the causes of security challenges in Nigeria. The paper further examines the effects of security challenges on the church and the Nigerian society in general. Furthermore, this paper hopes to give suggestive ameliorative recommendations to help the church in her responses to national insecurity. The research methods utilized in this paper consist of the socio-historical, internet explorations, interview and analytic approaches.

Causes of Security Challenges in Nigeria

In this sub section of the paper, these researchers tend to examine the causes of security challenges in Nigeria.

Security challenge is prevalent in Nigeria because of the wrong opinion of the northern political elites as they believe that they are the majority in population; therefore they want to dominate by violence (Jesutunwase, 2020). However, the 1952 population census and the 1963 census revealed they are not in the majority (Alamu, 2013). Similarly, security challenges in Nigeria suggestively could be connected to the current agenda of the northern Muslims who allegedly want to Islamize the country (Jesutunwase, 2020).

Simwa (2022) asserts that the overwhelming unemployment rate in the country is capable of causing panic. The issue according to him is especially obvious when it comes to Nigerian youths. According to the statistics, every tenth young citizen of the country is officially unemployed. Simwa (2022) further asserts that corruption is another cause of

security challenges in Nigeria. Corruption could be seen as any form of behaviour that generates private self-servicing gains, which are not sanctioned by law, or the prevailing norms of the society (Ninsin, 2000). Olopona (2013) has identified various forms in which corruption can be manifested. They are nepotism, bribery with its variant, misadministration/management, and the use of contrived security threat to the state or the large society to obtain approval for the personal enrichment of public officers. According to Simwa (2022) in 2021, Transparency International placed Nigeria in the 146th position out of 180 countries in the corruption perceptions index; scoring 26 out 100, corrupt Nigerian politicians have become a turn-off for international investors. Unfortunately, corruption has already become a part of life in the country, opined Simwa. He goes on to quip that, corruption forms part of the economic problems in Nigeria today.

Different parts of the country have different speeds of development. Due to this, the country's oil-rich regions feel disturbed when the federal government use their oil and does not develop their society. People of these regions feel cheated because of that. They went to take justice into their hands. That is why they vandalize oil pipelines (Simwa, 2022).

Weak judicial system is one of the biggest causes of insecurities in Nigeria. People feel insecure when criminals and terrorists go free. Many evil-minded people think that money can buy freedom in the country; unfortunately, the corrupt system proves this line of thought (Simwa, 2022). Rich people can buy freedom in the country, which the poor masses do not feel secure about. Therefore, the judicial system in the country should be changed, and there may be only one answer to that- transparency (Simwa, 2022).

The country has borders that are poorly guarded. Insurgents from other countries can infiltrate Nigeria. This situation is especially dangerous in the north east. The federal government cannot provide enough troops to secure the borders- porous coastal borders are the main cause of terrorism in the country (Simwa, 2022).

High influx of arms is another cause of insecurity in Nigeria. Smugglers use the porous coastal borders of the country to sell arms. The corruption and weak judicial systems only help smugglers to sell even more guns. They provide pistols, short guns, assault rifles, grenades, and explosives against the people and military forces (Simwa, 2022). The uncontrolled circulation of arms and ammunition pose a danger to peace and the country's long-term social and economic development. It has also led to the displacement of several Nigerians from their communities and ancestral lands (Simwa, 2022).

Narcotic trafficking is one of the causes of insecurity in Nigeria (Simwa, 2022). Criminal groups are involved in smuggling illegal substances to Europe, Asia, South Africa, and North America. Nigerian gangs are one of the largest distributors of opium in the world.

Citizens should fight this criminal trafficking, which is not affecting just the country but the entire world (Simwa, 2022).

Human trafficking constitutes security challenge in Nigeria. Simwa (2022) asserts that, the walk free foundation of Global Slavery reports that about 875, 000 citizens in the country are trapped in human trafficking. For instance, women in the country can be tricked into migrating to other regions. They hope to find good jobs but are forced to sell their bodies for money instead of promised jobs. Some of them are even sold to foreign brothels.

Criminal Situation: Furthermore, Simwa (2022) opines that, for the last few years, citizens have been victims of robberies, which sometimes happen in day light. He goes on to assert that, organized criminal gangs take over the streets of the country. People do not feel safe when walking on the roads. Corrupt government officials cannot provide help to Nigerians to fight these criminals.

Terrorist threat: According to Simwa (2022), Terrorism in the country is not a new problem. Boko-Haram and Niger Delta Avengers are two prominent terrorist organizations that cause the most damage to the country. The federal government keeps fighting with terrorists. Nigerian soldiers die every day for their country.

Effects of Security Challenges on the Church and General Society in Nigeria

The emergence of terrorism, health challenges, conflicts, Boko-Haram Insurgency, border closures, political uproar and so on have negative effects on the church and national development in. Dachal (2015) corroborates by asserting that, the activities of Boko-Haram sect in Nigeria have negatively affected the Nigerian society especially in the northern parts of Nigeria. He goes on to assert that, the bishop of Kaduna diocese of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Rt. Rev. Josiah Idowu, observed that violence and insurgency have destroyed the economic, social and religious lives of the people of Kaduna state. This according to him can also be said of all the Boko Haram stricken states in northern Nigeria.

Prior to the wake of insecurity in Nigeria, the church demonstrated Christian aesthetical, cultural values which united them together. However, at the emergence of security challenges, Christians tends to have lost their unity and togetherness, which was their cultural identity as a result of the fear of being killed by terrorists when they are gathered in the church for worship. "Pre-security challenges era in Nigeria was a period that was characterized with orderliness, unity, love, education, discipleship/followership among many other aesthetical values" (Jesutunwase, 2019). It appears these Christian cultural

values that were laid down by the early church seemed to have been neglected by some church leaders and Christians in Africa of this church dispensation. All these abnormalities are suggested to be consequential to the emergence of security challenges in Africa. It is a pride for the African race that the celebrated early church theologians were Africans. They were pace-setters for the twenty first century African church leaders; they were notable Christians and theologians (Jesutunwase, 2019). (Adamo, 2005). Some Africans who made useful contributions in the early church were Pantaenus, Origin, Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Athanasius of Egypt, Anthony the Hermit and so on (Enegho, 2009). Early church fathers in Africa have given a solid foundation to church leadership; it is the strength, the hope and fundamental for a successful church leadership.

There are certain legacies passed on by these early church fathers that were of African descent. Two of these legacies are: “Education” and “professionalism” in church leadership, no wonder they were able to perform to standard in the history of the global church. The life style of the African church fathers is a model for the contemporary church leaders. However, the current security challenges in Africa negatively affected these theological institutions and other secular institutions of learning as these institutions of learning were destroyed and their human resources killed. Low levels of education have been exacerbated by terrorist attack in Africa. Obviously, the original cultures of the church in Africa are beset by a deviation from the originality- that is corruption. Corruption means a deviation from the originality (Okpe, 2022). In the past, the church has some fundamental doctrines and laudable values like: godliness, unity, worship of God and morality, which were highly appreciated among the Christians in Nigeria as well as other African churches. Democracy is the government of the people, for the people and by the people. Thus, since the Church is an integral part of the citizenry, this makes her to actively participate in the African politics. With the advent of democracy, several traditional values of the church were shaken to the foundation, were jettisoned and corrupted (Enegho and Jesutunwase, 2020). These two scholars further opined that democracy was suggested to be consequential to the following effects on the church’s involvement in politics in Africa. These factors among many others are: thuggery among Christian politicians, disunity among Christian politicians, kidnapping and so on (Enegho and Jesutunwase, 2020).

Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, Christians congregated for regular weekly programmes (Olowoyeye, 2020). “The Church was psychologically normal in the worship of God; such occasions were usually characterized with positive testimonies. The congregational songs, musical instruments and dancing helped a typical African in his expression to God in worship (Jesutunwase, 2020). Jesutunwase still asserts that, congregational worship has been the culture of the church in Africa. Within Africa,

people have adapted beliefs in sincerity of purpose. People felt that, Christianity with its emphasis on salvation demands services to humanity. However, with the outbreak of Covid – 19 pandemic coupled with the consequential national lock down, Christians were not allowed to go to church in order not to be effected with this deadly virus (Jesutunwase, 2020). Of course, the contemporary church in Africa has not overcome the negative effects caused by the deadly disease. Negative effects like economic down- turn, disruption of health security and social life, hindrance to African cultural security and so on have been recorded. Yet, the world is presently experiencing a harvest of increase of security challenges from other agents of insecurities in the post coronal world; all these factors have great negative effects on the church in Nigeria and all other neighbouring African nations.

Kidnapping among other agents of security challenges is detrimental to the development of the national economy. It has hindered the general development of the nation and the church; it reduces the numerical, spiritual and economic growth of the church, and has negative effect on the economic buoyancy of the nation. Kidnapping can simply be described as the act of taking someone or keeping someone or restricting the movement of someone against his/her wishes. It could be for the purpose of forcing them to work involuntarily without pay or to make ransom demands from the relatives of the victim” (Mbah, 2021).

Church Responses to Security Challenges in Nigeria

According to Awojobi (2021), existing studies on security has always focused on the role of security agents like the Armed forces, the police and the legislators with little or no attention paid to the role of church leaders in national security which is central to the understanding and tackling of security challenges facing the Nigerian society. He goes on to opine that, church leaders are to use their position in the Nigerian society to promote adequate security of lives and property. Moral education in churches will foster peace, unity and harmonious relationship among different ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. As the mouth piece of God, church leaders are duty bound to speak on the ills in governance and the society so that peace and tranquillity can be achieved in Nigeria. In line with the assertion of Awojobi on the role of the church on security challenges in Nigeria, The United Apostolic Church of Christ (UACC) said its forthcoming 56th Supreme Executive Council meeting would seek divine solution to the nation’s security challenges (Evakhifu, 2021). The three day session would intercede for the unity, peace and progress of Nigeria. The church observed that, the subsisting crises of kidnapping, banditry and economic down turn have polarized the society and posed threat to people’s

ways of worship and their ability to fulfil obligations. It was discovered that, the church was worried over the persistent human carnage arising out of social upheavals that seemed to defy government administered solutions. Similarly, the current investigation reveals that Agency-Report (2021) asserts that Christian leaders proffer solutions to Nigeria's security challenges. In the report, it was discovered that the church leaders agreed at a peace summit in Enugu that Nigeria can't make progress if the nation's insecurity challenges are not tackled. Agency report made it known that no fewer than 120 church leaders from various denominations within Nigeria's south-east have proffered solutions to the lingering insecurity and other challenges in the country (Agency Report, 2021).

The Church leaders, at a peace summit held on a particular Saturday in Enugu, Enugu state, advocated fair representation of zones in government non-selective justice and improved border security as panacea to lasting peace and unity in the country. The peace summit was organized by the Nigerian Christian Pilgrim Commission (Agency Report, 2021). Goddy Okafor, Chairman, Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N), south-east, said the summit was a step in the right direction, adding that no nation can make progress in an atmosphere of chaos (Agency Report, 2021). Sunday Onuola, the bishop of the Methodist Church circuit, Abia State, noted that there might be no peace if there was injustice and marginalization of any section of the country religiously, socio-economically and politically (Agency Report, 2021). Also speaking, Oke Chukwu Obiora, the pastor of the Living World Outreach International, Onitsha, urged both federal and state governments to do more on youth engagement and empowerment through skill acquisition. "I believe the violence and vices in the zone can be checked if almost all our youths will be gainfully employed and there is no idle person within communities in the zone", Mr. Obiora said (Agency Report, 2021). Nkechi Nnamani, a pastor with Assembly of Love and Charity Ministries, Enugu, advocated development of the country to create more socio-economic and health competition among the various zones. Ms Nnamani also called on the government at all levels to give women more slots and visibility in the political space, while urging all to support the girl-child education and empowerment to women in general (Agency Report, 2021).

Conclusion

This paper has investigated church responses to security challenges in Africa: A Study of the Nigerian church and conclude that the effects of security breakdown on the church in Nigeria are enormous. The emergence of kidnappers, Fulani herdsmen attack, border closures, health-challenges, terrorism, Boko Haram insurgency and so on have negative effects on the church and the entire citizenry in Nigeria as well as other neighbouring

African nations. All these negative effects have caused human deaths, disrupted health-security, caused national economic down turn, plagued religious congregational meetings that led to a decline in church income and so on. The Church and the world have not overcome the negative effects caused by the deadly disease. Yet a harvest of increase in the global insecurities from other agent of insecurities in the post corona world has been recorded (Jesutunwase, 2022).

This paper has also examined the responses of the church to security challenges in Nigeria. Finally, the paper made some ameliorative recommendations to the church to improve her previous responses on the effects of security challenges in Nigeria. The present security challenges which are inimical to both national and church developments in Nigeria as well as in other African nations could not be denied. No doubt, this research has unveiled the previous active roles of the church in Nigeria to security challenges. However, it was discovered that the church in Nigeria needed to improve her strategic responses to security challenges in the country. The church and the government could organize or create programmes that could serve as a therapy to heal the wounds of these victims. For instance, an agreed period in the memory of the victims could be set aside, which could be observed regularly especially by the World Council of Churches (WCC). The Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) in collaboration with the Christian Association of Nigeria could organize good programmes to help the living victims and the relatives of those that died in the recent Boko- Haram insurgency, kidnapping and so on. Similarly, the WCC, OAIC and C.A.N could come together on how to curb the menace by coming up with advanced security measures against any attack in future and to discuss on what the church could do to help the victims; at such occasions, government executives could be invited, the affected living individuals could be compensated, at the forum, the WCC, OAIC and C.A.N executives could dialogue with the government leaders in Nigeria on how they could aid the victims. And of course, the leaders of the United Nations Organization should not be passive in ameliorating the effects and in the combat against agents of insecurities in Africa.

In addition, the church in Africa could start scholarship, grants and other financial programmes that could be beneficial to the orphans, philanthropist Christians are encouraged to start or continue Non-Governmental organization (NGO) that could cater for the need of the victims of insecurities in Africa. Molly (2012), in his report beckoned on the government leaders to kindly come to the aid of Boko Haram victims, when he commented and reminded the former first lady of Nigeria, and the former Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) Minister on their promises to miss Esther Mbakai.

Among the news on attacks mostly present in the media, the kidnapping of 276 female students from a secondary School in Borno in 2014 received global response. As of January 2021, 112 girls were still missing, and six students were believed to have died. However, every month dozens of deaths are attributed to the brutality of Boko Haram (Kamer, 2022).

In Nigeria, the Christian Elders forum of Northern States, CEFNs with the cooperation of the Christian Association of Nigeria Executives at the national level could jointly come together to formulate strong lasting policies to be able to enhance security measure for the Church in Nigeria especially the north eastern part of Nigeria (Ogunbiwaje, 2013).

Finally, the WCC OIAC and C.A.N. Executives with the collaboration of UNO Executives, could dialogue with the Federal Government of Nigeria on advanced security methods. Foreign governments and advanced security specialists are to be beckoned for better techniques, in order to combat insecurities in Nigeria as well as in all other African nations.

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