

Religion and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is facing serious underdevelopment. This can be seen in her economic, social and educational deterioration. This paper seeks to find out the reasons for the deterioration and the role religion can play to improve the development of Nigeria. Observation and descriptive method was used in this study. It was discovered that lack of good governance, corruption and religious intolerance contributed to underdevelopment in Nigeria. This study argues that religion transforms individuals who build the nation. It was also discovered that religious groups have played outstanding roles in national growth. This was achieved through the provision of schools, hospitals, inculcating morals through teaching in religious and political assemblies for national growth. The article recommends strong relationship between religious bodies and government. It recommends that when individuals understand and practice religious transformational values, ethics, forgiveness, and doctrines, most societal ills would be eradicated. Thus, religion is capable of not only ensuring but building sustainable and formidable nationhood.

Keywords: Religion, Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Religion is one of the processes of nation building. For a long time now, religion has contributed greatly to nation building and development in Nigeria, yet questions are being asked about the contribution of religion in national development, in nation's sustainability and nation building. This is as a result of various religious riots and crisis, religious intolerance, religious motivated killings, quest for wealth and corrupt practices by political leaders who confess religion.

A country is said to be developed when it is able to provide quality life for its citizen. In the last sixty-three years Nigeria has been battling with the problems of development despite abundant of natural resources in her possession. Expectations of fast development seem difficult to realize in Nigeria as a result of problems such as illiteracy, hunger, poor health condition, humiliation, unemployment, and so on. Nigerian citizens are being frustrated, not cared for, poor basic amenities to keep life going is in high rate, corruption and nepotism

keep increasing in the hands of the political leaders. Nigeria's economic prospects are now in recession. Dambisa (2010) is of the opinion that "most African countries are confronted with major developmental challenges emanating from bad leadership, corruption, insecurity of varied degrees like kidnapping, terrorism, child industry, ritual killing, armed robbery and the most endemic problem which is poverty is also wreaking". Furthermore, Dambisa (2010) asserts that "there is no denying the fact that all these indices of backwardness are similar to what is happening in Nigeria today".

Williams (1990), is of the opinion that "the general misconception is that religion and development do not mix; that religion (must) have a negative repercussion on development. He also argues that religion and development can, and do go together. He submits that Nigeria's development had had the assistance of religion and still does; that without the close collaboration of religion and development in the past, Nigeria would have charted and therefore taken a different course, and maybe has a slower rate of development". Following this view, Adeyomo (2002) in Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016) reechoing the views of Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber on the role of religion in social institutions such as economics and politics. He said that "religion is an interactive force in a society because it has the power to shape collective beliefs. It provides cohesion in social order by promoting a sense of belonging in collective enterprises". In many religious traditions, compassion, justice, and respect for human dignity may serve as vital guiding principles for people and communities as they try to improve their lives and the lives of their neighbors. Religious institutions have played and will continue to play a significant part in defining the social, cultural, and political landscape of Nigeria, with positive and bad effects.

Definition of Terms

Religion

Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016) defined religion as "a system of social unity commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought". Johnson and Samson (1994) in Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016) defined religion as "a structure within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued; usually among a community of like-minded believers". Fagbamila, David and Issa (2014), asserts "religion has continued to be a significant part of societies and human experience, shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live".

Development

Akwalla (2009) in Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016) describes development as ‘the process that includes: Physical development which includes man-made goods produced by use of technology, personal development which includes the psychological directions of individuals and Cultural development which comprises of the values, norms and traditions of a society’. According to Seers (1979) in Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016) “the reason for development in any given society is to reduce inequality, unemployment and poverty”. Sen (1999), in his own opinion sees development as “a complete process involving the reduction of lack or increase choice. He further explains that lack signifies a multidimensional view of poverty or inadequacy that includes illiteracy, illness and poor health condition, hunger, noiselessness, humiliation, powerlessness, insecurity, and an absence of access to basic infrastructure”. Development is a process that creates growth, brings in progress and positive change. Development is a tool enabling people to reach the highest level of their ability, through granting freedom of action, ie., freedom of economic, social and family actions.

Development according to Owen Barder (2012) “is a system-wide manifestation of the way that people, firms, technologies and institutions interact with each other within the economic, social and political system”.

National Development

National development refers to the process of improving the economic, political, and social well-being of a country and its people. This can include efforts to increase economic growth and prosperity, reduce poverty and inequality, improve education and healthcare, and strengthen political institutions and governance. National development can also encompass efforts to promote cultural preservation and identity, protect the environment, and promote international cooperation and security. In corroborating this, Munasinghe, (2004) defined National Development as “a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems”. The purpose of national development is to improve the standard of living for a nation's population.

Lawal and Oluwatoyin, (2011), defines National development as “a collective socio-economic, political, as well as religious advancement of a country or nation”. National development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people, namely, by providing social amenities like good education, pipe-borne water etc. National development shall be conceived as the holistic approach to enhancing the overall

segments of the society, secure high living standards for the public through the resources at a country's disposal, achieved in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Corruption

According to Nwabughio, (2016), "corruption is on the high side demoralizing every aspect of the government". In collaboration to these facts, Nwabughio, (2016) in Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016) quoted President Muhammadu Buhari, addressing his ministers on the state of the nation during Eid-el-Fitri, called for prayers for Nigeria. According by him, President Muhammadu Buhari emphasized that the present challenges facing Nigeria as a nation are enormous; they include economic recession, lack of development in agricultural and mining sectors, lack of patriotism, agitation from Indigenous people of Biafra. The state of the nation has greatly affected her quest for improved quality of life of her citizens as poverty; unemployment and starvation still pervade the nook and cranny of the country".

Theories of National Development

Three major theories of national development are: *Modernisation Theory*, *Dependency Theory*, and *World-Systems Theory*.

Modernisation Theory

Modernisation theory discusses a step-by-step transitional movement toward developing a nation based upon the growth of western countries. Although there are many contributors to modernisation theory, Walt Rostow is prominent. In 1960, he theorised the "Stages of Economic Growth". Once a nation has made it through each of these stages, it can be defined as developed.

Dependency Theory

According to World Population Review, Periphery Countries 2022, Raúl Prebisch initially theorised Dependency Theory in 1950, yet supported by other famous theorists, such as Andre Frank. This theory essentially splits the world into 'core' and 'periphery' countries, which are in a constant state of dependency on each other. Let's take a look at the Global Core-Periphery model to visualise this. The **core** represents the wealthy, developed countries of the world, such as the UK or Australia. The *periphery* represents the poor, developing countries, such as Ethiopia or Colombia. Periphery countries provide cheap resources, such as labour or raw materials, to the core (exploitation) so that the core can then provide goods in return (skillfully made products) at a high cost. This way, they are dependent on each other. It means that periphery countries stay underdeveloped due to the expensive goods provided by the core. Development proves to be difficult for the periphery

countries, as capital growth remains low. Referenced from: (World Population Review, Periphery Countries 2022 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/periphery-countries>)

World Systems Theory

According to World Population Review, Semi-Periphery Countries 2022, Immanuel Wallerstein coined the World Systems theory in the 1970s. Similar to the Dependency Theory, concepts of the 'core' and 'periphery' still exist. However, Wallerstein introduced another section, the '*semi-periphery*'. *Semi-Periphery* understands that some countries may not fit into either the core or periphery. They may show characteristics of both the core and periphery countries, such as Brazil or South Africa. This means they may provide resources to the core, but also take resources from the periphery (exploitation), for example. World Systems theory replicates the core and periphery characteristics of Dependency Theory. However, the Dependency Theory offers a straightforward divide between developed and underdeveloped nations. As in its name, World Systems theory recognises the world as more of a system where things are constantly changing. Countries can grow or decline. They don't just stay the same, allowing some nations to get into core and periphery sections. With its flourishing service sector, vastly growing countries such as India could be moving their way out of the semi-periphery towards the core. Referenced from: (World Population Review, Semi-Periphery Countries 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/semi-periphery-countries>)

Factors that hinder National Development in Nigeria

The religious effect on nation-building is complicated, involving both good and negative factors. A number of countries' governmental structures, social cohesiveness, and cultural advancements may be traced back to the religious influence. There have been instances of injustice and inequity because of the religious participation in politics and society. Unfortunately, religion as it is practiced in Nigeria by the adherents of the dominant religions: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion, rather than integrate the peoples of Nigeria, turns out to be one of the major causes of conflict and division among Nigerians. Despite the huge natural material resources at the disposal of the Government since independence in 1960, with growth of nation's economic, social and political structures, the challenges of national development have not been attended to. However, the following factors hinder development in Nigeria:

Corruption

High level of corruption and indiscipline is another barrier to development in Nigeria. According to Chuta (2004), "Nigeria is corrupt, managed by corrupt leaders who have made

the state an instrument of capital accumulation rather than using it to project the interest of the citizenry: A very good plan supervised by a thoroughly corrupt state can hardly do a thorough job. Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, and so, where one is present, the other suffers”. Employment in Nigeria is usually not based on merit but depends on how connected you are with people that have power. Corruption in Nigeria has been a major problem, adding costs and risks for local entrepreneurs and investors. Moreover, it has also contributed to a culture that does not value merit, innovation and initiative, which also lowers workforce productivity. Government funds are being misappropriated on a daily basis by the leaders, who only put the interest of their family and friends at heart while ignoring the masses. The corruption has eaten so deeply into the government and economy that everyone seems to be blinded by it. Nigeria’s corruption has increased poverty and inequality as well as contributed to high crime rates.

Poor Political Leadership

One of the major hindrances to sustainable development in Nigeria is poor leadership at various organs of the government. Inefficient political leadership has been an impediment to growth and development in Nigeria. Government lacks the capacity to perform, which is rooted in a lack of ability to innovate and harness available resources. These leaders on assumption of power quickly turned up the repressive machinery of the colonial state rather than dismantling it. Significantly, they have no vision of development to accompany the efficient instrument of repression they inherited. All they were interested in was access to power and privileges and not development. Political instability in Nigeria has led to lack of investor confidence and a decrease in economic activity. Nigerian Government has no regard whatsoever to the principles of good governance- openness, transparency, accountability and the rule of law. Lack of accountable has paved way for corruption and bad governance, a situation where public resources are being mismanaged at the expense of the masses. A stable political environment is necessary for a country to attract foreign investment and promote economic growth. The quality of leadership in any nation determines the level of national development in that nation. Hence, what we require today are leaders with visions and missions who will move this country along the envisaged path of progress and embrace the challenges of modernization and globalization. Politicians who are pandering to ethnic interests should be rejected at the polling booth while hard work, good skills and intelligence should be rewarded strictly on merits, without regard to ethnicity and religion.

Poor Formulation and Implementation of Policies

Formulation and implementation of policies should involve general public. Some of the previous development plans failed because; there was little or no consultation of the general

public. There were in most cases, no executive capacity responsible for the formulation and implementation of the plan. Officials are entrusted to positions without any meaningful supervision and achievement. According to Mimiko (1997), “Planning is supposed to involve even the peasant in the villages. Even the Local Government officials who are close to the people were not consulted”. Policies on substantial public resources devoted to poverty alleviation should be implemented. Such a situation will facilitate the achievement of sustainable development goals particularly as it pertains to poverty, zero hunger, decent work and economic growth as well as industry innovation and infrastructure which are sustainable development goals. There are several issues involved with bad governance in Nigeria, use of wrong policies, adaptation to wrong policies and implementation of those wrong policies. Government and policy makers should make more effort in addressing the issue of rising unemployment which will afterwards reduce or eliminate poverty in the country.

Economy

Another important factor is the economic base of the country. Ever since the country fell into a recession in 2016, Nigeria’s economic growth has been feeble, particularly in non-oil sectors. The country largely depends on crude oil for her survival to the detriment of other resources. All other sectors of the economy, according to Afamuefuna (2006), “are neglected. For instance, agriculture, which constitutes the mainstay of the Nigerian economy in the 1950s and 1960s, has been thrown into limbo over the years. How would government encourage export promotion when there is virtually nothing to export? He asked. The economy is not diversified and this is not suitable for a sustainable development”. In economic terms, Nigeria’s overdependence on the federal government has created a relational system in which distribution criteria are more relevant than growth – which weakens incentives for economic diversification and competition among states. This aspect of the system has become a source of deep resentment and conflict in the country’s oil-producing regions.

The oil industry does not employ a sizeable number of unskilled workers, thereby contributes little to reducing poverty. Ford (2007), in his own opinion states: “poverty has been linked to high crime rates, especially in the Niger Delta region where there is a sharp contrast between the rich and the poor. The masses cause social unrest because the wealth gotten from their territory does not get to them”. Garcia, Kohl, Ruengsorn and Zislin (2006), states that “in the Nigerian society, the best way to acquire wealth is to enter the political sphere. Most of the time political success is tied to criminal activities”. Nnadi (2008), in Chimobi Ucha (2010), discusses the various impacts of globalization on the Nigerian economy. These impacts have resulted to social and economic problems in the country such

as inequality, the emergence of a social underclass and low development. He also states that globalization has affected Nigeria's economic growth through a decline of foreign direct investment and for unemployment, poverty and inequality to be alleviated; Nigeria's economic policies need to be changed. Lack of adequate emphasis on human resource development as a tool for development on the part of government as well as business organizations and private bodies has brought about hardship among Nigerians especially the youth, and has thus led them to their engagement in unethical means for survival.

Human resources of any country are the most critical asset for the achievement of organizational growth and national development. In collaboration with this, Habib (2012), states: "the real treasure of any country is its human resources". Adewusi, (2015); Harbison (1973), were of the opinion that "the quantity of labour available for any country consists of all those able and willing to work, this including the self-employed, unemployed as well as the employed workers. This is linked to the reason most developed nations of the world pay serious attention to this factor when compared with other factors of production". Khatri (1999), in his own opinion states: "people are one of the most important factors providing flexibility and adaptability to organizations". In Nigeria, after her independence in 1960, Nigeria has adopted various forms of leadership styles ranging from parliamentary to presidential system of government. According to (Thom-Otuya, 2007, 2012), "Nigeria has experienced both civilian and military regimes yet, her leaders have been unable to deliver to her citizens the quality of life commensurate with her numerous endowed resources". To crown it all, Achebe, (1983), states that "the trouble with Nigeria is a failure of leadership".

Poverty

Unemployment, corruption, non-diversification of the economy, income inequality, laziness, and a poor education system can be considered to be some of the key factors contributing to poverty in Nigeria. Poverty according to Chimobi Ucha (2010), "is a multidimensional phenomenon". The World Development Report 2000/2001 in Chimobi Ucha, summarizes the various dimensions of poverty as "a lack of opportunity, lack of empowerment and a lack of security. The window of opportunity remains closed to the poor masses, and this makes them practically inactive in the society. Their lack of empowerment limits their choices in almost everything and their lack of security makes them vulnerable to diseases, violence and so on". Similarly, a United Nations statement says: "Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means

susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation”.

In Nigeria, widespread and severe poverty is a reality. It is a reality that depicts a lack of food, clothes, education and other basic amenities. There are several effects and deficiencies associated with poverty in Nigeria. One of the main effects of poverty is poor health, as is reflected in Nigeria’s high infant mortality and low life expectancy. Nigeria needs to do more for the employment of young graduates, which will also help in reducing crime rates, as many youths resort to crime for survival.

Administrative inefficiency, combined with insecurity and widespread poverty, will continue to compromise the development of human capital in some of Nigeria’s states. Education and health services, as well as job creation, will not keep up with demographic growth. In the long term, overall poverty, will likely increase. In several states, tensions are expected to remain or even escalate, amid an intensified competition for resources.

Religious Intolerance

There are some negative aspects of religion which can be seen as a hindrance to national development. Such as; Religious Crises, it will be recalled that since 1999-2012 almost 80% of these religious crises are fueled by political factors (Igwe 2012). Since the independence of Nigeria, she has witnessed a variety of religious disturbances some of which have threatened the existence of the country as a nation. There are always palpable fears at the slightest provocation of inter-religious skirmishes especially in the northern parts of Nigeria. The persistence of this monster has become source of worry for most Nigerians. In Nigeria, religion has been used and is still being used to induce violence, to create conflict situation and threaten the security of the nation and its citizens.

Role of Religions in Promoting National Development in Nigeria

The role of religion in national development cannot be overemphasized because they are involved in all areas of human life.

Ethical Roles

True religion teaches man that he is a creature of God on whom he depends for his life and well-being and to whom he must render an account of life. According to Aramu (2003), “Man learns from religion that he has specific obligations to himself, to his fellow human being and to the society to which he belongs and above all, to his maker. This is social justice in action. The three major religious groups we have in Nigeria: Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion, agree that man is dependent and contingent and need to be guided by the ultimate - God, Supreme or Allah and gods”. According to Ezeanya (1980) "to attempt

to build a nation without God is to hope to construct a massive structure upon the foundation of sand, such building will collapse at the slightest gust of wind and the fall will be great". One of the universal functions of religion is to help to promote the society. The role of religion in national development is to tell the people that, social justice, egalitarianism and building of a country is not merely man - conceived, but it is ordained by God. Peace is the absence of war. Okwueze (2003) said that: "...it is not merely the absence of war nor can it be reduced solely to be maintenance of a balance of power between enemies nor is it brought about by dictatorship". One of the ways Religion can help in national development is by securing the peace of the nation. And this is done by appealing to the conscience of the people through ethical teachings. According to Agha (2003) conscience is defined as "a faculty of the human mind responsible for different capabilities or abilities which the human being attempts to exhibit. It is the inner sense of right or wrong in moral choices that a person makes". Also, Okwunze (2003) sees conscience as "a practical judgment concerning the morality of a concluded action where there is an appeal to one's conscience when he does right or wrong". The Muslim scholar and leader, Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) in Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016) aptly captures it when he describes conscience as an open wound which only truth can heal". Ethics as a code of conduct is very important because people are living in an interacting human society wherein choices and desires are made. But if man is left alone to act according to his will, there will be series of conflict in the society and the conflict will breed anarchy. In national development the religion will be continually appealing to the conscience of their members to pursue peace and avoid conflict. By so doing, Nigeria will be a place where people will live in harmony both citizens and non-citizens. If this is achieved, Nigeria will be a country where every tourist will like to visit and such men will also come with their investments. According to Agha (2003) "No society can live without morals. He argues that morality comprises of those standards of conduct which the reasonable man approves". However, religion provides to their members a guideline about life and the life-after and thus provides much-needed incentives for indulging in productive activities during lifetime.

Religions according to Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016), can be seen as a "promoter of growth as they direct people towards honesty, discipline, hard work, education, thriftiness (leading to savings essential for investment and thereby growth) and absenteeism from harmful activities; though it can also encourage violence in the name of doing the will of God". In view of the above, one can say that religion plays the role of moving the nation forward by bringing the citizens together to plan for the good of the nation. Nigeria cannot develop on itself unless the citizens come together to develop it. Each of the religious groups has contributed significantly to the evangelization of Nigerians. The religious training and

the principles have been the core instrument in the Nation building. Every major religious to one or another prescribes principles for the human relationship with a supreme power, political leaders and the country itself. (Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016)

Economic Development Roles

One of the main aims of development is to actualize economic self-reliance through intensive rural farming and the articulation of other productive forces to place the nation in sound economic footing. Based on this, religious groups have been working in collaboration with the directorate for rural development, road and infrastructural facilities to meet the target of the religious groups to make this a reality. For instance, some states have begun to give back schools to churches. This shows that government still recognizes the importance of religion in this country. According to Sam (2009) “different religious groups also engage in economic ventures like owning a farm -settlement in different rural areas, even in some urban areas too. Religious groups have built health care centers, and maternity homes. Many religious groups now are involved in controlling the environment that is, protection of animals and fishes, care of water supply and Afforestation-tree planting to avoid erosion, educational programs on the effects of deforestation and constant bush burning”. Agha (2003) stated that religious groups also are engaged in small scale enterprises such as soap making, cream, shoe making, tailoring, carpentry, fish pond factory. They also encourage charitable organization to help in alleviating poverty”. With all these religious efforts to economic development of the nation, it then means that efforts of the religious groups have added greatly to national development. Ejim (2010), observed the peculiar character of Christian and Islamic economic principles of interest-free loan help greatly in developing our nation. This helps the rural dwellers to easily borrow from their religion, and feel rest-assured that the burden will not be too much for them. This encourages increase in food production and business venture.

Educational Roles

According to Chioma Ikechi-Ekpendu et al (2016), “Religious groups have been involved in the educational sector of this country through the provision of Nursery, Primary, Secondary, Adult education, Sabbath and Sunday School Classes, Almajiri school, clubs for Boys and Girls, Mass illiteracy, program planning and training courses”. Education contributes significantly to the development of nations. Education brings about more knowledge and skills, which in turn can increase wages, productivity and use of technology. Religion in this country has been working hard to make sure that Nigeria has quality education in this country. Chioma Ikech-Ekpendu et al (2016), in collaboration with this, “was made clear when some state Governments returned many schools to their original owners. Before now, our educational sector in this country' has experienced incessant strikes

because of no implementation of their agreement or nonpayment of salary”. Agha (2003), opined that strike is like a cankerworm to national development. According to Global Development Guide “Better access to education can also increase the population's health, as people are more aware of healthcare systems and medicines. Education is also heavily linked to the political aspects of a nation. With better education systems, the population will become more aware of the political on goings of their nation, increasing the likelihood of a more fair and stable society”. (Center for Global Development, Education and the Developing World, Rich World, Poor World: A Guide to Global Development Education can play a major role in reducing poverty. According to the World Bank (2001), “education is central to development. It promotes economic growth, national productivity and innovation, and values of democracy and social cohesion. This right to education has been denied to many Nigerians, of which many of them can be considered invisible to the society now. This is as a result of poverty”. But with the help of religious groups, this can be eradicated.

Political Role

One of the problems of the nation is lack of political education among the leaders shown by violent display of power. As Achebe (1983) rightly observed in his work; “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with Nigerian or climate or water, air or any other thing else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of the true leadership. It is not only the rulers; the people too contribute in no small measure to the ruin of the nation. This is done extensively by disrespecting constituted authorities, sometime apathy and absence of commitment of the behaviours of the citizens for conducive and rancor free atmosphere necessary for progress. Achebe (1983), also observed that; Indiscipline pervades our life so completely today that one may be justified in calling it the condition par excellence of contemporary Nigeria society. We see and hear and read about indiscipline in the home, in the school, in the public service, in the private sector, in the government and in legislative assemblies as follows: a failure or refusal to submit one's desire and actions to the restraints of orderly social conduct in recognition of the rights and desires of others”. If the leaders should be educated politically on what leadership entails -service; and the-led (people) made to understand their position too, obedience -the magic of decorum and political awareness would have been effective. The Nigeria political milieu has not been satisfactorily done. Religion can bring about sustainable political development through the inculcation of high sense of duty, morality, selfless service, respect for human lives, public accountability, love of one's neighbor, sense of humanity, abhorrence of violence, starting from Boko Haram

crisis that has taken religio-political dimension back to the Biafra war. With religion, there is a sense of religious reawakening which is supposed to have a positive impact on the political development of the country. According to Afolabi (2015), “Religion can contribute to national integration, political mobilization, and reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, and peaceful co-existence, economic social and political development”. In collaboration to the above, Marshall (2010) submits that “the virtues inherent from the political education of these religions has effected some changes and hence helped in the development of our nation”.

Health Care System

Religious groups in this country have been doing its best to see that our country is a better place to live. It has been providing and helping people to have good health care services. For example, there are the Seventh Day Adventist Hospitals in Aba, Ife, Jengre, and Ilisan. Faith Clinic Foundation in Nsukka, Queen Elizabeth hospital Umuahia, K and P hospital in Nassarawa State, Shendam hospital Gombe, Leprosy home Uzuakolie, and many others built by religious groups (Jerome 2010). We also have Regina Cealia hoapital Awka. Iyienue general hospital, Mkpogu Onitsha, Faith hospital Awka, and so. To reduce high rate of infant mortality religions are helping people to get well again by providing good health care. Many children are dying from several preventable diseases, such as cholera, malaria and so on. By providing clean water and adequate health care services, the government together with various religions can save the lives of these infants.

Agricultural Sector

Religious groups encourage people, especially its members to embark on farming by providing fertilizer and soft loan to them. The members also encourage the farmers by buying their harvested goods. Religious groups also encourage their members to be hard working as no religion encourages laziness. For even when we were with you we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2Thessalonians 3:10). This shows that Religion encourages hard work which agriculture is one of them.

Conclusion

Religion is characterized by functional and dysfunctional element, most especially in Nigeria; it is also admitted that it deals with abstract things, that is, conception of God is intuitively mediated quite unlike science which has a conceptual knowledge which centers on sense perception. Religion, just as its dysfunctional aspect has functional aspect as evidenced in morality, justice, truth, economic development, educational and social services which it can render through its various institutions. These functional aspects can be incorporated to the benefit of the nation's development, when religious dialogue, tolerance

is given its due place. Multiplicity in religion is the fate of Nigeria and therefore tolerance and dialogue must be an antidote to reap the benefits of these religions. It can be said that religion in Nigeria has made a substantial contribution to nation building through its advocacy of social justice, peace and reconciliation, and good governance. These efforts have been extensively acknowledged in the scholarly community and have contributed to Nigeria's growth as a country.

According to Igbokwe A.C. (2022), "The nature and mode of propagation of these faiths in Nigeria is identified as the major cause of the seed of division witnessed among these religions. If only the government and the religious leaders would liaise to educate the populace on the need for religious tolerance and freedom of worship, religion would have assumed its natural role of bridge building among the peoples of Nigeria". From the above enumerated facts, religion has significantly influenced the political, social, and cultural climate of many different areas of Nigeria as a country.

Recommendations

1. In making Government policies, Government should carry Religions along to always inculcate moral principles, justice, truth, equity and honesty in individuals to help reduce corruption. This is because laws and plans on eternal aspects of man exploiting scientific models are falling Nigeria.
2. Government should make use of the various organs of Religious Groups in the country to carry its message to the people.
3. Tested and trusted religious people should be used in the sensitive areas in political, social and economic goals of national development to prevent constant failures of government well-conceived programs.
4. Moral education should be made compulsory in all categories of learning and national orientation agency should also include it in their plans.
5. Government should promote Religious tolerance through education and enlightenment of the people through the mass media, civil society organizations and educational institutions to respect and tolerate other religions as well as extol the culture of others. This will definitely put to an end the persistent occurrence of religious violence in Nigeria,
6. The government should give more power to the Christian Association of Nigeria and Islamic Society of Nigeria in promoting inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance through organizing seminars and workshops for religious adherents which will help in building sustainable political development.

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