An Examination of The Role of Ethnicity, Religion, and Economic Indices in The Fragmentation of The Crisis of Governance in Africa

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Abstract

The study examined the role of ethnicity, religion, and economic factors as key indicators that have contributed to the governance crises in Africa, and explored strategies to mitigate their effects. It evaluated these elements in various African nations, with a special focus on Nigeria, where they are particularly prominent. The study revealed that the government's failure to address issues such as poverty and corruption hinders development, leading to conflicts that often revolve around ethnicity and religion. The research indicated that robust economic and corporate governance are essential for Africa's revitalization. The conclusion of the paper suggests that Africa can improve by moving beyond narrow tribal and ethnic loyalties, emphasizing the importance of credible elections as a way to oust corrupt leaders. The research methodology included a descriptive approach and content analysis, which involved collecting scholarly articles from books, journals, magazines, online sources, and newspapers. The study also reviewed the Conflict Transformation theory, which argues that, despite Africa's rich human and natural resources, poor governance, corruption, and significant external debt are major obstacles.

Introduction

Africa is grappling with a multitude of challenges stemming from the legacies of colonial governance, the management of foreign debt, the prevalence of diseases, poverty, corruption, and internal conflicts within the majority of its independent states. Furthermore, Africa is often described as the least developed continent globally, despite its abundant natural resources and a significant pool of educated individuals, including those residing in the Diaspora (Musarurwa, 2012; Elumilade, 2006; Soludo, 2005).

The dynamics of identity politics and religion have played a pivotal role in fueling numerous conflicts across the continent. Conflicts in countries such as Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Sudan, and Nigeria are deeply rooted in ethnic tensions. However, it is important to recognize that political, economic, psychological, and cultural factors also contribute to the animosity between ethnic groups (Williams, 2011; Ajayo, 2009). The governance of Africa has been significantly impacted by state repression, coup d'états, civil unrest, extended civil wars, and electoral violence. Ethnicity and the conflicts that emerge from it have been exploited by political leaders, particularly in Nigeria, to secure economic benefits and fulfill political ambitions (Williams, 2011; Osaghae, 2010).

Numerous scholarly works have explored the nexus between governance challenges and underdevelopment in Africa, attributing these issues to the phenomena of ethnicity, religion, and economic factors (Onah, 2010; Ajayi, 2009; Adelegun, 2009; Ostien, 2009; Aina, 2007).

The root causes of these issues are succinctly captured by a document from the African Union Commission in 2004, which states: "Distrust for the constituted authority, corruption and impunity, coupled with human rights abuses, have perpetuated a cycle of conflict, thereby undermining all efforts towards sustainable development."

Regrettably, poverty, encompassing various dimensions, remains pervasive across Africa, with sub-Saharan Africa being particularly affected (Barclay, 2004). The UNDP 2011 Human Development Report, which suggested that no African country falls into the "very high human development" category, highlights the continent's lack of significant progress in human development.

Despite over half a century of political freedom from colonial rule, the situation has not been notably improved. Africa continues to experience the highest rates of coup d'états, wars, regional armed conflicts, and poverty, which have hindered political, economic, and social development. The crisis of governance in Africa is largely attributed to corruption among political elites and the military, which have illegally seized power 186 times in African history, with a significant number occurring in the 1980s and 1990s (Agbede, 2010; Ajayi, 2009; Muggad, 2009).

In regions where political conflicts exist, elitism is often prevalent, with corrupt political leaders frequently exploiting ethnic divisions to mobilize support during times of need. Ethnic consciousness and the marginalization of certain groups across the continent also contribute to insecurity and instability (Marshal and Gur, 2003).

Poor governance and the violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms have undermined the ability of many states to sustain economic growth and address poverty. Onah (2010) identified three key factors essential for good governance: responsiveness, responsibility, and the pursuit of the public good. These factors ultimately hinge on the relationship between leaders and the people, suggesting that good governance requires the active participation of the populace in the public good and the welfare of the people.

This work aims to shed light on the factors contributing to the crisis of governance, exploring both their potentials and risks within African countries. It will also examine specific instances of the identified indices that have affected governance and propose solutions to mitigate the violent manifestations of ethnic and religious conflicts, which are deeply rooted in the social, cultural, political, and economic realities of African countries.

Immediately following this general introduction, the paper will review relevant theories and concepts. The remainder of the document will focus on the specific cases of African countries, analyzing instances of governance crises and recommending strategies for their resolution.

Theoretical Review

This paper delves into the Conflict Transformation Theory, as articulated by Galtung (2001) and Lederach (1995). These scholars posit that the Conflict Transformation Theory encompasses all actions aimed at altering the dynamics of relationships among various groups. Consequently, the theory suggests that activities should not be confined to specific conflicts but should operate within the broader context of a larger conflict. The objective is to foster relationships among different groups, thereby transforming perceptions from adversarial to cooperative, thereby promoting non-violent, integrative approaches to resolving potential conflicts.

The overarching aim is to transition from relationships characterized by conflict and destruction towards ones that are mutually beneficial, cooperative, and constructive. Consequently, activities under the Conflict Transformation Theory focus on enhancing cooperative relations, promoting non-violent methods for addressing differences, and empowering local communities to resolve future disputes independently, thereby reducing the need for external intervention.

Hendrick (2009) further elucidates that Conflict Transformation is centered on change, whether it be limited to a specific form or direction, or whether it is aimed at achieving change with certain values such as justice, non-violence, and participation. Moreover, it encompasses the outcomes, processes, and structural aspects of long-term peace-building efforts designed to genuinely address and mitigate forms of direct, structural, and cultural violence.

At its core, Conflict Transformation Theory acknowledges that conflict is an intrinsic component of development and social change, capable of yielding both constructive and destructive results. It endeavors to identify the root causes of conflicts and employs innovative strategies to transform these causes, thereby facilitating change.

Review of the Literature

Conflict: Conflict is an intrinsic aspect of human existence and is prevalent across all societies, particularly where there is competition over limited resources, objectives, and survival instincts. Eckstein (1980) is cited by Oyesola (2005) to assert that conflict is a fundamental part of human nature. Numerous scholars, including Isaac Albert, Okwudibia Nnoli, Joel Adekanye, William Zartman, Johan Galteng, and Anthony Giddens, have conducted in-depth analyses on the various dimensions, nature, patterns, courses, and consequences of conflict within human societies.

In the context of Nigeria, conflict has emerged as a result of years of repression and suppression, following demands for environmental responsibility from the Nigerian state and the oil industry, which have had a detrimental impact on development across the African continent. These conflicts have escalated and evolved into low-intensity conflicts, marked by continuous assassinations and the destruction of both public and private institutions, culminating in full-scale wars (Davis, 2009; Abidde, 2009; Hazan, 2007).

Governance predominantly pertains to the manner in which authority is exercised concerning matters of public interest. Adelegun (2009) posits that governance encompasses a process involving the control and direction of societal affairs, as well as the management of organizations or entities. Fundamentally, governance represents a multifaceted issue, which, in essence, confers authority upon certain individuals while also imposing responsibility for the enactment of new legislation, the administration of justice, the organization of public services, the formulation of regulatory policies, and the oversight of societal conduct.

To achieve such lofty objectives, it is imperative that there exists a genuine intent from leadership, consistency in policy formulation, and fiscal prudence. In the realm of political discourse, it signifies the operation of a responsible and responsive administration, wherein the sentiments and aspirations of the populace significantly influence governmental direction (Adelegun, 2009).

Regarding the concept of good governance, Hyden (1992) defines it as the deliberate management of governmental structures aimed at enhancing the public domain. Adejumobi (2000) further elucidates that good governance is assessed by the extent to which a political regime can ensure the welfare of the populace and promote the greatest happiness of the largest number of individuals within society. References to this include Checkman (2010) and Adelatif (2003).

In examining the crisis of leadership in Africa, Onah (2010) identifies several contributing factors, including the misallocation of resources through corruption and mismanagement, coupled with a lack of accountability among leaders, insufficient transparency in governmental operations, inadequate checks and balances, non-compliance with the rule of law, the absence of peaceful and consistent mechanisms for leadership transition, and a disregard for human rights. African leaders have frequently diverted the majority of their country's resources into personal accounts. Corruption in Africa has, in fact, entrenched political dominance, rendering the continent a 'dark continent' (Onah, 2010).

However, it is notable that governments in Africa remain largely detached from their citizens. They seldom heed the voices of the people and have made minimal efforts to address the suffering of their populations. High-ranking officials of the state and Africa often behave as though the countries are their personal domains. Beginning in the 1980s, there has been a concerted effort, albeit gradual, to reverse the prevailing trend of political despair and disillusionment that had characterized political life in Africa (Adejumobi, 2000).

Analysis Indices in Nigeria

The roots of post-independence conflicts in several African nations can be traced back to deep-seated ethnic tensions and divisions. The history of ethnic strife and conflicts in Nigeria, for instance, is linked to the colonial era, when the forced amalgamation of the northern and southern ethnic groups into the nation of Nigeria in 1914 laid the groundwork for future tensions.

After gaining independence, ethnic militias began to play a significant role, particularly during the third republic. This period saw the rise of various groups, driven by fears of repression and suppression. Among these were the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Egbesu Boys, Bakassi Boys, and the Movement for the Actualization of Biafra Republic.

In the Congo, the Shaba province declared independence for Katanga, which collapsed into civil war in the 1960s. Sudan also saw a prolonged conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, culminating in the UN-sponsored division of the country into South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan in 2012. In Burundi and Rwanda, ethnic violence and genocide were severe, with the war in Darfur potentially leading to genocidal outcomes. Trans-border ethnic conflicts have also been a recurring issue in various African regions.

The division between Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi and Rwanda was deepened by European colonization, with the Belgians and Germans playing a significant role. Despite speaking the same language, before European influence, distinctions were more based on social status rather than tribe. The history of colonization is, therefore, more significant than religious, linguistic, or geographic ties. However, geographic ties, such as Hutus' belief in their ancestral role as the region's original settlers, have also been a point of contention.

In Chad, the divide between the Muslim north and the Christian south is a source of ethnic tension, especially in the Dar Tama region where the Tama majority faces attacks from the Zaghawa minority. Both groups are Arabs, indicating that language is not the primary cause of tension here. The leader of Chad, IdrissDeby, who is ethnically Zaghawa, has appointed Zaghawa officials in positions of power in Dar Tama's local government and police, who have failed to prevent the violence.

Essay (2011) suggests that in multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria and South Africa, ethnic communities often engage in violent competition over resources such as property, rights, jobs, education, language, social services, and healthcare facilities. This competition has led to the survival and significant influence of ancient groups such as clans, tribes, ethnic groups, and nations in national politics.

Religious and Political turmoil in Africa

Religions have played a role in promoting global peace, yet they have also been a source of division, animosity, and conflict. Ajayi (2009) notes that the history of Nigeria (Africa) since gaining independence has been marked by religious violence, often with a religious and ethnic basis. The scholar also points out that the nation's government has struggled to establish a unified national identity and achieve stable progress, largely due to religious and ethnic tensions in the political arena.

Ajayi further argues that the differences in cultural and ethnic loyalties among groups cannot fully explain the political dynamics in Nigeria (Africa) without considering the role of religion, as religion and ethnicity are closely intertwined. Rivalries between ethnic groups frequently mirror religious conflicts.

Adelegun (2009) discusses religion, stating that in many regions, including Nigeria, the topic of religion is highly sensitive and contentious, leading to increased tension and threats to national unity. Despite the constitutional provision in the 1999 Federal Republic of Nigeria's first schedule, part 11 section (10) that prohibits the adoption of any religion as the state religion, religious extremists have largely succeeded in destabilizing society, and the government has struggled to enforce the law effectively against those responsible. This situation has allowed individuals who commit crimes in the name of their religious beliefs to continue to spread religious prejudices and fanaticism. According to a 2009 World Religious Survey, 50.4% of Nigeria's population is Muslim, 48.2% are Christian (with 15% Protestant; 13.7% Catholic, and 19.6% belonging to other Christian denominations), and 1.4% follow other religions.

Saliu (2006), Ajayi (2009), Adelegun (2009), Agbo (2011) have all noted the numerous instances where religious extremists have engaged in widespread acts of violence and theft, particularly in the north of Nigeria, where countless lives and properties have been destroyed (during the Maitatsine uprisings in the 1980s in places like Kafachan, Zaria, Kano, Maiduguri, Kaduna, and Yola; the Jos Crisis since 1991; and the violence leading up to and after the 2011 Nigerian presidential elections). The actions of these religious groups are thus making it difficult for the Nigerian government to function effectively and are putting a strain on the country's security forces.

According to Ajayi (2009), Nigeria is recognized as a secular nation, lacking a dominant state religion. Its secular identity was established upon gaining independence in 1960. However, since the late 1970s, there has been significant debate over the role and influence of religion, especially Islam, in the country's political processes, both domestically and internationally. Ajayi states:

For Nigeria to endure as a nation, it is crucial that religion is kept separate from its political activities. The Nigerian people must unite to prevent the destructive forces of ethnicity and religion from tearing apart the country's unity and progress. Nigeria has experienced ongoing religious tensions, calls for the implementation of Sharia law, demands for the end of Western-style governance and education by radical Muslim groups like Boko Haram, and deep-seated tribal conflicts. This constant division along ethnic and religious lines has led former Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, to suggest the division of West Africa's largest country in March 2010. The government would spend much of its time and resources trying to restore order instead of focusing on the public benefits of democracy.

In South Africa, the nation's more than 40 million people have been divided along racial lines. The population is composed of whites, indigenous Africans, coloreds, and Indians: with blacks making up the majority at around 30 million, whites at 5 million, and coloreds and Indians at 3 million. In South Africa, social status is determined by race, with blacks at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Historically, indigenous Africans were forced to live in impoverished and segregated areas known as "homelands" under the apartheid system. The country has approximately 11 linguistic groups, but English is recognized as the official language.

The Impact of Economics on African Government

Financial elements have been pinpointed as a key reason behind conflicts in Africa. It's important to recognize that the political freedom African countries gained in the 1960s and 70s didn't lead to economic freedom for the African people. Some experts argue that the theory of dependency has been a major obstacle to Africa's development. A thorough examination of this theory revealed that for many years, business dealings were conducted between the governments of African nations after independence and their former colonizers, a situation where the colonizers had control over the economies of the weaker African countries. Breaking this mutually beneficial relationship became challenging because these countries still relied on foreign aid for their survival. For a long time, African nations provided raw materials to developed countries and in exchange, received manufactured products of various kinds. Abia (2006) pointed out that imperialism and dependency were to blame for Africa's economic underdevelopment. For example, in Angola and Mozambique, the Portuguese forced the locals to grow cotton, which was then sold at low prices, despite the harsh working conditions. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, European companies dominated the import business, and Europeans controlled the banking, insurance, and shipping sectors.

Collectively, what the British left behind in Nigeria and other African countries was a significant power imbalance and uneven borders. This randomness has led to political difficulties. For instance, in Nigeria, the poor management of administrative structures and the exploitation of resources had a significant negative impact on the social, political, and economic progress following independence.

The World Bank has noted that the failure of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) was due to a lack of effective governance. According to the Bank:

The root of Africa's development challenges lies in a governance crisis. Governance refers to the use of political power to manage a country's affairs. Due to the absence of checks and balances, officials in many countries have acted in their own interests without facing consequences. In response, individuals have formed personal networks of influence instead of holding the state accountable for its systemic failures. This has led to politics becoming personal and patronage becoming crucial for maintaining power. The leadership has broad discretionary power, which undermines its legitimacy, information is kept under control, and voluntary groups are either taken over or shut down. The environment is not conducive to fostering a dynamic economy.

The journey towards improving governance in Africa, as outlined by the Bank, involves reducing the role of the state and fostering support for non-state entities like civil society. The Economic Commission for Africa (2002) notes that the establishment of effective economic and corporate governance in Africa is significantly shaped by various political factors. However, the extent of impact from these political factors differs among nations, both in terms of strength and direction. For instance, in Botswana, known globally for its exemplary governance and economic management, political factors have a positive effect on maintaining this reputation. Conversely, in some countries, governance challenges often overlap with institutional and administrative weaknesses, making it hard to distinguish between the two.

Adejumobi (2011) mentions that, in line with the World Bank's approach, donor organizations, both multilateral and bilateral, have integrated the demand for improved governance into their economic cooperation initiatives in Africa. This includes organizations like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as well as private foundations such as the Ford Foundation and the Carter Center in the United States, with a focus on backing civil organizations and non-state actors in Africa.

On a wider scale, entities such as the Commonwealth and the United Nations, along with some of their agencies, have highlighted and championed the causes of democracy, human rights, and good governance in their endeavors. For example, at the Commonwealth's Harare Summit in 1991, it committed to promoting democracy, respect for human rights, and good governance, issuing a resolution that member states were expected to adhere to these principles. This resolution was revisited in 1996 during the heads of state and government meeting in Auckland, New Zealand, leading to sanctions against a member state (Nigeria) for the unlawful killing of a human rights activist, Ken SaroWiwa, and the murder of the Ogoni Eight by the Nigerian military junta. As a result, Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth. Similarly, in 1997, Sierra Leone was also suspended from the Commonwealth due to the military junta led by Colonel Koromah (Adejumobi, 2011).

Adejumobi (2011) noted that certain organizations within its structure, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have actively engaged in deliberate actions and implemented strategies to advance the cause. For instance, the UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa has initiated a unique program, known as the Special Initiative on Governance in Africa (SIGA), aimed at enhancing governance effectiveness across the continent through accountability, empowerment of civil society, political reform, and peace and stability. The consequence of corruption in Africa has led to economic stagnation.

Onah (2010) mentions that the African Union estimates that corruption costs Africa $140 billion each year, which represents 25% of the continent's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Despite Africa's vast potential, the continent has remained underdeveloped since gaining independence. Africa is rich in natural resources. However, African nations have struggled to use these resources for industrial development. The manufacturing sector is virtually non-existent, and natural resources and agricultural products are exported as raw materials at low prices. These materials are then processed in the industries of Europe, Asia, and America. The end products are then imported back into Africa at prices much higher than the original sale prices.

Barclay (2002) argues that for sustainable development in less developed countries, effective governance is essential, along with a supportive and enabling international environment that encourages international cooperation in finance, technology transfer, debt, trade, and full participation in global decision-making.

In a 2006 lecture at the University of Benin, Nigeria, Central Bank Governor ChukwumaSoludo highlighted the extent of Nigeria's challenges by comparing it to Indonesia and Malaysia. He pointed out that before the first oil boom in both countries in 1973, Nigeria and Indonesia were nearly identical in many aspects, including their agrarian societies, multi-ethnic and religious diversity, and GDP size. However, their policy choices diverged after the oil boom, leading to stark differences in outcomes. Today, Indonesia's manufacturing exports are about 40%, while Nigeria's are less than 1%.

In 2006, Soludo noted that only about 40% of the land suitable for farming was being used for cultivation, while more than half of the tertiary educational institutions in the country were churning out over 200,000 graduates annually. The situation of poverty in the country had been deteriorating steadily, reaching a point where by 1999, it was believed that 70% of the population was living in poverty.

The spread of poverty in Nigeria accelerated following the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) by the Babangida military government, which was under the conditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The funds provided for development were misused on illusory projects like the Better Life for the Poor Women initiative, the Directorate of Food Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), People's Bank of Nigeria, democratic transition projects, and ultimately, corruption, which allowed the members of the Babangida regime to amass wealth (Elumilade, 2006).

Elumilade further points out that the economic policies of successive Nigerian governments have been unclear, with President Buhari engaging in counter-trade, Babangida implementing the SAP, and Abacha adopting a different economic strategy each year until his demise. It was Obasanjo who introduced the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), focusing on reducing poverty, creating employment, generating wealth, and reorienting value.

To shed light on the corrupt practices of public officials in Nigeria, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, DimejiBakole, was recently penalized with a 33-count indictment by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission for contract inflation. The charges were lodged on June 7, 2011. The Commission also accused Bakole and other senior officials of the House of approving contracts with the intention to defraud, conspiring to increase the cost of contracts from N300,000 to N320,000 per unit instead of the intended N160,000.

Conclusion

Despite its abundant natural resources and a skilled workforce, including those living abroad, Africa is often seen as the least developed continent. It is believed that these assets could significantly contribute to development if they were managed and utilized in ways that benefit African communities. This could lead to a shift in Africa's production of both raw materials and finished goods.

It would also help in keeping and developing its skilled workforce instead of contributing to the ongoing loss of talent. Proper management of these resources could open up opportunities for better living conditions and ultimately improve the overall standard of living. However, poverty, in all its forms, remains widespread in Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Baeclay (2004)

Africa has the potential to improve when we move beyond basic tribal and ethnic loyalties, focusing on reliable elections as a way to replace corrupt leaders. Create a comprehensive plan for development across the continent and commit to effective governance.

Recommendations

The three key factors—education, strong governance, and the rule of law—can be effectively managed alongside boosting economic growth in Africa. It falls upon African governments, as with any others, to cultivate a relationship of trust with their citizens and empower those most impacted by poor governance and poverty. The essential components for fostering good economic governance include transparency, accountability, a supportive environment for private sector growth, and the development and effectiveness of institutions. (Economic Commission for Africa, 2002)

It is also crucial to maintain high standards for political representation, such as limiting the terms of office for elected officials to ensure free and fair elections are conducted.

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