

Demographic Dynamics and Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

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Abstract: Demographically, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with an average growth rate of 3.2% and an approximated population of 190 million people; the seventh world-wide, and the 8th largest exporter of oil and many other resources. However, Nigeria ranks low in human development index, with 39.1% of her population living below income poverty line of US\$1.90 a day. These and many other factors combined to spur the various conflicts for which the country is now known, with its huge youth population as one of the most important factors in these perennial conflicts, especially the farmers-herders conflicts, which has become a near daily affair, especially since the return of the country to civil rule in 1999. This paper examines the roles of population dynamics on violent conflicts in Nigeria and its implications on national security and development through field surveys, focused group discussions, and literature review. The study has found out that the country's huge youths population in addition to issues of governance, are potent tools in the perennial violent conflicts for which the country is known for (of late), and recommends that the state should ensure adequate governance; put in place effective national development policy that caters well for the youths and the nation as a whole.

Key words: Demographic dynamics, Governance, Population, Violent conflicts, Youths

I. INTRODUCTION

Today's global population is the youngest, more urban, and more educated in history, with about 3.3 billion of the population less than 25 years of age, and about 1.5 billion aged between 12 and 25 years. This number constitutes nearly 30 per cent of the total population, with 86% of the number found in low and mid-income countries of the world. This development implies that the global population is undergoing a form of transformation that makes it a very poignant issue in the socio-economy and wellbeing (Okpanachi, 2010; Dahiru, 2004). This scenario is true for Nigeria with an estimated population of 200 million people and over 250 ethno-linguistic groups.

The youth is an important segment of the Nigeria's population that must be properly managed to enhance the nation's development, as well as keeping it away from all the vices that may push it into all forms of antisocial activities (Nigeria Watch, 2018). 4.2% of this population is less than 15 years of age, 29% is aged between 15 to 19 years, with 24% in the prime age bracket of 30-59 years. The elderly constitutes about 4.8% of the population in 2006 and 5.1% in 2015. The

median age of the country's population is 17.9% for the males, and 18.4% for the females (NPC, 2009; UNDP, 2013). Nigeria's literacy level is estimated at 61% in 2008 (NPC, 2008; ICFMICRO, 2009), and 78% in 2010 (NBS, 2010), with an estimated 58% primary school enrolment between 2008 and 2011 (UNICEF, 2010). During the next few decades, the proportion of global youth population will continue to swell up especially in the urban areas of growing economies, thereby impacting heavily on their socio-economy. In spite of its huge size and the potentials for inducing positive changes on the global socio-economic landscape, this group of people is however, confronted with increasing neglect and discrimination that make it more vulnerable and frustrated, and therefore, more prone to costly but avoidable misadventures like all kinds of crimes, self-indulgence with drugs and substance abuse as is currently the issue in different parts of the world (Okpanachi, 2010; Dahiru, 2004). This paper examines the roles of population dynamics on violent conflicts and the implications of violent conflicts on Nigeria's national security, and suggest framework for effective population management in the country.

1.2 Dimensions Of Demographic Changes And Development

Population dynamics is concerned with the determinants and consequences of changes in the growth, structure, composition, and distribution of population, as well as the various effects such dynamics bring to bear on the development and wellbeing (David, *et al.*, 2001). It provides useful insights for quality discourse in terms of both the parameters under pinning population changes (such as increased fertility; reduced mortality, and migration), and the indicators of a given population. It is also concerned with the degree of society's ethnic and cultural homogeneity, equity and fairness in the distribution of resources; opportunities, and power. Worldwide, population dynamics come with new and aggravated demands on the environment and its scarce resources, which create increased competition/clashes and outright conflicts that may be violent or otherwise (Hegre; Nygard, and Strand, 2012).

According to the United Nations, the global population is changing rapidly. This population has increased by 46.2% between 1960 and 1980 (from 3.03 billion to 4.43 billion). In developing countries, the population is currently growing at a rate of 2.08% annually, with a doubling time of 35 years

(Stanley, *et al.*, 2009). Population dynamics is critical in influencing relationships within and between people, communities, and or nations. Despite the great diversity of views on population dynamics, there is an emerging consensus of late that population factors create pressure and demands on the society, which if not met, may result in social dislocation and conflicts. What is not fully appreciated is that conflict and violence create profound demographic consequences in terms of increased population of orphans/street children, single parent children, and widows (Almond and Currie, 2011).

Demographic trends are important among the factors that motivate or inhibit political stability and national security (De Souza, 2007). Over the past decades, countries with very young age structure (i.e. those in which at least 60% of the population is younger than 30 years of age have seen much more outbreaks of conflicts than those with broader populations across different age ranges. Young people are a country's key human resource stock and an embodiment of future political development (Helge and Urdal, 2015; Ujoh, 2014). The effects of population change depends on the ability of existing institutions to introduce necessary changes in a polity, failure of which may result in adverse reactions in the society, such as violent conflicts as currently obtains in Nigeria's north central states of Benue and Plateau (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005; Joshua, 2005).

The effects of violent conflicts across the globe are vast, mixed, and gender biased, given its implications on health; education; income; food, and internal security. This scenario is more pronounced in developing states like the Arab and Asian nations; Rwanda; Cote- d'Ivoire, and Nigeria, where the victims suffer challenges of health care provision; educational development; inadequate shelter and nutrition; girl child molestation; and insecurity, among others (Currie and Vogel, 2013; Nigeria Watch, 2018).

Because of the spate of violent conflicts in Africa, there is a growing body of literature on its effects, with one of the first by Arkresh, and de Walque (2008), who studied the 1994 Rwandan genocide, due to which many lives and properties were lost. Exposure to violence adversely affects the adults in terms of human capital accumulation, with both demand and supply side effects (Leon, 2012). On the overall, study results have shown that an average person exposed to political conflict or violence before school age lost 0.3% years of schooling upon reaching adulthood.

In a study of Cote-d'Ivoire, Minoin and Shemyakina (2012), used the conflict survey data from 2002 to 2008 of households' living standard (HLSS) and Armed conflict location and event data (ACLED) to examine the impact of Armed Conflicts on children's health. The study showed that children exposed to conflicts or who lived in conflicts-affected areas had height-age Z-scores lower than those in less conflicts-affected areas.

Studies on the effects of violent conflicts on Nigeria in the past 10 years have shown remarkable increase in the spate and effects of violent conflicts in the country. For example, (Oluwale, 2021) examined the effects of Boko Haram Insurgence (BHI) on children's health, and suggested negative effects of BHI on weight-for-age and weight-for-height Z scores of children in affected areas. Abidoye and Cali (2014) examined the relationship between income shocks and conflicts across Nigeria, and found out that increase in prices induce conflicts due to falling earnings. Also, a study on youth bulges and violent conflicts in North central Nigeria shows that youth bulges increase the risk of violent conflicts, especially under conditions of economic stagnation, unemployment, and bad governance (Zakari, 2001).

II. YOUTH BULGES AND CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Today more than ever before, internal (armed) conflicts are far more frequent than interstate conflicts, thereby posing great risks to a large number of people in the world. In 2019, UCDP recorded 54 active state-based conflicts (including seven wars) - the highest number in the post-1946 period (Therese and Magnus, 2020). Youth bulges are believed to strain social institutions such as the labour markets, education and health, thereby causing grievances that may result in violent conflicts.

While the claim that youth violence may cause violent conflict has a long history, the issue has received increased attention in the last few decades, following the more general debate on the security implications of population pressure and resource scarcity (Choucri, 1974). This phenomenon has become more popular after the September 11 2001 twin tower bombing incidence in America, and the explanation for the political instability in the Arab world.

Demographically, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, the seventh world-wide and 8th largest exporter of oil and many other resources. However, Nigeria ranks low in human development index, with 39.1% of her population living below income poverty line of US\$1.90 a day (UNDP, 2018). The farmers-herders conflicts which has become a near daily affair, with year 2000 as the deadliest and most destructive of lives and properties in North Central Nigeria, where thousands have been killed between 2016-2019, with an annual average of more than 2000 deaths (Genyi, 2017).

With an estimated population of 189,009,696 people, Nigeria has a population advantage of about 70 million youths that can help her attain a pride of place in the comity of nations, if the population is properly engaged, with its potentials properly harnessed and appropriately utilized (Nigeria Watch, 2018; Dahiru, 2004).

Violent conflicts have been a feature of Nigeria pre-independence. This culminated into the 1966-1970 civil war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Since then, violent conflicts have evolved and become a state art, that spread across the country.

With new dimension of complex challenges in security threats, especially from 1990s, the various dimensions ranging from inter-communal, ethno-religious, election-related, farmers-herders, Boko Haram, and so forth, Nigeria is regarded as a violent state, with her youths as the chief prosecutors of over 90% of these conflicts (Azad *et al.*, 2018).

While violent conflict has spread to all parts of Nigeria, it is important to note that the most impacted states are the north central states of Benue and Plateau, the north eastern states of Adamawa, Borno, Taraba, Yobe, the north western states of Kaduna, Sokoto and Zamfara, and the south eastern states of the country. According to Azad *et al.* (2018), from 2010 to 2017, 49% of households in the North East experienced at least one event of conflict or violence against a household member. Years of misrule, corruption, and squander mania have not only pauperized a large segment of the population, but have left many frustrated citizens to vent their angst on erstwhile peaceful neighbours both at individual and community levels. Most of these conflicts have been over land and other resources, especially between herders and farmers in north central Nigeria. In the far north, environmental depredation, especially desertification has pushed the Fulani nomads southwards for pasture. As these nomads migrate and eventually settle in farming communities, violent conflicts often erupt, with some of the worst conflicts between the so called 'indigenes and settler communities', especially in the north central Nigeria (Nigeria: A History of Conflicts, no date; Oluwale, 2021).

The north central Nigeria comprising the FCT and six states is a home to several minority ethnic nationalities and several violent conflicts, especially from the last decade, with no fewer than 1400 incidences, and 7500 deaths. This escalating conflict has deeply unsettled the socio-economic terrain of this area, with the Federal Government annually losing about US \$13.7b from it. These conflicts largely occur in the contexts of wide spread poverty (where about 43% of the people are poor); youths unemployment and drug abuse; proliferation of small arms, particularly the locally made types (which aided about 50% of the crimes committed in Benue and Plateau States in the period in question); political and other proximate elites who provide youths with weapons (to intimidate opponents and other citizens before, during, and after elections), with most of such weapons allowed with these youths, who use them for the various criminal activities in the society; militarization of public spaces (as a result of which the people are now taking the laws into their hands, and killing even the military in some occasions). Between 2015 to 2020, six military operations were launched in this zone to deal with Armed conflicts, including cattle rustling, banditry, farmers-herders clashes, and ethno-religious crises.

III. IMPACT OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS ON SOCIETIES

Violent conflicts have devastating effects across a range of areas, many of which have lasting effects on societies, taking significant adverse toll on the life and wellbeing of people, such as extreme trauma, forced migration/displacement,

disease and famine, increasing poverty and child mortality, food insecurity, fall in school enrolment and education standard, reduced access to water and sanitation, recruitment/conscripting of children and other victims into the ranks of rebel groups as is the case with the Boko Haram terrorists group in Nigeria, among others (Akresh and deWalque, 2008).

Violent conflicts also affect community/public infrastructural facilities, capital assets, society's social fabrics and social relations, and decline in interpersonal and communal group trust and cooperation (Nwokolo, 2015). Many victims of violent conflicts suffer from post-traumatic syndrome, which contributes to poor physical and mental health, reduced quality of life, difficulties in work, increased tendency for violent behaviours, stigmatization and rejection of women who suffered sexual molestation by the society (Shemykina, 2011; Ahmad and Idowu, 2013).

IV. SOLUTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR POPULATION DYNAMICS AND VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Demographic dynamics must be properly managed to maximise its benefits and ameliorate its adverse effects through:

- i. Encouraging family planning by instituting family planning programs such as awareness campaigns and support funds for family planning/child spacing
- ii. Making the use of modern contraception legal, free, and available everywhere to child bearing women in order to reduce the rate of conception by women
- iii. Restricting child marriages by raising the legal age of marriage
- iv. Encouraging sex education for the teenagers
- v. Optimizing efforts at reducing economic crises
- vi. Enacting laws to set out operational boundaries between farmers and herders
- vii. Eradication of people with tendency for extremism in the society

If properly managed, population dynamics is a huge asset to states, rather than liability. The challenges associated with population growth and youths bulges which are particularly common to growing economies and African countries like Nigeria is largely due to the failure of the state to provide adequate governance. Failure of governance brings about widespread poverty, unemployment, insecurity and corruption, which bring about frustration, intolerance, and conflicts on the long run (Mohammed and Mohammed, 2015). This must be effectively addressed at all levels of governance, if national development and wellbeing must be achieved. Policy solutions must be strategic enough to bring about improvement in bridging security gaps, improving internal and border securities, harmonious coexistence, community awareness and resilience, among others.

V. CONCLUSION

Nigeria has been plagued with several bouts of conflicts since independence. The spread of Boko Haram Insurgency in the north east, the farmers-herders clashes of the north central Nigeria, the activities of the Eastern Network Security of IPOB and MASSOB in the South-east, and the Pan Yoruba ethnic militia attacks on non-indigenes in the South-west, are part of the examples of these conflicts that led to the wanton loss of lives and properties, with most of them driven almost wholly by the large army of educated, but unemployed youths. The youths must shun laziness, take to whatever lawful endeavours open to them, and be masters of their selves/destinies. They should engage only in constructive and worthwhile activities which will save them the evils of 'boredom'. The government at various levels and major stakeholders must re-strategies and provide the needed support through deliberate and consistent engagement with the youths, religious, community and traditional leaders.

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