

Effect of Ethno-Religious Conflicts on Socio-Economic Development in Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The negative effect of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. The menace has resulted to loss of lives and properties, leading to poverty, diverse deprivation and several bloodlettings in Nigeria. The ethno-religious conflicts has become a stable feature in Nigeria despite all efforts put in place by the government, religious leaders, peace practitioners and security agencies to put an end to the menace in the country. However, the menace has almost reached uncontrollable level if urgent and proactive action is not taken, it may bring the country into disintegration; this study examines the effect of ethno-religious conflicts and socio-economic development in Taraba State. Well-structured questionnaire was used as main instrument to generate the required information and collect data for the study. A mixed method approach was applied during this research using an exploratory research design. This was adopted in the study because it helps the researcher to obtain information from a sample of respondents for the purpose of testing the hypotheses concerning the stated problem of this study. Bali local government is about 255,000 and Wokari local government is 284,000 people situated at the center of Taraba state. Even though religion was not part of the census count in Nigeria. The population of the study covers major religious stakeholders, market women and community leaders in Taraba State. Conflict theory was adopted as its theoretical framework. Findings show that ethno-religious conflict has caused a major setback to socio-economic development in Taraba state. The study therefore recommends that there is need to create room for inter-ethnic and interfaith dialogue to protect the rights of all citizens, also that government should create awareness of the implication of conflict in the society as well as bring those that are perpetrating religious crises to book.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Religious, Conflicts, Development, Socio-economic

Introduction

Ethno-religious crisis has been a recurrent and common phenomenon in the world especially in Northern part of Nigeria. The global religious holy books, the Quran and the Bible, described how the fore-fathers in the past went through either ethnic or religions crisis at various point in time. This explains that ethno-religious crisis is neither peculiar to Nigeria nor a phenomenon of recent origin (Gberevbie, Shodipo, and Oviasogie, 2013). Nigeria seems to have made progress in improving the socio-economic conditions of its citizens during the period of high economic growth and significantly through oil revenues. It has been accepted that security and protection of lives and properties are the primary responsibilities of government anywhere in the world be it military or civilian administration. However, the persistent ethno religious crisis in the country and the enormous security challenges it poses has made the country a breakable state. It is observed that ethnicity has caused ethnocentricity in Nigeria which ethnic groups or its members instigate to see that one group is superior to all the other, the mentality is even displayed in the socio-economic relations among various ethnic groups. This has become a common practice in Nigeria to have settlers within a cultural milieu developing cooperative and communities within the host community where they settled and creating boundaries and barriers that separated them from the most community and thus makes the process of acculturation a near impossibility (Adesiyun and Ojuola, 2012).

Conflict in Africa generally is increasing and intensity and this is having effect in the government and governance structure. The continent is seriously contending with several problems arising from post-colonial rules, debt management, diseases, poverty, corruption and internecine wars in most of her politically

independent states (Goodnews and Chioma, 2021). According to Alemika (2015) ethnic and religious conflicts results to several negative consequences such as loss of lives and property, population displacement and traumatic experiences, poverty, diverse deprivation such as lack of access to education, health care facility, employment opportunity and denial of human rights among others. Also trust between and within groups and communities are destroyed thereby undermining inter and intra community cooperation and alliance that may promote community development and unity.

Often religious differences have been evoked to explain these bloody clashes. However, the problem involves perceived political domination by groups is being considered as external, illegitimate or 'alien'. Besides, the immediate cause of the crisis is generally associated with the *Shariah* controversy and the consequent demonstration and counter demonstration by both Muslims and Christians in Taraba state. *Shariah* question has since the inauguration of the new civilian government in 1999 sharply divided Nigerians across religious lines. The Muslim pro-*Shariah* activists expressed concern and fears over what they consider to be domination of Christian culture in Nigeria established by the colonial government.

Ethnic and religion consciousness has been the common problem since Nigerian gained independence, and it continued to threaten the development, continued co-existence, peace and unity of Nigeria as members of one sovereign democratic state. In recent history, there are only few states in Nigeria that have not in one way or another witnessed one form of ethnic or religious crises. The persistent incidence of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria, especially in Taraba state in northern part has been a concerned among intellectuals across the nation. With different developmental plans by the government targeted towards sustaining the country, little or no results seem to be forthcoming because of persistent ethno religious crises in the country. Taraba state, however, does not have the monopoly of being the flashpoint or theater of ethno-religious tensions and crises. These crises often trigger the sense of hostile behaviour between Muslims and Christians and thereafter inculcate a deep consciousness of religion sentiment which often creates adverse effects on the socio-economic development in Nigeria. It is very important therefore to examine ethno-religious crises and its implication on socio-economic development in Taraba State.

Concept of Religious

The term religion derived its name from the Latin word *religare* (which implies to read or pursue together; the same origin goes to legible and intelligent), or rather generally accepted from the term *religare* (to tie back, to find fast). Abdul (2012) described religion as an identity issue, which implies solidarity and setting boundaries between those who are consider believers and those that are not. This deals with issue of sentiments, and norms that are result of shared experiences. Religion has evoked man since time immemorial to attempt to work out their relationship with supernatural beings or powers often regarded as God's. Absolute to this regard is the interaction between religion and the society within which it functions. According to Peter, (2016) conceptualized religion as system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting mood and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Concept of Religious Conflicts

Abubakar (2019) defined religious conflict as the struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, status and power in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize or eliminate their rivals. This definition very much mirrors the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, as the groups compete for political and economic power, as well as land and water resources. Since independence from the British in 1960, the country has had many religious crises, which have persisted into the 1990s and 2000s.

Examples are the Kafanchan-Kaduna crisis of the 1980s and 1990s; the Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000 and the Bauchi riots in 2001, both caused by the introduction of Sharia law in those states; as well as the 2001 riots in

Jos, caused by a governmental appointment (Çancı and Odukoya, 2016). Hundreds of lives were lost during these conflicts and the effects reverberated beyond state borders. Since 2008, Boko Haram has been an increasing threat to national security. The terrorist organization is ranked the 4th deadliest terror group in the world and aims to establish an Islamic state in northern Nigeria. It opposes the westernization of the country, to which it links Christianity.

Concept of Ethnicity

According to Adesiyani and Ojuola (2012) they opined that ethnicity as a shared cultural identity, involving the same practices, initiations, beliefs and linguistic features passed over from generation to generations. Etymology Online (2019) described the word ethnic which originated from Latin (ethnicus), or Greek (ethnikos), both of which referred to it as for nation, national or people. It was later adopted by grammarians to be pronounced as ethnos, which means band of people living together, nation, people, tribe, caste. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019), ethnic is an adjective and it is defined as something related to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background. In an eloquent style and exhaustive effort at explaining the term ethnic within the context of group of people: it is observed that ethnicity is close to Max Weber's conception of a subjective belief in common descent, ethnicity embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion; it covers 'tribes,' 'races,' 'nationalities,' and castes (quoted in Isah, Dando and Mukhtar, 2018).

Isah (2018) described ethnicity as a concept which can best be understood within the context of people or group. Therefore, define ethnicity as a group of people sharing some common socio-cultural features such as language, tribe, nationality or religion.

Ethno-Religious Conflicts

The struggle of Nigeria government to establish free and just societies has been hindered by lack of a genuine national cohesion since the 1914 amalgamation (Ayu, 2014). Since 1914, the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the differences in historical development of the people, their religious beliefs and customs and the people themselves do not show any sign of wiliness to unite (Ajayi, 2014). Nigeria unity is only a British intension for the country (James, 2016).

The responsibility of ensuring successful genuine national cohesion is the responsibility of all and sundry regardless of ethnic and religious diversities Ethno-religious conflict has affected the fabrics of genuine Nigeria national integration and thus, a threat to the stability, development and future of the state. Ethno religious conflict has deepened the north-south dichotomy. The north-south debacle has made Nigeria a theater of conflict interest. The south, dominated by the Christians and the north, dominated by the Muslims have created an interface between domination and influence of these two religions. Ethnic sub-nationalism has today complicated the Nigeria political interplay. Politicians and elite use the aggregate interest of protecting the Christians in the north gather support and influence. The phenomenon of a patriotic Nigerian has not been realistic; Plural loyalties and citizenship identities along ethnic and religious lines continued to play a dominant role in the Nigeria State.

Ethnicity and Religion haev become the basic problem of north-south dichotomy employed as a fundamental political factor. Nigeria Politics even when pitched on other lines of (North-South divide), always ends up being largely about Christianity and Islam (Kukah, 2000). 'Religion factors become dangerous when they are linked to politics but even more so when they are linked to ethnicity and North-South Division' (Strategic Conflict Assessment Report, 2003). Sustaining a pluralistic and heterogeneous society can be upheld through unity in diversity. In the light of recent happenings, Nigeria operates on the verge of diversity in unity. Several ethno-religious conflicts have occurred due to the inability to tolerate others ethnic identity and religion or religious perspective, lifestyle, political views and ideas.

National cohesion is rooted in the ability to tolerate others. Conflict itself is an evident of human and social forces relation but the management of this violence remains paramount before it degenerates into warfare. Ethno-religious conflict poses threat to sustainable democracy and development. The nature of governance and the conduct of election in Nigeria have become worrisome. These democratic processes are exhibited within ethno-religious ideas, which have appropriately leads to underdevelopment, democratic retrogression, and lack of democratic consolidation.

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria can be described as a cycle of bloodletting. The plural nature of Nigeria reflects the weak state of the country to guarantee fundamental liberties and right, security, dignified existence for its populace, distributive justice and essences of social contract. Ethno-religious pluralism becomes a problem in Nigeria when opportunities in life and access to important socio-economic opportunities are dependent on membership of particular ethnic and religious group. Jakob (1995) defines ethnicity as groups which see themselves as constituted by the real or imagined bonds of a common decent religion, language, culture and history. Ethnicity defined according to Osaghae, (1992) as a social formation predicated on culturally specific practices and unique symbols. Alegbeleye (2014), defines ethnicity as a situation in which individuals in a particular ethnic group consider themselves or are considered by others to have common affinity which distinct them from other groups in the society.

Ethno-religious conflict is a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious and another of such group in a multiethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontations (Achumba, Ighom ereho and Akpan-Robaro, 2013; Salawu, 2010). The upsurge of violence resulting from ethnic cleavages and some elements of religious coloration can be said to be ethno-religious conflict. Within the framework of this work, crisis is cogitates in line with the submission of Oladosu (2013) as a state in which people, ethnic or religious groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement which may or may not result in bloody confrontation. A conflict triggered under the aegis of ethnic identities is referred to as ethnic or racial conflict and similarly those triggered under the influence of religion is defined as religious conflict. Conflicts are signals of social relation and are not inherently negative if necessary preventive and early warning mechanisms are put in place to prevent it from degenerating into incessant bloody or violent confrontations.

Socio-Economic Development

Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) described Socio-Economic development as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country. It is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people, namely, by providing social amenities like good education and pipe-borne water.

In the same vein, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) maintained that the people must be at the center of all development (UNDP, 2018). The World Bank (2018) also asserted that investing in people, if done rightly, would provide the finest foundation for lasting socio-economic development. It further noted that all people have the same basic needs in form of clean water, fresh air, comfortable housing, etc., which must be met if development is to take place.

Nexus between Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Socio-Economic Development:

It is imperative to know the various ethno-religious conflicts and socio-economic development that have swept across this country in the past three decades. Religion and ethnicity have been a major source of conflict that has threatened the unity of Nigeria right from the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria in 1914. The series of ethno-religious conflicts observed in many parts of Nigeria, especially in the

northern axis of the country have not only hindered the nation's socio-economic and political development but also put to question the peaceful co-existence of the two dominant religions in Nigeria (Islam and Christianity). The consequential enormous loss in human and material resources has continued to register its multiplier impacts on all aspects of the nation's socio-political, economic and infrastructural development.

These conflicts have had massive negative consequences on the economy, and especially on the poor masses, which are yet to be measured with a view to finding appropriate policies that will improve the situation.

According to Awojobi, (2014), range from destruction of human and physical capital, disruption of economic transactions, increased cost of conducting such transactions, to distortion of resource allocation by the state. Writing on the adverse effects of conflict on development, here marked that peace as opposed to conflict is increasingly perceived necessary for human development. He added further that broad economic development and prosperity are possible only in the presence of positive peace, as opposed to the presence of war.

Effects of Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria

Ethno-religious identities have become disintegrative and disparaging social rudiments menacing the peace, stability and security in Nigeria. The frequent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes have posed a major security challenges. The long protracted ethno religious crisis leads to destruction of lives and properties. The number of lives and properties consumed because of these crises cannot be statistically determined. Onwumah (2014) posited that in economic terms, ethno-religious conflict damages resources and facilities, which took the government time to acquire. No foreign investor would like to invest funds in a country that is prone to communal and ethno-religious conflicts.

Ethno-religious conflict has a devastating effect on Nigerian socio-economic structures and infrastructures such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. Burning of schools, churches and mosque, destruction of community projects are problems that do not only affect the community involved but compiled the national problem of Nigeria underdevelopment. In the agriculture sector, farmers desert their farm lands to safety zones where there is no probability of getting new farmland, food insecurity and prices increases as a result of farmer inability to farm. This has a great deal of influence on Nigeria agricultural sector, which has been the mainstay of the economy. Ethno-religious conflict also leads to psychological problems. Victims of ethno-religious conflict suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSS) (Dogara, 2010). Also, Onwumah (2014) further asserts that conflict periods bring forth the worst instincts and impulses in man. Socio-economic vices such as increase level of crime rate and struggle over scarce resources. In post ethno-religious conflict, actors in this conflict remain reservoirs of ethno-religious knowledge of factual or distorted information. The aftermath of these conflicts disrupts social relationship as actors see no reason to live happily together with one who destroys one family and society.

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have presented many challenges that border on security and the corporate existence of the country which is the fundamental reason for the adoption of a federal system. In almost every parts of northern states of Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts occur in an alarming rate in the past three decades and the probability of future occurrence remains high amidst socio-economic and political strife facing the country. It has occurred in state of Kano, Bauchi, Nassarawa, Jos, Taraba, Kaduna, Niger, Borno, Maiduguri, and Benue State respectively. But this study focused on Taraba state because it is in a better position to provide the information needed for the study area.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is conflict theory.

Conflict Theory Assumptions

Conflict theory as propounded by Alegbeleye, G. I. (2014) believes that competition is constant and, at times, an overwhelming factor in nearly every human relationship and interaction. Competition exists as a result of the scarcity of resources, including material resources, money, property, commodities, and more. Beyond material resources, individuals and groups within a society also compete for intangible resources as well. These can include leisure time, dominance, social status, sexual partners, etc. Given conflict theorists' assumption that conflict occurs between social classes, one outcome of this conflict is a revolutionary event. Conflict/Marxist theoretical perspective shares the same assumptions concerning the nature of the society and ethno-religious conflict. Conflict theory on the other hand emphasizes conflict as the hallmark of the society (Yecheo, 2005).

Methodology

Towards achieving the set out objectives of the study employed descriptive Statistics of frequency and simple percentage for organization and presentation of the data collected and to summarize the responses of respondents' male and female, Christians and Muslims in Taraba state because percentages reduced different sets of numbers to comparable set of numbers. Pearson products moment coefficient and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test null hypotheses. It is generally accepted that ANOVA is one of the most versatile statistical tools in the comparison of means of more than two groups.

Well-structured questionnaire was used as main instrument to generate the required information and collect data for the study. Even though religion was not be part of the census count in Nigeria. This was done to enhance the truthfulness of the data regarding the study. The population of the study covers both male and female in the selected state. This is due to the fact that ethno-religious conflicts issues and not limited to a particular state or region.

A mixed method approach was applied during this research using an exploratory research design and the method was employed and the sample of 121 was retrieved from the respondents out of 132 questionnaires administered, simple random sampling technique was adopted to ensure fairness and unbiased selection of the respondents, a small but carefully chosen portion was used to represent the whole population. In order to obtain such sample that is representative of the population, appropriate sampling technique which is a combination of purposive and random sampling was adopted.

The advantage of using this method is that it is simple and easy to apply when there is need to group the elements in the study population into segments for proper and equal representation. The population of the study covers two local governments each for the study state. Bali local government is about 255,000 and Wokari local government is 284,000 people situated at the center of Taraba state.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table: 1: Classification of Respondents' Background Data: (121) respondents from Taraba State

Respondents' Background Data		Respondents	Percent
Sex	Male	67	55.4
	Female	54	44.6
Age	Below 20years	58	48.0
	21-30yrs	51	42.2
	31-40yrs	6	4.1
	41yrs-50	4	3.3
	51yrs and above	2	1.7
Marital Status	Single	52	43.0
	Married	31	25.6
	Divorced	27	22.3

	Separated	11	9.1
Educational Qualifications	WAEC/GCE	54	44.6
	OND/NCE	37	30.6
	B.Sc/ HND	13	10.7
	Postgraduate	11	9.1
	Others	6	4.1
Occupation	Farmers	41	11.5
	Vocational worker	39	32.2
	Civil servant	28	23.1
	Others	13	10.7
Religion	African traditional	06	5.0
	Islam	56	46.3
	Christianity	33	27.5
	Others	26	21.5

Source: Field Survey, 2022 & Computations Aided by SPSS Version 24.0

The study included 121 respondents from Taraba State. The 67 gender distributions of respondents representing 54.4% of the respondents are males while 54 representing 44.6% are females. This implies that male respondents participated in the study as compared to their female counterparts. The age distribution of respondents, 58 representing 48% respondents that are less than age of 20 years, 51 representing 42.2% are in the age range of 21- 30years, 6 representing 4.1% are in the age range of 31-40 years, 4 representing 3.3% are in the age range of 41- 50 years while 2 respondents representing only 1.7% of the respondents are above 51 years.

The marital status of respondents shows that 52 respondents representing 43% are single, 31 respondents representing 25.6% are married, 27 respondents representing 22.3% are divorced while 11 respondents representing 9.1% are separated. This implies that majority of the respondents are single.

The educational qualifications of respondents shows that out of 121 respondents, 54(44.6%) have WAEC/GCE, 37(30.6%) have OND/NCE, 13(10.7%) possess Professional certificate, 13(10.7%) have B.Sc/ HND, 11(9.1%) Postgraduate while 6(4.1%) possess others certificate. This shows the respondents have very modest educationally background.

Occupation of the respondents stated above indicates that 11.5% of the respondents are farmers, 32.2% of the respondents fall within vocational workers, 23.1% of the respondent are civil servants while 10.7 of the respondents belongs to others. This assumes that a large proportion of the participants are vocational workers. Religion of the respondents, out of 121 respondents, 06(5%) are African traditional, 56(46.3%) are Muslim, 33(27.3%) are Christian while 26(21.5%) practices others religious. This shows that majority of the respondents are Muslim that contributed enormously in making appropriate decision in this research.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Responses on Ethno Religious Crises and Social Effects

	ETHNO RELIGIOUS CRISES AND SOCIAL EFFECTS	Level of Agreement (%) (n=121)					Average	
		SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	
1	Social activities such as marriages, sports, are hampered during ethnic or religious crises	67.3	27.1	5.3	5.6	3.79	.532	
2	People are intimidated where they are minority during and after ethnic or religious crises	71.0	29.0	6.4	6.2	3.29	.456	
3	Religious activities are negatively affected during ethnic/religious crises	5.2	41.2	61.7	38.3	3.62	.488	
4	Large numbers of people are forced to abandon their houses during ethnic or religious crises	5.3	21.1	58.9	41.1	3.59	.494	
5	Centers like churches, mosques, houses and hotels are destroyed during ethnic/religious crises	6.6	1.9	60.7	37.4	3.64	.519	
	Grand Mean					3.56	.497	

The table presented above, 67.3% of the respondents strongly agreed, 27.2% agreed, 5.3% strongly agreed while 5.6% disagreed, the research thus revealed majority of the respondents tend towards agreement that social activities such as marriages, sport and so on are hampered during ethnic or religious crises. 71% of the respondents strongly agreed, 29% agreed, 6.4% strongly disagreed while 6.2% disagreed respectively. It thus revealed that people are intimidated where they are minority during and after ethnic or religious crises. 5.2% of the respondents strongly agreed, 41.2% agreed, 61.7% strongly disagreed and 38.3% disagreed respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents tends towards agreement with the statement in the study that religious activities are negatively affected during ethnic or religious crises. 5.3% of the respondents strongly agreed, 21.1% agreed, 58.9% strongly disagreed and 41.1% disagreed respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents tend towards agreement with the statement that large numbers of people are forced to abandon their houses during ethnic or religious crises. 60.7% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 37.4% agreed, 6.6% strongly disagreed and 1.9% disagreed respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents tends towards agreement with the statement in the study that social centres, churches, mosques, houses and hotels are often destroyed as a result of ethnic or religious crises. Based on the above and with particular reference to the grand mean of 3.56 and grand standard deviation of 0.497, it is clear that a preminent number of the respondents believes that ethno religious crises affects social life in the aforementioned states in this study.

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of Responses on Ethno Religious Crises and Economic Effects

	ETHNO RELIGIOUS CRISES AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS	Level of Agreement (%) (n=121)					Average	
		SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	
6	High cost of living is experienced during and after ethnic or religious crises	28.0	39.3	21.5	11.2	4.84	.963	
7	Loss of properties is experienced during ethnic or religious crises	28.0	29.0	29.0	14.0	4.29	1.028	
8	Ethnic or religious crises bring about hunger and poverty	38.3	31.8	13.1	16.8	4.41	.921	
9	Investors are prevented from coming to a place during ethnic or religious crises	22.4	57.9	19.6	14.2	4.97	.651	
10	There is poor patronage of buyers which reduces profit during ethnic religious crises	26.2	36.4	20.6	11.2	3.54	1.389	
	Grand Mean					4.35	0.911	

The table presented above, 28% of the respondents strongly agreed, 39.3% agreed, 21.5% strongly agreed while 11.2% disagreed, the research thus revealed majority of the respondents tend towards agreement that high cost of living experienced during and after ethnic or religious crises. 28% of the respondents strongly agreed, 29%

agreed, 29% strongly disagreed while 14% disagreed respectively. It thus revealed that loss of property is experienced during ethnic or religious crises. 53.7% of the respondents strongly agreed, 31.8% agreed, 13.1% strongly disagreed and 16.8% disagreed respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents tends towards agreement with the statement in the study that ethnic or religious crises bring about hunger and poverty. 22.4% of the respondents strongly agreed, 57.9% agreed, 19.6% strongly disagreed and 14.2% disagreed respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents tend towards agreement with the statement that investors are prevented from coming to a place during ethnic or religious crises. 26.2% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 36.4% agreed, 20.6% strongly disagreed and 11.2% disagreed respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents tends towards agreement with the statement that there is poor patronage of buyers in markets due to mistrust which reduces profit during and after ethnic religious crises. Based on the above and with particular reference to the grand mean of 4.35 and grand standard deviation of 0.911, it is clear that a preeminent number of the ethno religious crises has economic effects in Taraba state in this study.

Discussion of Findings

This section presents key findings from the statistical analyses that was carried out and contextualize these findings using cognate studies on ethno-religious conflicts and socioeconomic development. Based on the result shown in the above table, the first objective and hypothesis of the study ascertain the level at which ethno-religious conflicts and socioeconomic development affected the Taraba state.

It was observed that during conflict years, there was a decline in the level of agricultural investment/yield, decline in income levels of the people of the area, and increased level of social and residential segregation and damages to lives and property worth millions". The resultant effects of these are high level of poverty and unemployment, particularly to youths. The result of this study was in line with the findings of Okolie-Osemene (2015) opined that the major cause of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has to do with the allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalization, nepotism, bigotry and failure of religious leaders. This is so because there is no complete agreement on how wealth, power and status are to be shared among individuals and groups. There is also no agreement on how to effect necessary changes and reforms because different groups and individuals have diverse interests in which case, some groups will have their aims met, while others will not.

The overall findings supported by Adesiyan & Ojuola (2012), there is relationship among conflicts, ethnicity, religious and socio-economic development in this study. Ethnicity has always come to façade as a tool for selection and mobilization exclusively when discovered impalpable political ideology to drive government. It is also veritable tool to trap economic power. When a politician fails, it is commonplace for such politician to incite the ethnic nationality into believing they are being marginalized, thus provoking national crisis.

Conflict theory seems to be suitable to this study, in the sense that, the theories have helped to further illuminate the results obtained from the investigation. Conflict theory of Karl Marx are capable of providing an insight into the ethno religious crises as one element of government systems and shed light on the relationship between socio-economic development and ethno religious conflicts and the attainment of the objectives of the. The theory is based upon the view that the fundamental causes of ethno-religious crisis are the social and economic forces that operates within society. The theory is also relevant in explaining ethnic conflict in Taraba State because ethnicity is seen as the most basic and politically salient feature of identity for Nigerians. This argument is based on the premise that in their competitive and non-competitive contexts, Nigerians tend to define themselves in terms of ethnic affinities as opposed to other identities, such as social class. Conflict theorists are of the view that there are groups in the society that have different interests.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, based on the findings, it is believed that ethno-religious conflicts cause hindrance to social life, loss of economic sources of livelihood and psychological trauma. It is quite evident that ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria have fueled insecurity, violence and have succeeded in driving Nigeria into further poverty and reduce socio economic development in Taraba state. Nigeria is now labeled one of the poorest countries of the world despite its abundant human and material resources. The crises has further succeeded in driving away most investors from Nigeria and existing ones have since folded and settled in other more secured African countries. Billions of naira that meant to develop and establish industries, infrastructures and schools has been diverted towards fighting ethno – religious conflicts, insurgency and militancy. It is firmly believed that more reliance on mediation and dialoguing, especially at the grass-root levels would go a long way in curbing this turbulent societal menace in Nigeria.

Besides, ethno religious conflicts brings about disruption of social lives of Christians and Muslims and destruction of worship centers, revealed reduction of economic resources and properties of individual families which bring about loss of livelihood. It is concluded in this study that based on the results of the hypotheses tested the study concluded that there is nexus between socio economic development and ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba State. The state of insecurity in the aforementioned state has become so enormous and has attracted the attention of international community. The nation has continued to come under series of violence, thousands of human lives are lost and properties destroyed on daily basis. In this study, it is argued that there is high level of religious intolerance in the country due to high level of illiteracy and poverty with unquantifiable impact on social economic activities. This study acknowledged that federal and state governments, civil society, religious groups and leaders and communities have responded to the different manifestations of this conflict in a variety of ways, but solutions to ethnic conflict can be achieved through a variety of efforts.

Based on the above findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were raised in this study. Both federal, state governments and religion leaders both Muslim and Christian should develop other strategies like external assistance to take full account of the political, ethnic and religious dynamics in order to reduce ethno-religion conflicts and the occurrence of the phenomenon in Taraba state. There is need to create room for inter-ethnic and interfaith dialogue, this will promote and protect the rights of all citizens irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class and age and preventing insecurity and Federal, state, and local governments should address the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, in order to reduce conflict in Taraba State. To do that, government should design and implement a community-centered program on disarmament that focused on improving community security.

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