

Nextier POLICY WEEKLY Vol.2 Issue 18 June 3-9, 2019



North-East: Restoring Social Cohesion

Policy Recommendations

- 1. There is need for a reaffirmation of the social contract between the people and the state.
- 2. There is need for a concerted promotion of secular ideology.
- Opportunistic behaviours should be criminalised and publicly condemned.
- 4. There is need for a genuine commitment to poverty alleviation.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

For further discussion of pragmatic implementation of the recommendations, please contact



www.nextierspd.com info@nextierspd.com +234 701 002 7301

The brutal campaign of violence executed by Boko Haram insurgents has elicited various explanations from scholars, analysts and commentators. While some pundits have underscored the role of Islamic jihadism in the insurgency (Adesoji, 2010), others have castigated violent political mobilisation (lyekekpolo, 2019). A third strand of the burgeoning literature has blamed economic marginalisation as evidenced by increasing levels of unemployment and mass poverty (Akinola, 2015). Absent from the explanations is the role the breakdown of social contract has played in transforming the conflict. This edition of Nextier SPD Weekly interrogates how the breakdown of social bond or cohesion has triggered widespread violent insurgency in the North-East region of Nigeria.

As expounded by John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacque Rousseau, social contract refers to citizens' concession of their freedom for the benefits of 'living in a system governed by rules' (Adison and Murshed, 2006:138). Social contract has been interpreted to encompass both formal and informal rules of interaction in political, moral and economic spheres. To avoid

rebellion of the subjects who had conceded their rights to self-governance, rulers are expected to keep to the terms of the agreement and shun opportunistic behaviours which may be defined as 'taking advantage of others by unfair means' (Adison and Murshed, 2006:139). Social contract is not only entrenched in the European tradition, it is also found in Sunni Islam where the Caliph is expected to discharge his responsibilities to the people who have given him their allegiance (Abou, 2004).

The sovereignty of most modern-day governments is anchored on the social contract which emphasises reciprocity of duties and obligations between rulers and the ruled. To ensure a viable social contract, liberal democracies adhere to the rule of law in order to prevent arbitrariness by those entrusted with the machinery of government and also to drastically reduce opportunistic behaviours among them. As typical with most liberal democracies, Government of the United States implements several policies (such as Affirmative Action) to uphold the

social contract and minimise inequality. In the same manner, British government promotes a healthy social security to build trust in government thus deepening the political bond with the people. While these measures do not totally eradicate social conflicts, they go a long way to reduce radicalisation as well as channel social grievances through peaceful mechanisms of conflict resolution.

From her Independence in 1960, Nigeria has made unsuccessful in instituting a secular and cohesive state. Political and religious elites have promoted divisive religious enclaves between Muslims and Christians on the one hand, and ethnic enclaves between Northerners and Southerners on the other. Paradoxically, Northern elite have occupied the headship of the state more than members of other ethno-religious blocs. Yet, the region has remained worse off as reflected by poor human development indicators. Most parts of northern Nigeria consists of unemployed (and, in most cases, unemployable) youth and Almajirai who make a profession of alms solicitation (Imobighe, 2012). To this army of disadvantaged persons, trust in government has been eroded and social cohesion has lost its meaning (Jega, 2007).

Islamic religion has largely been effective in filling the vacuum created by insensitive governments. The Islamic practice of Zakat provides succour to many hopeless persons in northern Nigeria. Following these incentives, the religion has become attractive to most people neglected by the state. Puzzlingly, a large number of uneducated and unemployed persons have fallen into the hands of religious fanatics and conflict entrepreneurs who have socialised and brainwashed them into violence (Osumah, 2013). In Mubi, for example, street kids neglected by the state were recruited by Boko Haram members who gave them between ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 to join the insurgency (Hansen, 2016:88). Testimony by some of the arrested Boko Haram fighters indicate that they received as little as ₹5,000 to set schools ablaze and spy on government troops.

Rebuilding trust between the people and the state is a prerequisite for sustainable reconstruction and redevelopment of the region. Nextier SPD proposes the following ideas as effective start points in that effort:

- 1. There is need for a re-affirmation of the social contract between the people and the state. The power elite in the region need to reconnect with the people by utilising their common patrimony to promote public rather than self-interest. Social investment programmes should be designed to engender human capital development and poverty alleviation rather than avenues for political relevancy.
- 2. There is need for a concerted promotion of secular ideology. All progressive elements of the society such as professionals, intellectuals and traditional rulers should prevail on the governing elite to disengage from the politicisation of identity. They should be made to imbibe and promote the secular ideology of the Nigerian state to foster national integration.
- 3. Opportunistic behaviours should be criminalised and publicly condemned. The re-orientation of government officials and promotion of public interest will undoubtedly result in transparency and accountability which will drastically reduce the level of corruption. For example, all highprofile corruption cases involving elected and appointed public officials, should be given national coverage to demonstrate the willingness of the state to take charge.
- 4. There is need for a genuine commitment to poverty alleviation. The promotion of public interest will ensure effective utilisation of common patrimony and a promotion of egalitarian society. Poverty alleviation programmes or social investment programmes should be planned to meet the needs of the targeted local population. Therefore, conceptualisation of such programmes require contributions from direct beneficiaries.

A re-affirmation of a viable social contract in northern Nigeria will not only promote post-conflict healing, it will also instil civility, tolerance, selflessness and peaceful resolution of disputes. This is not an easy process but it is an essential one. It can be achieved through a re-affirmation of the social contract, commitment to secular state, criminalisation of opportunistic behaviours that lead to corruption and worsening of socio-economic outcomes for the region.

References

Abou El Fadl (2004). Islam and the Challenge of Democracy, Princeton, Princeton University Press
Adesoji, A. (2010). "The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria", Africa Spectrum 4 (2), 95-108
Adison Tony and Masoob Murshed (2006). "The Social Contract and Violent Contrict" in Helen Yanacopulous and Joseph Hanlon (eds.) Civil War, Civil Peace, Oxford: James Currey, 137-163
Akinola, O. (2015). "Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Between Islamic Fundamentalism, Politics and Poverty", African Security 8 (1), 1-29. Imobighe Thomas (2012). "Addressing Sectarian Violence in Nigeria" in T.A. Imobighe and S.I. Ebohon (eds.) Themes and Issues in Nigerian Governance and Politics, Kuru: National Institute for Policy

and Strategic Studies Press
Iyekepolo, Oghosa Wisdom (2019). "The Political Process of Boko Haram Insurgency Onset: A Political Relevance Model", Critical Studies on Terrorism doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2019.1617654