Building peace in a divided state of Nigeria: The role of counselling in ensuring unity and national development in the country

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ABSTRACT

There are different crises in Nigeria ranging from ethnic-religious crisis to agitation for resource control/break-up of the country, but the religious crisis especially the recent Boko Haram insurgency has attracted international attention and concern. The fallouts of these crises are threatening the country's unity and national development. Based on the foregoing, this paper examines the prospect of building peace in Nigeria as a divided state leveraging on the roles of counselling in ensuring unity and national development. The paper adopts a survey research method and the use of self-developed questionnaire for data collection. The finding shows that Nigerians have strong confidence in the efficacy of counselling in solving personal problems and that counselling could ensure National unity and development in Nigeria. Thus, to build a united Nigeria, the paper recommends that counselling clinics should be established across the country for students and politicians and all other citizens of Nigeria. This policy recommendation should also be backed up with enabling law.

Keyword: Divided society, national identity, Nigeria, counselling.

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INTRODUCTION

A popular saying - "united we stand, divided we fall" - supports the assertion "unity is strength and division is punishment". These statements depict the life of the people living in a divided society like Nigeria, because different scholars have described Nigeria as a divided society. Horowitz (1985) in Okpanachi (2009) established that one of the most challenging aspects of divided societies is that they face particular obstacle in maintaining peace. He also added that "from a similar point of view, a plural society is a society divided by what Harry Eckstein (1966) calls "segmental cleavages." He says: "This exists where political divisions follow very closely, and especially concern lines of objective social differentiation, especially those particularly salient in a society." Segmental cleavages may have religious, linguistic, regional, cultural, racial, or ethnic dimensions. In essence, a divided (that is, plural) society is defined by the coexistence of incompatible institutional systems and,

therefore, force must be used to maintain order. Okpanachi's view was buttressed by Osaghae and Suberu (2005) who described Nigeria as one of the most deeply divided states in Africa because of its complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and instability.

Therefore, this paper attempts to look into the divided society of Nigeria by analyzing the causes of the disunity, crises and conflicts. Consequently, the role of counselling in ensuring unity and National development in the country is studied in the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The divided state of Nigeria: The history so far

"Nigeria is the most populous countries in Africa with a

diverse cultural heritage. The country has a population of about 140 million with not less than 250 ethnic groups, three (3) of which are the majority groups. The majority groups include the Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Yoruba speaking people in the South/West and the Igbo speaking people in the Eastern part. These groups, because of their opportunistic positions have been seen as consistently dominating the political as well as economic scene before and after the attainment of independence in 1960 and this has led to agitations for state creation by the marginalized groups; however, the more states were created, the more the complaints of marginalization and inequality by new minorities against the new majorities in each state" (Abdullahi and Saka, 2007). Consequently, the proliferation of ethno-religious and political turbulence in the country is therefore necessitated on one hand by cultural, communal and religious differences and on the other hand by fear of domination nursed by the minority groups.

Is diversity synonymous to crisis and conflict in a divided society?

The question one needs to ask is that: are differences in culture/tradition or religion an automatic cause of conflicts and crises in a community? This question was answered by different scholars among which are: Osaghae and Suberu (2005) established the fact that a 'state is diverse in terms of culture, traditions, religious and ethnic groupings does not suggest that conflict is indispensable, but when mobilization around identities occurs or they are politicized only then they constitute the bases for conflict. There are evidences of diverse countries in the world (diversity in terms of ethnic, cultural and religious) that have taken advantage of their diversity to better the lots of their citizenry and enjoy a reasonable level of peace and stability. Notable among these countries are Tanzania, Switzerland, India, Belgium, and in fact the United States. Supporting this argument was, Okpanachi (2009). While contrary to these assertions, others have argued that diversity is necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict. In other words, the very fact that a country has different religious, ethnic, communal, and racial groups does not make division and conflicts inevitable. And for that matter, empirical evidence shows that division and conflict are not dependent on the degree of diversity, as some of the most diverse countries (for example, Switzerland, Belgium, Malaysia and Tanzania) enjoy relative peace and stability, while some of the least diverse are the most unstable or violent (for example, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and, perhaps, Sri Lanka) (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). Another fact is that even in cases where conflict takes place in least diverse societies such as Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia, Northern Ireland, Cote d'Ivoire and Rwanda, identity mobilization appears to be an important element in many of these conflicts'.

Major causes of disunity in Nigeria

There are numerous and various causes of crises and conflicts in Nigeria according to different scholars and professional authors. Some of these causes include:

First, it is the challenge of Identity. Identity in my opinion is the distinctiveness and uniqueness of any group or individual. Osaghee and Suberu (2005) broadly defined identity as any group attributes that provides recognition or definition, reference, affinity, coherence and meaning for individual members of the group, acting individually or collectively. Generally, the basic identities are ethnicity, religion, regionalism, class, gender and youth. These different identities contribute to conflict in Nigeria as stated by scholars.

Aleyomi (2012) established that 'ethno-religious crisis does not only undermine the effectiveness of federalism to foster national unity and security, but also threatens the stability of the federation and sustainable development. This is connected with inherent contradictions in the dispositions and effort of ethnic and religious leaders of the country'.

Furthermore, Abdullai and Saka (2007) added that another cause of the of ethnic crisis in Nigeria is colonialism that was boosted by military dictatorship and strengthened by the contradictions embedded in the Nigerian federalism. This has led to not less than one hundred politically, ethnically and religiously motivated conflicts in Nigeria. This opinion was also supported by Alubo (2004) and Halliru (2012). Moreover, Ojie and Ewhrudjakpor (2009) confirmed that ethnic diversity has hindered the sustainable development of the culture of peace and equity in Nigeria.

Adesoji and Alao (2009) emphasized that the indigenes-settlers' syndrome is one of the causes of crises in Nigeria like in many societies in the world.

Also, the politicization of identities is another cause. Take religion for instance. Ideally, under the Nigerian constitution, governments should be neutral in religious matters according to Section 10 of the constitution which affirms the essential secularity of the Nigerian federation. What takes place rather is the mixing of religion with politics. For example, President Obasanjo seems to lead the way of politicizing religion when he described himself as a "born again" Christian and organized a big evangelistic meeting as part of his inaugural ceremonies. He then went farther to build a Christian chapel in the presidential villa and appointed a Baptist chaplain for the chapel (Obadare, 2006:669). As Ojo (2004) confirmed that, 'Christian Pentecostal leaders collectively "adopted Olusegun Obasanjo as a symbol of Christian control of the political sphere, believing that he was an answer to prayers about the ending of oppression and mis-governance, and the ending of a Muslim political dominance."The perception of the overbearing influences of Christianity on Obasanjo's Presidency, elicited fears of domination from Muslim leaders in the North; the

nepotistic nature of politics in Nigeria made such fear reasonable. President Obasanjo's example is reflected in most states of the federation where state governors build mosques and churches in government house, sponsor pilgrimages to Mecca and Israel; publish religious sermons in the newspapers that are offensive to the other religion, and make comments that are intolerant' (Bianchi, 2004).

Related to the above is the question of social justice. The feeling of people on social injustice is another problem threatening the Nigeria's unity and National development. This made people feel that institutions such as central and local governments behave in discriminatory or at best unpredictable ways and no longer trust them to come with fair and balanced policies. People then resort to violence to ensure justice… (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

Poverty is also seen as another cause of crises in Nigeria. "Poverty in Nigeria has assumed the moral character of war, and this is what reflected in much of the violence in this country" (Human Rights Watch, 2006).For instance, the resurgence in northern Nigeria could also partly be explained by the failure of politics in Nigeria to produce well enough social goods, maintain security and welfare, and ensure justice. Given this situation, people then looked up to the rule of piety rather than policy for solution to social anomie (Amadi, 2003).

The Nigerian crises and conflicts are also affected by international environment. For instance, one of the effects of the "war on terror" in the aftermath of the Sept 11 2001 attack has a renewed polarization between Christianity and Islam, at least a deepening of mutual suspicion and mistrust. The Global perceptions that the U.S. is anti-Islam and hostile to Muslim nations are echoed in Africa. For example, in the recently published Pew Global Attitudes Survey only 32% of Nigerian Muslims, (down from 38% in 2003), have a favorable view of the U.S., compared with 89% of Christians (Ruby and Shah, 2007). The post-9/11 US war on terrorism and corresponding increase in Israel onslaught against Palestinians, were therefore all perceived as part of Western, and therefore Christian agenda of de-Islamising the world.

Finally, the role of the media is also important in our understanding of the disunity in Nigeria. A good example was the events surrounding the Miss World contest in November 2002. The conflict was sparked by a comment by a fashion columnist for the Southern newspaper.

The roles of counselling in ensuring unity and national development

Omoegun (2012) defined counselling as a helping profession, a relationship of trust between the counsellor and the client. It is an applied psychology, a psychological process of helping people/individual, students or clients to cope with various life situations.

Furthermore, American Counselling Association (1997) as quoted in Olusakin (2011) also defines counselling as the application of mental health, psychological, or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioural or systemic intervention strategies, that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology. It can therefore be concluded that counselling is a profession of different strategies that ensures people's wellness, rounded developments and make them to cope with various life situations (like when in crises and conflicts) in order to achieve peace, harmony and unity in the human society.

In the recent times, the fallout of different seminars, conferences, and workshop have proposed many programmes geared towards ensuring Unity and National Development on the recommendations of scholars and counsellors. For instance, Olusakin and Nwolisa (2012) concluded in their study on counselling strategies for addressing militancy and social restiveness in Nigeria that there should be counselling sessions with the youth. These sessions should not only focus on solution but also address understanding the problem and being empowered to make future decisions. They moreover stated that the task of nation building must begin with an elaborate programme and an honest commitment to social reconstruction and moral; revolution as their first step towards peaceful co-existence or else…end once again in disaster.

Furthermore Modebelu and Okafor (2012) in a research established that counselling would help the youth in cultivating cooperation, loyalty and respect for the leaders; help in handling issues that concern the Nation without prejudice; and make the youth to be law abiding citizens in Nigeria. This made the authors to recommend a regular counselling programme for the youth in other to learn effective followership qualities.

Denga (2012) also suggested an urgent National Dialogue Agenda for Nigeria at all levels (Community, Local, State and Federal Government), however, the agenda should be counselling oriented and National Security focused.

Also, Dada et al. (2013) suggested the following in their work on religious bigotry: that special seminars and workshop on religious tolerance, group counselling session should be organized for religious leaders of both Christians and Muslims, parents, teachers, students in Nigerian schools annually; Government should be sensitive and not being religiously bias in its policies; and that religion counselling clinic should be established in each religious house and supervised by a professional counsellor.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The research design used in this study is descriptive survey. It is aimed at investigating the counselling roles in ensuring National Development and Unity in Nigeria. The population of the study

included all students in Tertiary institutions in Lagos and the sample consisted of 200 students spread across all higher Institutions of Learning in Lagos State, while simple random sampling was used to obtain the sample. Self constructed questionnaire that was titled 'Building peace in a divided state of Nigeria: the roles of counselling in ensuring National Development and Unity Questionnaire' was the main instrument used in collecting data. Out of the two hundred (200) questionnaires that were distributed, a hundred and thirty-three (133) returned filled. It was analyzed with the use of Statistical Package for Social Scientists (IBM SPSS 21)

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test was conducted which showed the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.922; therefore, the reliability level is very high. The questionnaire was divided into three sections; Section A for the Respondents' Demographic Characteristics, while Sections B and C were for the items of the questionnaire. It is however worthy of notice here that the questionnaire was designed in a five Likert Scale, which would be restructured under analysis as three. On one hand, Strongly Agreed (SA) and Agreed (A) were represented as Agreed, on the other hand, Strongly Disagreed (SD) and Disagreed (D) were represented as Disagreed, while Undecided remains same. These were achieved with the use of Statistical Package for Social Scientists (IBM SPSS 21).

RESULTS

Respondents' demographic characteristics

Here, we present the respondents' demographic characteristics using frequency distribution tables (Tables 1 to 5).

Table 6 shows the Nigerian tertiary institution students' awareness about counselling profession. The majority (56.4%) of the total respondents was aware of the counselling profession and believed in its efficacy in solving personal problems. More so, they at one time or the other visited a counsellor, 40.6% of them were undecided, while the remaining 3.0% of them disagreed with this. It thus showed that there is high level of awareness about counselling and its efficacy in solving personal problems among youth. (Table 7)

DISCUSSION

From the results, it showed that youth have a high level of awareness about counselling and its efficacy in solving personal problems in Nigeria. This supports the assertion of Akong and Onete (2013) which established that everybody should realize that Guidance and Counselling is the cornerstone of a realizable and meaningful educational policy and growth. Thus, professional guidance counsellors should be involved in the formulation and implementation of educational policies.

Also, the finding revealed that the counselling profession plays its role in national development and unity in Nigeria. This conforms with Akong and Onete (2013) in their study. It moreover, supports the suggestion of Dada et al. (2013) that established different counselling services for adolescents in secondary school

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by sex.

		Frequency	Percent
	Male	69	51.9
Valid	Female	64	48.1
	Total	133	100.0

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by age.

		Frequency	Percent
	15 - 24 years	105	78.9
Valid	25 - 34 years	28	21.1
	Total	133	100.0

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by marital status.

		Frequency	Percent
	Single	130	97.7
Valid	Married	3	2.3
	Total	133	100.0

Table 4. Distribution of respondents by institution.

		Frequency	Percent
	University	85	63.9
Valid	Polytechnic	23	17.3
	College of Education	25	18.8
	Total	133	100.0

Table 5. Distribution of respondents by ethnicity.

		Frequency	Percent
	Yoruba	108	81.2
	Hausa	2	1.5
Valid	Igbo	11	8.3
	Others	12	9.0
	Total	133	100.0

in order to stop hooliganism and aggression among youth. As it also confirms Modebelu and Okafor (2012) stance that counselling would imbibe in the youth cooperation, loyalty and respect for the leaders; help them in handling issues that concern the Nation without prejudice; and make the youth to be law abiding citizens in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the Nigerian youths and students are optimistic that counselling can play some roles in ensuring Unity and National development in Nigeria; this is supported by 82% of the respondents. This corroborates Olusakin and Nwolisa (2012)'s stand of

Table 6. Awareness of the respondents about counselling profession.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	3.0
	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	54	40.6
	Agree	75	56.4
	Total	133	100.0

Table 7. Perception on the counselling roles in national development and unity in Nigeria.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Disagree	6	4.5
	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	18	13.5
	Agree	109	82.0
	Total	133	100.0

suggesting counselling sessions with the youth in their study on counselling strategies for addressing militancy and social restiveness in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study investigated the level of awareness of the Nigerian youth about counselling with or with having studied any counseling course in any school. More so, it established the perception of the Nigerian youth on the roles of counselling in ensuring National development and Unity in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this paper recommends that there should be an effective and functional counselling clinic in all primary, post primary and tertiary institutions for students and in each local government for non students, then at the state house and federal secretariats for civil servants and public office holders. It is to make accessible for the youth counseling programmes because they ascertained its efficacy in solving problems

There should be National Security Counselling agenda that should be powered by the Federal, State and Local government with the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) to solve and ensure National Unity and Development.

Counselling profession should be recognized and supported by the provisions of law to forestall the challenge of intruders and non professionals from bastardising the profession and giving evil guidance and counselling.

The Counselling Association of Nigeria should be up and doing and roll out counselling remedies for all national problems both in print and electronic media.

There should be emphasis on career counselling in order to ameliorate unemployment and promote employability of the Nigerian youth in other for them to be fully engaged. This supports Abdullahi and Saka (2007)'s solution for the Nigerian crises and conflicts. He said: ''… good governance, accountability, poverty and unemployment reduction and restructuring of federalism are important issues to be addressed in order to solve permanently the problem of ethno-religious and political conflicts that have continued to threaten Nigeria democracy''.

There should be counselling for peaceful coexistence between all ethnic groups, most especially counselling to stop selfishness and the abuse of power, indigeneship, and religion, ethnic for personal gains.

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