

The Role of Youths in Peace Building: A Response to Insurgency in the Northeastern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the role of youths in peace-building, as a response to Boko Haram insurgent activities in the northeastern Nigeria. The paper used secondary data and discussions of the findings have been made qualitatively. The finding of the study indicated that the northeast geopolitical region has been a peaceful region, notably Kanem Borno Empire since before the colonial rule. This was possible because of the role played by the rulers of that era in promoting peace and peaceful coexistence, such as establishing the concept of unity of God (none to be worshipped but Allah alone), rule with justice as Allah and His messenger gave judgment, by the Book (Quran) and the Sunnah (Hadith), and not to oppress any of the servants of Allah, as Allah averts oppression from the two worlds, etc. However, there were some emerging challenges to peace as a result of Boko Haram insurgency in the region, such as unleashed great fear and suffering upon individuals, displaced great number of people causing an enormous economic burden upon the society and total destruction of educational system where students were been killed and schools were destroyed. The finding also indicated youth have played important role in peace building. The paper gave some recommendations on the expected roles of youth in peace building in the North East, view to proffering solutions and relevant policy options that could be implemented, for a strong, lasting, beneficial, acceptable, strategy that will eradicate violence, social conflicts and other vices which constitute threat to our peaceful coexistence.

KEYWORDS: *Insurgency; Peace and Peaceful Coexistence; Role; Youth*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since Kanem Borno Empire maintained the philosophy of governance based on Islamic perspectives, purposeful, dynamic and time tested. The caliphate succeeded because it was a strong cohesive, honest, result oriented leadership, which perused a policy of integration, unity, peace and harmony. In a multi-racial, multi-ethnic rooted in a common environment. The caliphate also served as a terminus and commercial center of the Trans-Sahara trade route, which existed since sixth (6th) century. The road was described by scholars and historians as the most peaceful, secured and heavily travelled. This has not only contributed to the patronage, fame, commercial activities, but also to peace and peaceful coexistence among the society. The culture which is maintained, uphold and cherished by the society. As a

result, the whole people of the region were rated as the most tolerant, peaceful, united and harmonious society in the country, before the unfortunate outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency.

Therefore North-Eastern youths should unite themselves in order to achieve the benefit of peace and peaceful coexistence against the decade-old insurgency which rendered the region insecure for the indigenes and visitors coming for business investment and other inter-state political and economic intercourses. Peace building focuses on fostering sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and inequalities; create transparent and accountable governance, the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law and the promotion of a

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culture of peace. Peace building according to Brinkman (2006) is transforming from a condition or situation of violence to more political, socio-economic equality, justice, fairness as well as security. Peace building is concerned with reducing violence.

There are studies on the roles of youths and peace building process, such as CLEEN Foundation's (2014) study on youths, radicalisation and affiliation with insurgent groups in northern Nigeria; Brickman's (2006) study on steps for peace making manual for peace building and conflict management; and Abdullahi *et al.*'s (2016) paper on the factors responsible for youth radicalisation in Nigeria, but none of them focused on the northeastern Nigeria. especially on the role of youths in peace building, particularly in respect to the insurgent activities by Boko Haram in the northeastern Nigeria. To fill the above research gap, this article will investigate the role of youths play in peace building, as a response to Boko Haram insurgent activities in the northeastern Nigeria.

The article is divided into seven sections, with this introduction being the first section; section two deals with conceptual clarification, where the concepts of peace and peaceful coexistence, insurgency, role and youths are discussed; section three discussed peace and peaceful coexistence in Kanem Borno Empire before the colonial rule; section four identifies the challenges to peace as a result of insurgency in the North East; section five examined the role of youth in peace building; section six provided some recommendations on the roles youth in peace building in the North East; and, lastly, section seven concludes the article.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

This section deals with the conceptual clarification, where the concepts of peace and peaceful coexistence, insurgency, role and youths are discussed.

2.1. The Concept of Peace and Peaceful Coexistence

The concept of peace has been defined in a various ways by various scholars. The word peace is drive from the Latin word (PAX) which means treaty or an agreement to end war, dispute and conflict between or among people or nations. The Webster International Dictionary also defines peace as "freedom" civil glamour and confusion. According to Howard (n.d) Peace is "the maintenance of an orderly and just society. Ibeam (2006) describe peace as activities geared towards reducing conflicts and increasing development within specific societies and the wider community. The term peace is also a practice of non-

violence or describes as society, given situation or relationship that is operating harmoniously without violence or conflict. Peaceful coexistence therefore is the absence of hostility, or existence of healthy interpersonal or international relationship.

Peaceful coexistence is also described as society in which diversity is recognized for its potentialities, equality is pursued and maintained, independence between different groups is recognized, use of weapons to address conflict is discouraged and avoided. The peaceful coexistence incorporates equality, diversity and independence, a relationship across differences built on mutual trust and respect. Peace therefore, is safety in matters relating to social or economic welfare, the acknowledgement of equality and fairness in political relationship, peace time and conflict free environment. Peace and peaceful coexistence is the most important and dependable parameter for the operational success of human, societal, socio political development, peace advocate non-violence, as violence is incapable of improving any society, in any situation, that is why violence is rejected and unacceptable because it doesn't bring about peace. Peace unarguably is the most treasured and great asset of a man. Conflict, Crisis, Insurgency on the other hand is the greatest threat to peace. Peace has to do with being in cordial relations with the people around us, whether a small community or a large society (Adegbam, 2020:59).

2.2. The Concept of Insurgency

According to Jamri (2020), insurgency is the unequal warfare between the state and non-state actors, in which the latter used confrontational, subversive tactics to challenge the state authority. USG COIN Guide's (2009) defined insurgency can be defined as "the organised use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region" (p. 6). In his own view, Schaefer (n.d. p.3) says, an insurgency should be considered "as an organised movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict" (p. 3).

As observed by Jamri (2020), in many cases, the insurgents have been easily identifiable national groups, for instance Indonesians, Vietnamese, Tunisians, Algerians, Congolese, Angolans, but this does not alter the strategically important fact that they were challenging a local ruling power controlling the existing administration, police, and armed forces. Thus, Galula (1964, as cited in Jamri, 2020) explains that a revolutionary war is primarily an internal conflict, although external influences seldom fail to bear upon it.

2.3. Concept of Role

Role is function in a particular situation, or part played by the youth in facilitating the achievement of conducive or enabling environment for peace and peaceful coexistence. Role is *a behavior expected of someone who holds a particular status*. Role is the dynamic aspect of one's status: an individual holds a status and performs a role (Virtual University of Pakistan, 2006). There are a number of other aspects of role like role set. Since we occupy many statuses simultaneously therefore we perform multiple roles. The performance of such multiple roles related to a status is referred to as role set. *Role set refers to a number of roles attached to a single status*. You have a status of student, think of how many roles do you have to perform (Virtual University of Pakistan, 2006). In this context, the roles of youths transcend studentship or membership in clubs and associations, but also sacrifice in peaceful processes and achieving peaceful coexistence in their respective societies (Northeast Geo-political Zone in this case).

2.4. The Concept of Youth

The term "youth" is a contested concept. It is defined using biological, psychological, socio-cultural and political approaches but the most common method of defining the concept across these areas is the emphasis being placed on age. For instance the political/legal connotation sees youth as an individual who by virtue of age (18 years) is eligible for voting and other constitutional rights and/or responsibilities (Umar, 2010). There are definitions of youth that focused on the economic life of the individual as evident in person's preparation for, and engagement with, pay work, thereby becoming economically independent; anyone in the labour force fell within the category of youth population. Some definitions make use of age bracket with no specific reference to biological, psychological, political or economic factor (Mukhtar *et al.* 2015).

Thus, youth varies across time and space, as well as within societies. Youth has an important gender dimension: Boys and Girls, youth also is define as a process of transition from childhood to adulthood. According to United Nations, (UN) youth is the age between 15 and 24 while the convention on right of the child (CRC) defines a child as everyone under the age of 18. Similarly the African charter on right and welfare of the child (ACRWC) defines a child as every human being under the age of 18 (UNDP Bureau for crisis prevention and recovery NY 10017 USA Page 16).

3. Peace and Peaceful Coexistence in Kanem Borno Empire before the Colonial Rule

Kanem Borno before the colonial rule, historically, an established Islamic polity. Society with articulated value system solidly grounded on Islamic perspective and knowledge. This has undoubtedly created a favorable atmosphere of peace and peaceful coexistence, understanding and cooperation among settlers and the main stream indigenes of the community. Kanem Borno Dar-Salam, the home of peace has been an acknowledged Islamic State for over one thousand years. Kanem Borno has touched the lives and livelihood of many states and nations in the African continent, in the past, present and continue to do so for many years to come. The Empire has provided political and intellectual leadership to various city states in Africa South of Sahara. It was rated and regarded as one of the four super powers of the then Islamic world, others being, Baghdad, Egypt and Qayrawan which gave birth to political, Islamic, intellectual and commercial leadership of the Muslim world.

Kanem Borno Empire served as a commercial center, a trade terminus, transit camp for travelers and a crossroad for the Trans-Saharan trade activities as far back as 6th century. As a center of Islamic intellectual activities for centuries, it has attracted various interest groups with commercial, Agricultural, Educational, religious connections, especially to passers-by to Makka for pilgrimage. The rulers pursued an aggressive policy of unification, power, diplomacy and Islamization to create a strong United Kingdom of Kanem Borno. To achieve these, to some extends, the leadership then, ensured and instilled the promotion of unity, peace and peaceful coexistence, by running an inclusive and participatory Government. This to date earn them honor and admiration throughout and the common slogan of home of peace, became a household identity of the region, hence turn out to be the most peaceful environment in the country.

The Kingdom survived series of challenges and crises due to wider economic, socio-political conditions, but still, maintained the philosophy of government based on Sharia, in injunctions with the Quran and Hadith, Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as contained in their code of conduct (MUNE) adopted in times of war and peace.

The rulers of that era made the following declarations:

1. To worship Allah only, Him alone who has no associate; And to obey Him and not attempt to defy Him;

2. To rule with justice as Allah and His messenger gave judgment, by the Book (Quran) and the Sunnah (Hadith);
3. Not to oppress any of the servants of Allah, as Allah averts oppression from the two worlds;
4. Not to betray Allah or His messenger or the faithful;
5. Not to cheat except in war, for war is deceit;
6. To support the religion and the Jihad in the way of Allah;
7. Not to desert the line of march in war;
8. To hold fast to the rope of Allah all together (united) and not to be afraid or disseminated;
9. To call people to Allah by wisdom (education) and good advice;
10. To do our utmost to be righteous both outwardly and inwardly peace.

The above pledge (MUNE), as described by Alkali (2013:18) as “Modern day time’s equivalent to a national anthem that united and guided the Sayfawa rulers in their governance and military expeditions”. The Sayfawa rulers adopted a mild, integrative, participatory, inclusive mode of governance, both in terms of policy and in administration, rather than adopt coercive and extortionist mode that might not guarantee to manage territorial spread and longevity.” (Tijjani, 2013:110)”.
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4. Challenges to Peace and Peaceful Coexistence Due to Insurgency in the Northeast

Nigeria as nation and the north east in particular has continued to have it share of challenges to peace until recently the situation started improving but the crisis led to the plaguing socio-political, Economic, religious, ethnic and communal conflicts that continue to torment the region and the nation at large. Post insurgency is described as a society which was affected by aftermath of conflict or war situation, such society bedeviled by distraction, in the spheres of human endeavor left with devastated economy, shattered political and educational system, disunited and fragmented society. The North East insurgency has unleashed great fear and suffering upon individuals, displaced great number of people causing an enormous economic burden upon the society and total destruction of educational system where students were been killed and schools were destroyed.

Generally, most of the communities directly affected by the insurgency suffered serious humanitarian crisis ranging from mutual fear, violations of rules of law, tribal sentiments, distrust, violence and conflicts of various magnitudes, destructions of lives and

properties. Crisis and conflict regardless of their status or magnitude, have constituted a devastating impact on our peace and peaceful coexistence for over one thousand years, negative impact on our unity, which threatened our interdependence, trust and created tension and suspicion among our people.

This unfortunate situation paralyzed all our social, political, economic, educational and created unnecessary conflict rampant spread of unfounded rumor etc. These conflicts and crisis also led to enormous humanitarian consequences ranging from displacement of people from their domain to elsewhere as refugees, settled at IDP camps, markets Educational centers closed, schools were attacked and students were killed while towns and villages were ransack etc. These among others attracted increasing restoring law enforcement agencies in form of creating, restoring peace, purposely for peace keeping and civilian protection mission in our society.

Insurgency in general terms, especially in the North East sub-region has changed the politico-socio-economic and Educational landscape of the region, which gave the term peace and peaceful coexistence a new prominence, due to the existence of mutual fear, distrust, violation of rule of law, religious crises, tribal sentiments, political conflict, marginalization, high population growth rates, poverty, bad government policies etc. manifested themselves in violence and conflicts of various magnitude in the society Borno/Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi etc. the North East in particular and the nation at large.

5. The Role of Youth in Peace Building

Peace building is a complex task, all stakeholders ranging from the Ulama and religious leaders who were not only naturally involve in preaching peace or settlement of conflicts in the society, but spiritually pray for peace to reign. The traditional rulers, their institutions are known for keeping peace and conflicts resolutions in their domain. The politicians and state actors at local, state and federal levels, the security agencies, the military, the police, the air force, the navy and other para-military segments saddle with responsibility of providing security internally and externally. The civil society NGO’s whose membership covers an array of organizations are very useful in peace building activities. The international/regional organizations, the UN, AU, ECOWAS etc. facilitate the maintenance of peace regionally and internationally.

Professional groups/media, the communication channels or apparatuses involved in storing and dissemination information especially to the people by sensitizing public on the need to maintain peace and on the essentiality of peace building. While the

professional bodies groups academia, journalists, engineers, bankers, medical personnel, students' etc. To support peace initiation and actively involved in peace building in the society for effective peace building efforts people should come together and find a way of forging ahead in peace and its sustenance.

The role of youth in peace building, youth is the driving force for any national development for the youth to be used as tool for the nations development, they must be planned for by their parents on one hand the society and government on the other hand. Parents are expected to give their children adequate training, while government is expected to provide an enabling environment for the youth to earn their living. This is because, youth could be the most volatile when their energies are misdirected or misapplied. As youth people with limited, education and non or only few opportunities often provide fertile recruiting ground for parties to a conflict therefore lack of hope for the future can fuel disaffection with the society.

Therefore addressing the needs and appreciations of adolescence is an important aspect for long term prevention, strategy and resource for peace and conflict prevention. Peace building is a process of identifying and supporting those structures which will enhance, strengthen as well as solidify peace, to avoid a reversion into conflict. Peace building is about building an environment for negotiation, reconciliation, mutual understanding and compromise that allows for resolving conflict issues before it degenerates into violence and conflict.

Generally it has been accepted all over the world that the position of youth has been acknowledged as the agents of change. That's why there is always wisdom in making young growing youth to participate in development efforts in all facets of life including education, peace, security and our common future in our dear nation and globalized world. Of the over 200 million Nigerians population over 60% are youth, therefore youth should always be put into not only consideration while formulating governmental policies but should be part of the decision. Failure to consider them as rightly put by Adegami (2020:59) could mar the development activities of the state as it could lead to their restiveness.

Youth restiveness could be seen as their refusal to be controlled due to an unsatisfied stance to the unfavorable condition of the state. Especially negligence in planning for youth empowerment or unemployment when they have the basic qualification, ability and capability, unequal treatment, lack of basic education, etc. may lead to an upsurge in violence and conflicts like the cases of Boko Haram insurgency which led to killings of

several people and destruction of properties. An enduring peace can be obtained through the youth peace education, where groups, individuals and youth are involved in knowledge and skills acquisition, which will not only foster dialogue culture and understanding, but also encourage constructive skills to conflict resolution, nonviolent conflict resolution techniques etc. (Engdaw, 2013). This could be achieved through the proper enlightenment of citizens about their right as well as respecting other "Citizens" rights.

Therefore there is a serious need for government at all levels to engage youth in peace building, conflict prevention. As the constant rate of youth unemployment threaten the nation's security as youth are available for recruitment in armed and insurgent groups which may negatively affect the peace building and sustainable peace in Nigeria. Youth as leaders of tomorrow, the United Nations General Assembly of 17th December, 1999 endorsed the recommendation made by the world conference of ministers responsible for youth, declared youth as the agents of change. This is because the role of the youth is critical to the attainment of peace and peaceful societies, promotion of peaceful and sustainable development for building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The role of youth in peace building is very important as rightly observed by UN secretary general Ban Ki-Moon in 2015 "youth are untapped resources, waiting for empowerment to offer their contributions towards nations". All nations and international community have now realized, that, there is connection among youth, peace and security, there by inclusion of youth in to institutions and mechanism for conflict prevention, resolutions as well as for building sustainable peace. Today peace building receives particular attention globally especially in Nigeria and the North East sub-region, where the society pass through very unfortunate, serious, disastrous situation for the last decades. Peace building is an effective and important activity, because through peace building the roots of the conflict can be removed. Peace building, peace initiative, peace enforcement and peace-keeping can slow the momentum of the conflict or eradicate it. This is because peace building is the only way of stating the country or society on the road of gradual sustainable development.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's report 1992, on "An agenda for peace", defines peace building as "action to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. That is why (UNESCO 2013) indicated that peace can be maintain

and sustain through the inspiring culture of social interaction, values, attitude, behaviors, based on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy etc. all human rights, tolerance and solidarity that reject violence and endeavor to prevent conflicts by tackling the root causes to solve problems.

6. Recommendations on the Roles Youth in Peace Building in the North East

1. North East youth should initiate and workout modalities to develop a frame work for comprehensive sub-regional peace programmes to facilitate youth participation and involvement in peace building, reconciliation, reconstruction and stabilization efforts in the North East region. Youth should create enabling environment to work as a team with government and communities to sustain peaceful coexistence.
2. The Government and youth organizations to organize a youth platform to articulate and identify youth views, aspirations, concerns and the role they could play to promote peace, a mechanism for stability, Unity, reconciliation in the region.
3. Provide opportunities to use practical and live experience of the youth to enable enhance capacity building for youth to play a more practical role in peace building and get involve in peace process and dispute resolutions in the region. Especially in youth capacity building, empowerment, education, employment etc. This will also facilitate a shift from passive partnership to participatory partnership which will also alter the perception of the youth as sources of conflict to seeing them as resource for peace and development.
4. Youth should established North East youth peace center to encourage youth to exhibit their talents and facilitate partnership between them and international organizations, National, Local Government and other actors so that young people are seen as equal partner. This also provide the youth to initiate and innovate strategies to resolve and solve societal problems through capacity building opportunities, conferences, peace workshops, effective communication network, involving all categories of youth, student's, civil organizations, private individuals etc. Youth organizations consulting representatives of their broader communities and societies greatly assist peace building processes in general and not limited to youth specific issues.
5. North East youth should collaborate and cooperate with other youth organizations to

design peace projects and factor in to the existing measures to facilitate or implement prevention of crisis, encourage peace building efforts, so that peace is maintain and sustain for the peaceful coexistence in the society. As youth, you should always preach peace, unity, justice, freedom, equality, cooperation, understanding, sense of belonging, appreciating individual differences for mutual respect and human dignity.

6. Youth should also provide enabling environment to develop and upgrade youth skills and acquire knowledge that will make them lead. So that, they engage with peers, other stakeholders and communicate with international audiences for more support.
7. Youth should effectively facilitate engagement with diverse stakeholders, fundraising, grant writing, advocacy, need assessment, conflict resolution, conflict analysis, conflict management and mediation. So that youth at the grass root level could be included and can access resources for the implementation of the peace building activities. Because if youth do not have access to resource, food, decent shelter they can hardly contribute fully and effectively to peace building.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion youth must be seriously and effectively engaged, encouraged supported and allowed to be involved, participate in peace policy decision making of government at all levels and actively involved in peace education, culture of peace building maintenance, sustenance for national peace, cohesion and integration. Deliberate measures in confidence building for young individuals and youth organizations, local economic development, and promotion of youth entrepreneurship, establishment of youth volunteer center, with broad base programmes, ranging from peace radio programmes, focusing on peace building efforts, human right and social affairs, empowerment of internally displaced young women, through informal training, women right leadership and entrepreneurship. As the saying goes "Those who failed to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it" therefore, let's parley our experience of the past into our knowledge of our present, for the service of our society and nation at large.

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