
THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-VIOLENCE: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE, SECURITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The way in which violent reactions to socio-political issues is affecting development in Nigeria nowadays now necessitate that Nigerians from different social formations and ethno-religious backgrounds embrace an effective alternative mechanism of resolving social and political issues. The end result of violence is endless misery caused by the destruction of lives and properties. People are at cross-road today because of the catastrophe that religious and ethnic civil wars have always caused. Due to the ethnic and religious differences among Nigerians, Nigerians find it difficult to tolerate and accommodate one another. Often, issues seemingly innocuous do degenerate into violent attacks and counterattacks among people of different ethnic backgrounds and religious persuasions. This paper reasons how the different tribes and religious groups in the country can amicably resolve conflicts without resulting to violence. It focuses on the analysis of the potential of the principle of non-violence (ahimsa) in creating a peaceful atmosphere that will help to reel in the era of substantial development in our society. The paper employed qualitative research approach, and used the secondary method to elicit information. There is urgent need for national consciousness that will enable Nigerians from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to work in cooperation for the progress of the country. The ministry of national orientation should collaborate with the different inter-religious organizations like NIREC and allied organizations, and intensify efforts to enhance and strengthen national unity.

Keywords: Non-violence, Sustainable, Peace, Security, National, Development.

Introduction

Religion offers dynamic and creative measures for peace building and religious communities have made significant contributions to conflict resolutions in the past. One likely effective religious measure or principle that has the prospect of helping to enhance peace building is the principle of *Ahimsa* (nonviolent principle). It is a doctrinal aspect of ancient Indian religions and the principle applies to actions towards all living beings. It is a key virtue in Indian religions like Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism. *Ahimsa* is one of the cardinal virtues of Jainism, where it is the first of the *Pancha Mahavrata*. It is also one of the central precepts of Hinduism and it is the first of the five precepts of Buddhism (<https://en.em.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahimsa>).

The principle of nonviolence (*Ahimsa*) is inspired by the premise that all living beings have the spark of the divine spiritual energy; therefore, to hurt another being is to hurt oneself. Nonviolence (*Ahimsa*) is also related to the notion that all acts of violence have karmic consequences. While ancient scholars of Brahmanism had already investigated and refined the principles of *ahimsa*, the concept reached an extraordinary development in the ethical philosophy of Jainism. *Mahavira*, the twenty-fourth and the last *tirthankara* of Jainism, further strengthened the idea in the 5th century BCE. About the 5th century CE, *Thiruvalluvar* emphasized *ahimsa* and moral vegetarianism as virtues for an individual, which formed the core of his teachings in the *Kural*. Perhaps the most popular advocate of the principle of *ahimsa* in modern times was Mahatma Gandhi. *Ahimsa's* precept that humans should “cause no injury” to another living being includes one's deeds, words, and thoughts. Classical Hindu texts like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, as well as modern scholars, disagree about what the principle of *Ahimsa* dictates when one is faced with war and other situations that require self-defense. In this way, historical Indian literature has contributed to modern theories of just war and self-defense (<https://en.em.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahimsa>).

Non-violence principle can be applied personally as a way of life or collectively as a method of resolving conflict and building peaceful societies (Summy 2000). However, despite the perceived potential of the principle as a possible tool in resolving issues and for peace building, individuals, ethnic and religious groups, including different pressure groups in Nigeria still do not see reason to embrace non-violent approach while trying to seek solution to social and political issues. In Nigeria, often, issues that are seemingly innocuous do degenerate into violent attacks and counter attacks. As a matter of fact, Nigeria has suffered wanton destruction of lives and properties of her citizens as a result of spontaneous violent reactions to issues that ordinarily would have been settled through peaceful dialogues and this has constitute a cog in the wheel of development in the country. The recent “End SARS” nationwide protest in Nigeria and the concomitant wanton destruction of lives and properties of Nigerians represents a typical example of the damage a violent approach to issues can cost any society. Considering the numerous social and economic damages that violent reactions to issues have caused, this study examines the potential of the principle of non-violence in peace building in Nigeria in order to make recommendations towards engendering accelerated development in the country.

Conceptual Clarifications

Non-Violence

In modern times, non-violent approach has become the widely accepted method of social protest and activism. The concept of “non-violence” has been defined in different ways by scholars. It is the personal principle of being harmless to oneself and to others in all circumstances. It comes from the belief that hurting people, animals or the environment to achieve an outcome is unnecessary. It also refers to a general philosophy of abstention from violence. Non-violent philosophy may be based on personal moral, religious or spiritual principles, or it may be for purely strategic or pragmatic reasons. Nonviolence also has active elements in that believers generally accept the need for nonviolence as the best approach to achieving positive change in the society (Beissinger 2007). The word “Nonviolence” is often being used as a synonym for peace, and it is also being frequently equated with passivity and pacifism. The conception of non-violence as passivity and pacifism is however being rejected by nonviolent advocates and activists. While the concept nonviolence refers specifically to the absence of violence and is always the choice to do no harm or the least harm, passivity, on the other hand, is the choice to do nothing. Sometimes, nonviolence is passive, and other times it isn't. This concept is a powerful and just weapon that is unique in history. It cuts without wounding, and empowers the man who wields it. According to Ghandi (1968), the origin of the principle of non-violence can be traced to the doctrine of “*Ahimsa*” which is one of the cardinal virtues and an important tenet of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It is a multidimensional concept inspired by the thought that all living beings are full of the divine spiritual energy, therefore, to hurt another being is to hurt oneself. It has also been related to the notion that any act of violence done to any being has karmic consequences.

Advocates of nonviolent action believe that cooperation and consent are the roots of having a well-developed society. All regimes, including bureaucratic institutions, financial institutions, and the armed segments of society depend on compliance from citizens. When nonviolent approach (in the form of peaceful activism like peaceful marches, strikes, protest art and digital activism) is employed on a national level while trying to influence the decision of government, the strategy is to undermine the power of rulers by encouraging people to withdraw their consent and cooperation. Some forms of nonviolence draw inspiration from both religious or ethical beliefs and political analysis. Religious or ethically based nonviolence is sometimes referred to as principled, philosophical, or ethical nonviolence, while nonviolence based on political analysis is often referred to as tactical, strategic, or pragmatic nonviolent action. Often, both of these dimensions may be present within the thinking of particular movements or individuals. In the times of modern democracies, nonviolent actions have been employed severally in the political sectors without mainstream political power in handling issues.

Martin Luther King Jr, itemized six principles of non-violence viz:

- a) Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people. It is active nonviolent resistance to evil. It is aggressive spiritually, mentally and emotionally.
- b) Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding. The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation. The purpose of nonviolence is the creation of the Beloved Community.
- c) Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people. Nonviolence recognizes that evildoers are also victims and are not evil people. The nonviolent resister seeks to defeat evil not people.

- d) Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform. Nonviolence accepts suffering without retaliation. Unearned suffering is redemptive and has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities.
- e) Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate. Nonviolence resists violence of the spirit as well as the body. Nonviolent love is spontaneous, unmotivated, unselfish and creative.
- f) Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice. The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win. Nonviolence believes that God is a God of justice.

Practicing nonviolence goes farther than abstaining from violent behavior or words. It means overriding the impulse to be hateful. It means showing love for everyone, even including people one is in disagreement with. It is imperative to know that the commitment to non-violence entails a belief in restorative or transformative justice, making peace with the community, an abolition of the death penalty and other harsh punishments (Bond 1994). This may involve the necessity of caring for those who are violent. Nonviolence, for many, involves a respect and reverence for all sentient and perhaps even non-sentient being. Based on the foregoing, the principle of nonviolence seem to be a promising tool that can be employed for building a better society and which can also help to repress the power of political tyrants without causing any problem.

Peace

According to Fasiku and Adedayo (2023) cite Baljit (2003), the word “peace” has gained prominence in the broader global discourse. It is frequently used and abused, and because it is hard to define and conceptualize, it is seen as idealistic and fantastical. He asserts that, in psychological, social, and political contexts, the concept of peace evokes feelings of harmony and happiness. These pictures don't seem to fit the chaotic, discordant world that exists in real life. For this reason, the study of peace research aims to create a world that is either violent-free or at least peaceful. Fasiku and Adedayo (2023) cite Galtung (1994) for their clarification of the differences between positive and negative peace. Therefore, he defines "positive peace" as the absence of negative peace along with the removal of societal structures and flaws that prevent people from finding fulfillment, i.e., the integration of human society, and "negative peace" as the absence of violence and absence of war.

Accordingly, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines peace as follows:

- a) No war: a situation in which there is no war or fighting
- b) No noise/interruptions: a very quiet and pleasant situation in which you are not interrupted
- c) Calm/Not worried: a feeling of being calm, happy, and not worried

However, peace is classified into two types: Internal peace and External peace.

Sustainable Peace

Sustainable peace is defined as “a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account” in UN General Assembly resolutions. It also refers to “activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation and moving towards recovery,

reconstruction and development". In addition to humanitarian action, the idea of sustainable peace calls for stronger connections between the UN's three core pillars: development, human rights, and peace and security.

Therefore, a variety of interventions are included in sustainable peace, such as bolstering the rule of law, encouraging sustainable economic growth, eliminating poverty, advancing social development, sustainable development, and fostering national reconciliation. These interventions are being pursued through a variety of strategies and tenets, including gender equality, respect for human rights, inclusive dialogue and mediation, accountability, accountability, good governance, and access to justice and transitional justice.

Maintaining peace is closely related to sustainable development since it is based on the ideas of nonviolence, human security, and the integration of knowledge about the underlying causes of conflict and the defense of human rights. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the critical role that national ownership plays in achieving sustainable development and aims to create "peaceful, just, and inclusive societies." It also highlights the recognition that maintaining peace is "the primary responsibility of national governments and authorities in identifying, driving and directing priorities, strategies, and activities" and places a strong emphasis on "inclusivity in national peace building processes and objectives."

Security

According to Familugba, Ibitoye, Adedayo and Ojo (2024), cited in Adabembe and Adedayo (2022), security is defined as the protection of person's life, properties and possessions. In the same vein, security also means absence of risk or threat. It covers a wide range of situations and, depending on the situation. Recent times have seen the replacement of the conventional understanding of security with a non-traditional one. Political theorists like Thomas Hobbes believed that the primary function of a state is to maintain law and order, which can only be accomplished through effective security. This suggests that historically, the state has played a one-sided role in security.

Any society needs security and safety for its functions. Safety and security represent many things, including food supplies, health, housing, environmental security etc. It's seen as moral rights and intrinsic to development; Security and safety of men and women encourages well-being and financial health; It promotes in productivity of individual and economic life integration; It helps individual to be calmer, understanding, mind control and be more responsive than reactive, more observant, and achieve cognitive awareness; Security and safety is vital for survival (Adabembe and Adedayo, 2022).

National Development

Adabembe and Adedayo (2022) views National development as the qualitative as well as quantitative change in social, cultural and economy of a particular nation. Ebeh, views national development as enhanced, changes in all aspects of the society be it, industry, political, economic, and socio-cultural in order to achieve development. National development is the ability of the country to nurture the standard of living of its citizens, this can be achieved making available for people's basic livelihood necessities (Google 2022). In all, it can be deduced from above definitions that national development involves all round progression in economic, education, social, political of a nation which affects the nation and the entire citizens positively.

The Process of Development

Development is the result of society's capacity to organize resources to meet challenges and opportunities. Societies passed through well-defined stages in the course of their development. The development stages of most societies include nomadic hunting and gathering, rural agrarian, urban, commercial, industrial, and post-industrial stages. Development of society means transformation of social structure, social relations and social institution in their new form. In order to make things better, the society needs to be modified, nothing can be made better if no modifications are made in the existing situations. In the historical trajectory of humanity, various kinds of rules and regulations restricting the activities of people living in the society have been developed, some regulations are beneficial while others cause setback for the society. Nicholas (2003) asserts that our society is transforming from simple to complex, equality to inequality, unity to diversity, primitiveness to civilization and obsolete to modern due to development. So in order to develop a society, there is need to transform it. Therefore, development of a society means the transformation of the society. Development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather, a multi-dimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system. It is also a process of improving the quality of all citizens' lives in aspects that include raising peoples' standard of living in terms of incomes, consumption, access to good food, medical services, education and other necessary social facilities. It also involves creating conditions that are conducive for the growth of peoples' self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions that will promote human dignity and respect. Development involves economic advancement, positive and progressive changes in social, psychological and political processes. It entails imbuing in people wealth oriented behavior and values, and profit seeking rather than subsistence economic attitude.

Every society is centralized and directed from a center. As time passes, the central authority moves to the individual in the periphery making a social organization into a social institution. Festivals are thus institutionalized in a society. Organization that was run by rules matures into an institution that is maintained by social values that are accepted by the individuals. It further develops into culture. A society's ability for accomplishment is measured by its culture. Culture is acquired in work, human relationships, religious sentiment, and spiritual pursuits and in every walk of life. Behind the achievements of a society lie its energies (Bond 1994).

Theoretical Framework

This aspect of the study discusses the theory that forms the framework with which the research works is built. For the purpose of this study, the theory used is Peace building Theory

Peace Building Theory

Peace Building is an activity that aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent ways and to transform the cultural and structural conditions that generate deadly or destructive conflict. A Marxist-inspired structuralist theory of peace building sees peace building as analysis focuses on justice and equality. Peace buiding in this context is a revolutionary approach to mobilize the masses in order to achieve radical change. In the same vein, realist theory of peace building refers to peace building as a way of maintaining stability through hegemonies power and through the preservation of interests.

By application, in promoting non-violence principle in Nigeria, the principles established the process of making use of mediation, conciliation, negotiation, joint problem solving, third party interventions and arbitration process in resolving disputes and conflicts.

Non-Violence as a Panacea to Religious and Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria

As mentioned earlier, the principle of nonviolence can be traced back to ancient Taoist, Buddhist and Jewish scriptures as well as the philosophy of the New Testament and some of the resistance movements to the imperial edicts of Rome. However, in the past one hundred years, the philosophy of nonviolence has become an important instrument that has helped in shaping people's lives and the political directions of societies. Arguably, Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian independence movement and the campaign he led were the most influential factors while highlighting the immense potential of nonviolence to bring about positive change. Gandhi and the success of the Indian movement have inspired campaign after campaign. When Albert Einstein heard of Gandhi's death on 30th of January, 1948, he made the following much-quoted remarks as tribute in his honour as a result of Gandhi's contribution to societal change and improvement: "Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." Even, some of his opponents would be moved at times to express their unbounded admiration for his dedication to the pursuit of truth and nonviolence (Ashe 1968).

Nigerians can borrow a leaf from Gandhi and adopt the principle of nonviolence if the trends of violent experiences that have continue to bedevil the country must be nipped in the bud. Violent conflicts in Nigeria, like in other parts of the world, have led to irreparable loss of lives and properties. Conflict is inevitable as far as social relation is concerned, especially in a pluralized society like ours. However, the consequence of violence is retardation in all aspects of socio-economic life and underdevelopment resulting from the destruction of lives and property. The menace of violent conflict has been on the increase in many Northern Nigerian cities in the last two decades. Most of these conflicts are generally as a result of ethno-religious bigotry which usually transmute into rivalry and antagonism among the various social groups in the country. For example, Jos, the capital city of Plateau State, Nigeria, has experienced spates of sporadic violent conflicts since 1994. Although these conflicts are largely caused as a result of struggles over economic and political issues. Ethnic labels are used to manipulate and control the conflicting parties. Nigerian people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds are pitched against one another; just as Christians and Muslims are pitched against one another, towns and communities also see one another as rivals and antagonists. And these conflicts have constituted a cog in the wheel of socio-economic development in the country.

Apart from the loss of lives and property of many Nigerians, the mutual suspension among citizens also has profound influence on the relationships of people living in the same neighbourhood, leading to a new trend in the polarisation of communities. Ethnic conflict is one of the major threats to societal peace and security even at international level because violent ethnic conflict leads to tremendous human suffering. Religious and ethnic conflicts are not new phenomena (Kemp and Douglas 2004). Such conflicts have existed all over the world for centuries, but in the last 20 years, it has been from one conflict to the other in Nigeria. Conflicts can escalate from local to regional areas. The casualties resulting from religious and ethnic conflicts are often in hundreds of thousands as one ethnic group tries to eliminate another. The consequences can last generations. Many states are made up of numerous ethnic groups that share common heritage, interests, beliefs, historical experience, and cultural traits. Ethnic conflicts usually occur between two ethnic groups within a state.

While one of the two warring ethnic groups may be the dominant in terms of numerical strength and spread, the other with weaker numerical strength, which naturally appears as the subordinate, does not want to accept being subservient to the dominant one. Hence, often, while the dominant group becomes assertive, the group with the weak numerical strength continues to challenge its legitimacy. Religious conflict on the other hand is usually caused by the claims and counterclaims of doctrinal absoluteness by the adherents of the different religions, and it is the type of conflict which escalates easily and is very difficult to resolve. Collective ethnic conflicts are absolute and fixed. The bonds between the members of these ethnic groups are dogmatic. They fear contamination by another group and attempt to prevent any infiltration from outside. Members of the group act as individuals. Their identities can switch among different political, cultural and religious entities. The causes of the conflicts often are as a result of grudges built on ancient hatreds, feelings of hostility of one group towards another based on past historical experiences. According to Rydgren, the past can influence the perception of the present. This means that people's beliefs depend on whom they trust, and so, most often, they adopt the ideas of their own ethnic group while trying to address any current situation.

As has been said in the preceding, non-violence measure is a promising mechanism with which ethno-religious conflicts and other forms of social disharmony can be resolved. Aggrieved parties can always create a forum to negotiate for peace and also find a common ground that will not allow for violence that usually lead to loss of lives and properties. Nigerians as a people with different religious affiliations and ethnic groups can adopt the principle of non-violence while trying to find solution to issues in order to foster peace and development in the country. As mentioned earlier in this discourse, the principle of nonviolence is built on the philosophy that one must be in peace with oneself and with other people. This means that one should not cause harm to anybody for whatever reason. The principle of nonviolence requires an unwavering demonstration of love to every human being regardless of where they come from. It means being above all manners of sentiment; be it religious or ethnic. If this principle is adopted in our individual and collective approaches to issues, all the evils associated with violence will be nipped in the bud in our immediate society and in the entire global community.

How Non-Violence Principle can Aid Sustainable Peace, Security and National Development in the Nigerian Societies

Since nonviolence principle forbids violent approach to resolving issues, it by the implication of this naturally gives no room for all the evils including the destruction of lives and properties that are associated with violence. Nonviolence is therefore a potent tool that can help to facilitate and accelerate development. It is the means and the only method that leads to the goal of societal development and peace. A society would be able to achieve its development goal when a peaceful atmosphere is put in place. In an atmosphere of peace, people will be able to carry on with their day to day socio-economic life, individuals and cooperate organizations would be able to establish businesses, and there would be employment opportunities that would engage people in productive endeavours. With this, people's social and economic lives would be enhanced. People's standard of living will improve as there would be unhindered access to the basic needs and necessities of life sustenance. These needs are survival/security, wellbeing, identity and freedom. While the struggle to fulfill these needs is unending, the commitment to nonviolence will move the individual and society ever closer to their realization.

A persistent commitment to nonviolence entails the embracing of a living philosophy, the pursuit of a life commitment that strives towards an idea peace, incorporating both the negative and positive peace. Negative peace refers to a state where there is absence of violence and its fear, while positive peace represents the outcome of a successful elimination of the potential for violence. The latter entails the reduction of the instruments of violence and the realization of structures and values that enable people to experience the full range of their ontological needs, without impeding other people's capacities to do the same (Bond 1994). Nonviolence, as a philosophy, provides a code of conduct by which a people can seek to structure their life, find their identity, give meaning to their existence, and help to build society in the direction of positive peace. Non-violence aims at promoting interpersonal harmony, building mutual respect, and fostering toleration of individual differences. It aids devaluing conflicts, minimizing and resolving them when they occur, and preventing them from developing into violence. Any society that wants to grow should also aim at removing competition, self-focus, and other ego-centric social behaviors that they feel might lead to violence.

To be able to achieve meaningful development, individual's basic survival needs must first be met. The level of poverty among the people must be reduced. This is one of the first steps to creating a culture of peace. For this to ever happen, there must be a joint conscious efforts targeted to achieving it. Individuals too need to contribute to achieving the set goals. When this is achieved, there would be a drastic reduction in the number of impoverished people in the country.

One strong impediment to societal growth is intolerance. Intolerance arises as a result of the primordial sentiments associated with the differences of race, religion and culture. However, through education and orientation about the need for unity and integration in the midst of diversities, citizens would see the need to tolerate one another and embrace peace. By educating people about the inherent gains in our diversities, they will understand that our diversified nature is a potential for development, rather than being excuse for prejudices, discrimination and disharmony (Caprioli and Peter 2003). With this, tolerance and mutual respect can be promoted. The media as a veritable source of information and orientation can be of help in this regard. The various media houses can help to educate people and promote the culture of non-violence. There is urgent need for Nigerians to cultivate and inculcate the virtue of empathy. Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another person's position in order to be able to appreciate how they feel. There are different ways to teach this, and one way that can be sufficiently effective is creating awareness about the urgent need for social justice. By making citizens to be aware of the way life look like and the level of discomfort being experienced in other parts of the world where there is incessant war can be a real eye opener.

Conclusion And Recommendations

The social menace of violent conflict which is a common experience in Nigeria has continued to impede the growth of the Nigerian society for a while now. This situation has made the journey of Nigeria towards socio-economic development stagnant. Nobody would be motivated to invest in a place where there is recurrent experience of violent conflict. Any individual or corporate body that may be willing to invest in the economy of any country that is faced with the challenge of incessant war will need to have a rethink and to also give the plan a second thought. Ethno-religious civil war and other forms of social disharmony are not just common but are also recurrent experience in Nigerian social space. Meanwhile, the

principle of nonviolence is a very promising mechanism for preventing and resolving social disagreement. Societies where it has been adopted (e.g. India during the time of Mahatma Gandhi) really reaped from the inherent potential of the principle in helping to promote peace and facilitate development. Nigeria can borrow a leaf from this, and promote the culture of nonviolence amongst his citizenry. The ministry of national orientation should collaborate with the different inter-religious organizations like NIREC and allied organizations and intensify efforts to enhance and strengthen national unity. Individuals and social groups be it ethnic, religious or other pressure groups in Nigeria can adopt the principle while trying to resolve issues instead of resulting to violence. If the culture of nonviolence is promoted and cultivated by Nigerians, Nigeria will be set on the path to unhindered socio-economic progress.

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