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The Church and Security Challenges in Nigeria: Prospects for Peace-Building and Sustainable National Development

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

In the recent times, security challenges have rapidly topped the list of major challenges confronting Nigeria as a nation. These security challenges manifest in different forms, which include terrorism, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, ethno-religious conflicts, communal crises, separatist agitations, cultism, youth restiveness and other forms of social disturbances. These problems, which impinge tremendously on social, economic, political and general wellbeing of citizens, have persisted despite huge annual governmental expenditure on security. This paper, therefore, examines the role of the church in addressing security challenges in Nigeria and the implications of its peace building activities for sustainable national development. It adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis of books, journal articles, internet-based sources and other relevant scholarly materials. The paper argues that the church cannot be successfully sidelined in Nigeria's struggle to achieve security of lives and property of citizens, peaceful environment for all and sustainable national development, because it is laden with colossal spiritual, moral, social and institutional resources required for active and impactful contribution to conflict prevention, peace building, social cohesion and sustainable national development. It highlights intra-church conflicts, weak church leadership, ethnic consciousness, denominational rivalry, inadequate collaboration among churches, and lack of reliable security information and large scale infiltration of criminals into Nigeria's security networks, as some of the factors undermining the church's contribution to security, peace-building and sustainable national development in Nigeria. The paper concludes by arguing that security, peace and national development can be effectively sustained if the church takes its proper place in the society as God's agent of peace and social reformation, and engages actively as well as constructively in peace-building processes and in providing support for rural community policing and security networks. It recommends, among others, that the church should collaborate actively with government security institutions and intensify efforts in provision of error-free security information to government security institutions for effective maintenance of peace and security in rural and urban areas.

Keywords: Church, Nigeria, security challenges, peace-building, sustainable national development.

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1. Introduction

Events and developments around us in the present day point, lucidly, to the fact that we are living in a world where insecurity and terrorism shape the contour of all human activities and future engagements, including those of faith-based

organizations like churches. Nigerian society has become pathetically suffused with complex security challenges which adversely affect peace, social stability and sustainable national development. The rising spates of ritual killings, terrorist attacks, banditry, insurgence, kidnapping inter-party clashes, political thuggry , ethno-religious conflicts, communal clashes and youth restiveness has continued to impinge on socio-economic lives and sources of livelihoods of millions of Nigerians. Security is paramount to peaceful coexistence and sustainable development of any emerging nation. Nigeria, as observed by Duruji (2024), is presently at a cross road as the challenges of insecurity has assumed an unmanageable proportion. No part of Nigeria is free from the ravaging effects of insecurity.

There could hardly be any meaningful development, foreign direct investments (FDI), high industrial productivity and improvement in the people's standard of living, where insecurity prevails (Onyenze, 2026).

Peace is one of the cardinal factors in sustainable national development. Nigeria socio economic development is currently declining with poverty rate steadily rising as a result of pervasive nature of insecurity in almost every part of the country (Jegede& Daniel, 2025).

Nigeria, a country reputed to be the giant of Africa, and a model of peaceful environment, now wallows in troublous moments, enmeshed in the sinister web of insecurity and political violence, which hinder its national development striving (Duruji, 2024). Its security environment has become precarious due to the weakening of borders and the growing power of transnational criminal net works, which have created great barriers to the development of west African regional economy and security (Ossai & Nweke, 2023).

Security and sustainable peace are constantly threatened by activities of criminal groups such as bandits, kidnappers, cultists, armed robbers and lawless community members who fan the flame of communal conflicts (Nwankwo, 2016).

Nigerian government acknowledges the primacy of peace and security in its efforts to achieve sustainable national development for the country in this 21st century. The soaring security problems, therefore, constitute not only a break- down of law and order but also a major setback to national development. The government has adopted different measures to tackle insecurity and improve the nations security architecture, such as increase in the nation's security budget, encouraging the formation of community, local and state vigilante groups and expansion of Nigerian army from eight to twelve divisions. These measures, however, have not yielded the much expected meaningful results. This points to the fact that security problems cannot be solved exclusively through military and policing strategies. Insecurity is a complex socio-psychological challenge that requires not only collective social efforts to handle but also coercive and preventive approaches. In this regard, the role of the church as an agent of social change, moral reformation, peace-building and community unification becomes imperative.

The church occupies a place of prominence in Nigeria socio-religious, political and economic scheme of things today. It possesses extensive grassroots networks, influential organizations network such as youth organizations, woman organization, men's forum, education institutions, health facilities and effective church- community relations, which give it a very strong footing to contribute meaningfully to addressing Nigerian security challenges. The church can complement the states efforts in fostering security in Nigeria through participation in rural community policing, peace-education, mediation, resolution of disputes, reconciliation, humanitarian services, youth empowerment, moral reformation, and community-based conflict prevention. It is in the light of the above that this study seeks to critically examine how the church can contribute to addressing the security challenges in Nigeria through peace-building with the ultimate aim of paving the way for sustainable national development.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Church

The church is a name generally given to all those who believe in Christ and as such see themselves as a community of Christ followers. It is defined by Duruji (2025), as company of those redeemed by Jesus Christ, made saints and specially chosen out of the world by God (ecclesia). The World Book Encyclopedia (1992) cited in Duruji (2025), defines Church as the term for a community of Christians who share a specific set of beliefs. Jegede and Daniel (2025), see Church as the gathering of Christians in a given location. The word "Church" is a translation of the Greek word _ekklesia-_a compound of two segments `ek` meaning `out` and `kaleo` meaning `to call`. _Ekklesia_ thus means `to call out`. The followers of Christ in the Church are thus, "those who are called out". (Enemali, 2022). The word "Church" has now become a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon that is described as the body of Christ (Umunakwe & Okereke, 2025).

Security Challenges

In order to have a full grab of the compound word "security challenges", it is germane we look at the two compounding words separately, and then as a whole.

Security: The word security is often used to describe a situation where everybody is safe or well protected from harm. It is defined by Danwi, Okonkwo, Amadi and Amabebe (2019), as the condition of feeling safe from harm or danger, as well as the defence, protection and preservation of lives and property of individuals. It is the presence of safety, protection and on the other hand absence of anxiety and fear (Ogazie, 2020). Challenges, on the other hand, means problems or obstacles that hinder the smooth handling of a task or job. Hornby (1995) defines challenge as a difficult task that tests somebody's ability. Security challenges, therefore, refer to a conglomeration of problems, obstacles, or difficulties that hinder or constitute a threat to security of lives and property of individuals. Nweke and Nwankwo (2023) see security challenges as a range of complex and evolving threats that pose risks to the safety, stability and well- being of individuals, communities, and nations. A threatened security becomes insecurity which is the opposite of security and is associated with fear and anxiety due to absence of safety, protection and certainty about future well-being. Security challenges cause apprehension in the lives of people both as an individual and as a community (Uchendu & Obiozo, 2020).

Peace building

Peace-building has been given different definitions by different scholars, but its simplest definition, here, is the promotion of conditions that favour the growth of peace, mutual understanding and harmony among people in a community.Peace is defined by Oji and Olomi (2022), as the absence of violence in all its forms of physical, social, psychological and structural. They see Peace building as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing peace and reducing conflict both with specific societies and in the wider international societies. Ishola (2025), defines peace-building as the process of promoting and establishing conditions that contribute to sustainable peace within a community, society or organisation. It involves addressing the root causes of conflicts, fostering reconciliation and creating an environment conducive to peaceful coexistence.

Sustainable Development

Development is the process of improving human life through the improvement of his socio-economic, cultural and political activities. It is the act of improving, enlarging or expanding the scope of a people to enjoy an acceptable quality of life (Okoro &Onah, 2022). Development, according to Alikor (2025), is a multi-dimensional process involving re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social systems. It is all-encompassing change, a process which builds on itself (Adesoji, 2021).

Sustainable development is therefore that development that is sustained or maintained over a long period of time. It is development that can be passed to the next generation without compromising its standard.

A synopsis of Security Challenges in Nigeria

Security Challenges have continued to spread in Nigeria like a wildfire, cutting across every part of the country with alarming intensity. There are incessant cases of Boko Haram terrorist activities and bandits attacks in the North East, North West and North Central parts of Nigeria. There are also frequent cases of Fulani herdsmen attacks on rural farms, communities, churches and schools in many parts of Northern Nigeria, Southwestern Nigeria and some parts of South-East. The recent activities of armed robbers, kidnappers, cultists, ritual killers, organ harvesters and unknown gunmen have made South-East, South-South and South-West unsafe for life and economic activities.

The soaring rate of insurgency, armed struggle for political relevance and self-government as exemplified by the activities of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), have so much heated the polity in Nigeria that the government has to map out huge annual budgetary allocation to national security (Uneze-Amby, Ononogbo & Obumadike, 2020). Communal and ethno- religious conflicts are also playing their illicit role in threatening peaceful coexistence, social stability and Nigeria's national development striving.

Effects of Security Challenges on Nigerian Society

Security challenges are ill wind that blows no body any good. Insecurity is inimical to human progress, peaceful coexistence, social and political stability and sustainable national development. Media reports are awash with the number of lives lost as a result of terrorist insurgent and other attacks that are alarming, incessant cases of school children that are abducted by bandits and Boko Haram terrorists and communities displaced by their brutal attacks (Ojukwu &Amusa, 2020).

The security challenges adversely affect Nigeria's efforts towards national economic development and its reputation as the giant of Africa. It has continued to cause a sharp decline in foreign direct investments (FDI) as it scares foreign investors away, thereby robbing the country of their contributions to economic development (Uchendu &Obiozo, 2020). The issue of insecurity has caused a lot of fear and anxiety among Nigerians as no one knows what will happen next as they move around. Many businesses and markets have been destroyed by the activities of terrorists and unknown gunmen, thereby increasing the rate of poverty and hardship among Nigerian citizens.

It is causing the government huge budget to contain the menace and economic emasculation associated with security challenges (Uneze-Amby, Ononogbo &Obunadike, 2020). Security is the bedrock upon which economic prosperity, socio-economic stability, peace, unity and sustainable national development are built. It is the basis for national economic growth and development as it guarantees continuity and un- disruption of diverse economic activities as well as government services (Enemuo &Eze, 2019). Where security is unduly threatened, there will likely be economic setback, retardation, decline in production and even systemic collapse, which culminates in excess poverty and hardship, as is the case with the present day Nigeria.

Biblical Foundation of Peace building Mission of the Church

The Church is a sacred institution ordained and empowered by God for the propagation of the message of peace, hope and reconciliation among people in every society. Jesus Christ is addressed as the prince of peace and as such commissioned his Church to actively engage in the mission of peace-making. Isaiah 9:6 says: For unto us a child is born,

unto us, a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the prince of peace.

Jesus came to the world to establish his government characterized by endless peace, judgments and justice (Isaiah 9:7). Those who identify with his government are to be nothing less than ambassadors of peace, sound judgment and justice because he replicates his power to make, rule and dominate the world with endless peace in them. 8

John 14:27 lends credence to the above when Jesus addresses his disciples thus: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I giveto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Jesus left the legacy of peace building with his early disciples for the purpose of ensuring trans-generational transmission of the same. They are called to make peace in the society and reconcile those who are at enmity with one another. Jesus declares in Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God".

By declaring this, Jesus mandated believers to wholeheartedly take up the responsibility of peace building as that is the condition that will guarantee their recognition as children of God, worthy of blessings. Peacemaking and reconciliation are cardinal responsibilities of true believers in Christ. The implication of this is that conflicts, disputes, violent confrontations, war and fighting are alien to Christianity, a religion whose founder is the prince of peace.

The church's role in peace building is biblically enshrined as the church is enjoined not only to make peace but also to strive to live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18), pursue peace with all people (Hebrews 12:14) and reconcile with their offenders without delay (Matthew 5:23-24). In the light of the above, there is indeed a realistic prospect that the Church can successfully contribute to peace-building in every society, have been mandated as well as empowered by God to do so.

The Church's Role In Peace-building in Nigeria

The church stands prominently as agent of peace-building, teaching, preaching, fostering promoting peace and translating all these into practical social actions in the society via a number of processes which include:

i. Mediation: Mediation centres on settlement of disputes or conflicts and 9 restoration of peace among individuals or communities at variance with one another. Church leaders are endowed with moral authority and spiritual insights and command respect among the people in rural communities that can facilitate dialogue and understanding between conflicting parties. As remarked by Baker (2017), mediation can restore stability in a crisis-situation, calm down tensions and handles conflicts and disputes among people.

ii. Reconciliation and forgiveness: The church has the required institutional resources for active and impactful engagement in reconciliatory role and initiating mutual forgiveness among warring communities and individuals in dispute. Ishola (2025), has highlighted the ability and creative conflict management skills found among some members of faith based organization like church, which enable them to effectively handle conflicts, disputes and crises of diverse kinds and magnitude among conflicting members of the church and the society at large.

iii. Dialogue: The church also employs dialogue as one of the potent means of contributing to peace-building in a turbulent society like Nigeria.Dialogue operates with the instrumentality of round table discussion and mutual interaction aimed at digging through to the root of conflicts and grievances to know how to proffer solution to them. Inter-faith dialogue can foster mutual understanding and promote cooperation between Christian leaders and Muslim leaders, traditional rulers and church leaders, and among men, women, youths and community leaders in the society. (Idoh, Acheseinimie & Otto, 2026) Dialogue encourages openness respect for religious differences, and recognition of shared human values such as forgiveness, tolerance, dignity, compassion, justice, equity 10 and respect for human

right (Idoh, Acheseinimie & Otto, 2026).

iv. Promotion of inter-religious harmony: It is a known fact that almost all Nigerians belong to one form of religion or the other. The church promotes religious harmony through its major leadership Association such Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (P.F.N), Catholic Bishops of Nigeria (C.B.N) and Anglican Synod and so on. The Church also enhances rural Community peace and policing by encouraging local parishes and Church-based groups such as Catholic Men Organisation (CMO), Catholic Women Organisation (CWO), Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria (CYON), Anglican men Organization (AMO), Mothers Union (MU), Anglican Youth Fellowship (AYF) and so on, to serve in neighbourhood security watch networks and vigilante (Onyenze, 2026). Religious harmony guarantees stable and peaceful environment, promotes economic development and restores confidence and hope among people in regions where religious violence has led to the displacement of populations, destruction of markets and decline in foreign and local investments (Dada, 2025).

v. Regular and periodic celebration of religious festivals and ceremonies: Religious festivals and ceremonies are often filled with attractive force and social bonding capacity that connect and bind different people together, including those of different faiths. They have unifying potential that cut across ethnic boundaries.

Christmas celebration, Easter celebration, New year celebration, feast of different saints in the Roman Catholic Church, annul celebrations of different Christian organizations and soon, attract visitors, invitees and non-church members from different ethnic groups in Nigeria, including Muslims, who come to identify with 11 them during the important religious festivals. Thus religious festivals stand as instruments of peace-building, interfaith cooperation and national development.

Festivals, as observed by Onuorah (2025), have the ability to enhance social cohesion, mitigate socio-religious tensions and foster sustainable national development . They are occasions used for the promotion of social and civic values such as unity, responsibility and peaceful coexistence (Opara, 2024).

vi. Negotiation: The church encourages and spearheads negotiation for peace and reconciliation among conflicting parties in the communities. Negotiation provides a forum for reaching agreement on conditions of peace, compensation and the part which each party to the conflict can play to facilitate restoration of peace.

vii. Peace education, value-orientation and moral reformation: The church via active engagement in the education system, have continued to play outstanding role in peace education, value-orientation and moral reformation of the society.

Education remains a fundamental means of transforming and expanding the individual's ethnical awareness, values, moral decorum, attitudes, skills and behaviours for sustainable social stability which paves the way for sustainable national development in Nigeria (Jowoju & Salahu-Deen, 2024). Mission-controlled schools lay great emphasis on moral and academic excellence of students. Youths or students who have acquired moral excellence cannot join terrorists group's and become killers and destroyers of lives and property of fellow citizens. Such youths or students cannot also become political thugs, armed robbers, ritual killers, unknown gunmen or members of any criminal gangs in Nigerian society. The Christian teachings, values and ethics inculcated in them 12 will make them place premium on the sanctity of life above other considerations (Duruji & Ugwuledo, 2026).

The Nexus between the Church's Peace-building Role and Sustainable National Development

Peaceful coexistence, communal solidarity, social cohesion and stability, are vital ingredients for the promotion of socio-economic development, human capital development, economic prosperity and sustainable national development. National development of any nation and its sustainability depends on its social stability which is achieved through peace and security within a nation.

Oji and Olomi (2022) identified a shared relationship between peace-building efforts in the rural communities through community policing and sustainable national development. The church's mediation in disputes, dialogue, reconciliatory role, its active engagement in peace education, value-orientation and moral reform action are aimed at dealing with the root causes of conflicts, disputes, violence terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery and other activities that constitute serious threats to security and peace of the society. Peace-building is a practical pathway to Nigerian sustainable development (Dada, 2025). Study carried out by Shehu and Jamilu (2025) indicated that security and peace are the prerequisites for development as no nation can achieve sustainable economic growth without peace and stability.

Challenges Facing The Church Peace-building Role in Nigeria

It is evident that the church plays enormous role in peace-building in multi-ethnic and multi cultural Nigerian society. However, a lot of factors still hinder it in its role as an agent of peace-building in Nigeria. Some of these factors include:

i. Intra and inter church conflicts: Intra and inter church conflicts are among the 13 fundamental challenges confronting the church in Nigeria, undermining and weakening its efficiency in fostering peace , social stability and unity among different tribes , languages and cultural groups. When members of the church fight among themselves and when different Christian denominations do not work or operate harmoniously in a particular community, they can hardly make meaningful impact in fostering peace and unity among people living in that community (Duruji & Duruji, 2024).

ii. Weak church leadership: Weak leadership is leadership without vision and experience. Most church leaders are just there for money. They lack ideas and creative approach to administrative issues in the church and cannot effectively mediate in disputes and conflicts among members of their churches, let alone among members of the society.

iii. Leadership crises: Leadership crises, especially issues that relate to succession, authority and decision-making can disrupt the peace within churches (Ishola, 2025). When a church is plagued by leadership crises, it will be ineffective and weak and hence cannot successfully engage in effective conflict resolution mechanisms in the society.

iv. Ethnic consciousness: When ethnic loyalty overrides church membership loyalty to God and church authority, it becomes a serious problem that lead to a breakdown in peace, mutual love and collaboration. When the Igbo are biased against the Yoruba Urhobo, Gwari and Hausa people in the church and exclude them in their decision-making desks; and the Yoruba, Urhobo, Gwari and Hausa vise versa, the strength of the church to win the world for Christ will become drastically reduced. (Ishola, 2025) 14

v. Inadequate collaboration among churches: Most often different churches find it difficult to operate in synergy or collaborate to find a lasting solution to problems affecting Christian churches in general because of selfish interest.

vi. Lack of reliable security information: The church sometimes find it difficult to access real-time and reliable security information that will help it shield itself and members of its host communities from the activities of criminal gangs, terrorists groups and suspicious individuals in the society. Nigerian church as observed by Ishola (2025), face security threats ranging from internal disruptions to external attacks.

vii. Large scale infiltration of criminals into Nigerian security network:

Nigerian security network is currently saturated with individuals who lack credibility, reliability and trust-worthiness, and this makes the church apprehensive to partner with the rural community vigilante groups in providing rural community security and policing in some communities. This poses a threat to chuech-community engagement programmes.

Conclusion

The church is a very important religious institution, chosen and endowed by God with colossal spiritual, moral, social and institutional resources required for active and impactful contribution to conflict prevention, peace-building, social cohesion and sustainable national development. In the light of the above, the church cannot be successfully sidelined in Nigeria's struggle to achieve security of lives and property of citizens, peaceful environment for all and sustainable national development. Insecurity 15 has plagued the country so much that the involvement of some non-state actors, like the church, in helping the government find a lasting solution to it, has become compellingly imperative. Although the church is confronted with challenges such as intra and inter-church conflicts, weak leadership, leadership crises, ethnic consciousness, inadequate collaboration and so on, which threaten its peace and efficiency in playing its role as an agent of peace-building, it should endeavor to rise abovethese challenges and take its proper place in the society as God's agent of peace and social reformation. It should engage actively as well as constructively in peace-building process and in providing support for rural community policing and security network.

Recommendations

To position the church in Nigeria effectively for impactful and meaningful contribution to peace-building and sustainable national development, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. The church should strive to rid itself of all forms of intra and inter-church conflicts, rivalries unhealthy competition, leadership crises and fight for position, which mar its internal unity, integrity and capacity to act as a model of peace and agent of recommendation and dispute settlements in the society.

2. The church should incorporate into its administrative structure well programmed conflicts resolution mechanisms for effective management of conflicts and disputes of diverse kinds among members and for mediation and reconciliation of conflicting individuals and communities.

3. The church should collaborat4e actively with government security institutions and intensify efforts in provision of error-free security information to government security institutions for effective maintenance of peace and security in rural and 16 urban areas.

4. The church should invest more in peace education an and leadership conflicts management skills to equip its leadership with the capacity to use modern digital tools to manage, administer and handle complex sensitive issues that can lead to crisis both in the church and in the larger society.

5. Different Church denominations in Nigeria should, unite both in purpose and vision, and work together as one, avoiding unnecessary rivalry among them, so as to present a formidable force capable to impact on national security, and with peace-building efficacy that will contribute more significantly to Nigeria's sustainable national development.

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