

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The achievement of sustainable national development is usually not an easy task in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious country as Nigeria. Nevertheless, it is the contention of this paper that through a thoughtful integration of whatever political ideology held by the government and religious beliefs of the citizens, sustainable national development could be achieved without much difficulty. As a conceptual review paper based on existing literature, the discussion started by examining some principles of sustainable national development and then proceeds to expose the complex relationship between political ideology and national development. This is followed by a discussion of the relationship between political ideology and religious beliefs. Lastly, it examined some necessary steps to be taken in integrating political ideology and religious beliefs toward sustainable national development. It concluded by calling on the Nigerian government to adopt a prudent and non-discriminatory approach towards the proposed integration in order to achieve sustainable development that could be sustained.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Integration, Political ideology, Religious belief

Introduction

Any development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is said to be sustainable. Achievement of sustainable national development is a major goal of any government in power anywhere in the world. In pursuit of this goal, right from the time of her independence in 1960, different development plans have been put forward by different governments in Nigeria. Thus, between 1962 and 1986, Nigeria as a country had four different development plans. These plans gave rise to such programmes as: (1) Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) launched by General Obasanjo's military administration in 1976. This programme which was designed to promote self-sufficiency in food production failed due to among other things the fact that it was federally controlled instead of empowering local farmers. Also, lack of continuity after the military handed over to civilian administration contributed to its failure. (2) President Shehu Shagari's Green Revolution launched in 1980. Although the Green Revolution succeeded in boosting food production through the use of high yielding crop varieties, this success could not last due to low soil fertility coupled with lack of irrigation facilities in many parts of the country. (3) National Directorate for Employment (NDE) and Directorate for Food, Road, and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) launched by General Babangida's military regime in 1986. The DFFRI was an integrated nationwide approach to rural development, through the boosting of food production, construction of feeder roads, provision of clean water and electricity to rural areas, as well as encouragement of local participation and grass root development associations. Despite the good objectives of this programme, it did not have a lasting impact due to large scale misuse of public funds, poor programme implementation evident in poorly constructed boreholes and rural roads, imposition of projects on rural population without recourse to local needs etc. (Aremu, n.d).

Also, with the pronouncement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations Organization in September 2015, Nigeria quickly adopted these goals as a means of tackling both social, economic, and environmental challenges confronting the country. Basic among these goals are the eradication of poverty and inequality, elimination of hunger, access to education, healthcare and clean water, women's empowerment, peace, justice and strong institutions, responsible consumption and production, decent work and economic growth (Wikipedia, n.d)

As was the case with the various development plans, the Nigerian governments swiftly embarked upon various poverty alleviation programmes in the bid to attain the SDGs. For example, the National Healthcare Insurance Programme has been initiated to make healthcare affordable to the citizens, the National Housing Fund has been established to make houses available to the citizens, various educational institutions (public and private) have been established at different levels in order to make education available to many Nigerians. Other measures geared towards the attainment of the SDGs include the establishment of the office of Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs and formation of different committees on SDGs at different arms of government and even the private sector.

Despite the above measures by the federal government among other things, the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria has remained elusive due to certain pervasive conditions in the country. Moti and Vambe (n.d) have identified poverty, threatened and degraded agrarian and production environment, prevalence of anti-development activities, ignorance, apathy and denial, as some of the factors militating

against sustainable development. Rodriguez (2024) has also mentioned poverty and social disparity as some of the challenges of sustainable development. This he says is due to the fact that a large number of people live below poverty line and thus, lack access to essential necessities. There is also the problem of population growth and urbanization. These problems have resulted in inadequate housing, congestion, strained transportation network and high demand for energy. High level of national debt also militates against sustainable national development. In Nigeria for example, it has been reported that 66.9% of the total revenue of the country in the past nine years was spent on debt servicing and that her public debt grows steadily in levels that have left many worried while government revenue remains low (Balley, 2024). This is a serious obstacle to sustainable development no matter how laudable the programmes and initiatives designed to achieve it seem to be.

The above challenges notwithstanding, it must be observed that the attainment of sustainable development by means of whatever strategy requires first of all a thorough grasp of the concept and principles of sustainable development. It is on the basis of such knowledge that appropriate and result-oriented development efforts should be put in place. Also a sound knowledge of the principles of sustainable development will enhance the integration of political ideology held by the leaders and the religious belief of the citizens in the effort to formulate and implement result-oriented strategies for the attainment of sustainable development.

Concept and Principles of Sustainable Development

Development is said to be sustainable when it is such that the present generation of citizens are able to meet their needs as well as makes provision for the future generations to meet their own needs. Thus, the Academy of Public Policies (2024) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Reasoning from the standpoint of agriculture, Ogujiuba, Ugwuoti and Ehiagiamusoe (2013) see sustainable development as encompassing sustainable agriculture when they define it as consisting of environmental friendly methods of farming that allow the production of crops or livestock without damage to human or natural systems. Sustainable development therefore is all about conserving natural resources after the resources namely soil, water, biodiversity and other environmental resources have been used to meet the present needs. It ensures that economic, social and environmental policies are formulated having in mind the protection of the planet.

Sustainable development has some principles that guide decision making and action for guaranteeing a more sustainable future. The Academy of Public Policies (2024) has identified some principles and their implications. These include:

- i. Integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations in decision making process. This principle implies that the impact of policies, programmes and projects on the environment, society and economy must be considered with a view to finding a balance that will benefit the three dimensions of sustainability namely economic, social and environmental.
- ii. Recognition of the interconnectedness of all living things and importance of maintaining biodiversity. This means that emphasis should not be placed on human beings alone.
- iii. The need to protect and manage natural resources in a sustainable manner. This demands that water resources should be conserved, wastes and pollutions reduced, and sustainable land use practices promoted.
- iv. Promotion of social equity and justice. This principle requires the creation of a more

equitable society where individuals have access to basic services, opportunity to education and employment and a voice in decision-making process.

- v. Empowerment of individuals to participate in decision making process.

The above principles is a pointer to the fact that sustainable development is not achieved by wishful thinking. It rather requires thoughtful planning of how natural resources should be used for the satisfaction of human needs without depleting the resources, how one resource relates to others, involvement of different categories of people in decision making as well as who and how different resources should be handled.

Citicore (2024) also lists the following five principles of sustainable development:

1. Conservation of the environment and ecosystem. This principle emphasizes the need to ensure that the environment and ecosystem are not destroyed as a result of usage/human activities.
2. Conservation of the planet's biodiversity. This principles lays emphasis on the need to preserve both the number and varieties of different species of plants and animals within a region.
3. Society's sustainable development.
4. Conservation of human capital and
5. Management and control of the population.

Similar to the above principles, GeeksforGeeks (2023) mentions conservation of ecosystem and environment, conservation of the biodiversity of the planet, sustainable development of the society, conservation of the human resources, population control and management as five principles of sustainable development.

From the foregoing, it is evident that sustainable development principles brings together society, economic, and environmental sustainability with a view to ensuring health, employment, and quality education for global sustainability and conserving all living beings. It is therefore pertinent at this point to reflect on the extent to which the political ideology of our leaders and the religious beliefs of the citizens align with these principles. Let us first of all consider how political ideology relates to national development

Relationship between Political Ideology and National Development

Simply put, political ideology is a set of beliefs one has about the world and how it should operate. Heywood (2021) sees it as a set of beliefs and values about how society should work. Valenzuela, Grimsley, and Perry (2023) define political ideology as a set of related beliefs about political theory and policy held by an individual or a group of individuals or a particular social class. A few examples of political ideologies include

1. Liberalism which focuses on individualism, self-reliance, personal responsibility, equality before the law, etc;
2. Socialism which like liberalism believes in equality before the law, but differs from liberalism in the sense that it objects to the idea that people can develop independently. It rather subscribes to collective or social efforts.
3. Communism which as a form of socialism abolishes private ownership in favour of collectivism and equalization of social conditions of life.

By explaining social, economic, and political conditions that a people face as well as dictating a plan of political action, political ideology relates directly to sustainable national development. Specifically, Ayanlola (as cited in Adisa, 2008) has identified the following three reasons for political ideology:

- i. It helps to identify where society is,
- ii. It includes where society should be or ought to be moving,

iii. It shows how to get there.

These functions of ideology are necessary requirements for the planning of the economy as well as making informed decisions affecting the growth and development of any country. Such well guided decisions when thoroughly implemented will go a long way towards the attainment of sustainable development.

Tahir (2015) also identifies five functions of ideologies namely integration functions, legitimation functions, distortion functions socialization functions and motivation functions. The integration function, socialization function, and motivation function have positive impact on national development as shown below:

The integration function of ideologies include binding people together, creating a sense of unity and solidarity, and providing common goals and values. These functions contribute to national development since without unity, human rights will not be recognized and protected, social justice and equity policies that deal with discrimination, marginalization and inequality will also be neglected and such neglect will impact negatively on national development.

Socialization function of ideology transmits values and norms to new members as well as teaches people societal etiquettes through family, school, media and religion. These virtues enable collaborations in the management of natural resources, forestation, environmental protection, and social security. Prudent and effective handling of such social and environmental issues will definitely enhance sustainable national development.

Motivation function of ideology provides goals and direction, mobilizes people for collective action as well as inspires people to bring social change. The extent to which a country tolerates and implements positive changes has a direct bearing on the country's rate of development and its sustenance.

A consideration of the high level of poverty, hunger, economic strangulation, corruption, and inequality in Nigeria of today viz-a-viz the present government's policies that lack human face clearly indicates that political ideology can either make or mar national development. It will mar national development when leaders fail to relate their political ideology to the religious beliefs of the citizens. The next section of this paper will examine the relationship between these two influential factors.

Relationship between Political Ideology and Religious Belief

Whereas political ideology as seen in the last section refers to ideas or beliefs of a group of people about what is of interest to the people, a group's religious ideology refers to the beliefs, values and practices associated with a particular religion. Political ideology is therefore not completely independent of religious beliefs as religion either overtly or covertly affects a person's everyday life. Swierenger (as cited in Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2018) agrees to this when he says that people act politically, economically, and socially in keeping with their ultimate beliefs. He remarks further that people's values, mores, and actions whether in the polling booth, on the job or at home are an outgrowth of the god or gods they hold at the center of their being. Baggett (2020) also shares this view by noting that religion plays a powerful role in modern politics and that the government of a state cannot be separated from the religious views of its people that affect the leaders and law makers of a country. This is so because religion provides ethical guidelines that shape political views. Also in the area of social justice, religious teachings inspire people to advocate for equality and human rights. Moreover, political allegiances by some individuals are more or less based on shared faith.

The link between religion and politics is vividly captured by Vaghefi (2023) when

he observes that Religion influences politics by shaping individual's value system and community network. He further states that religious beliefs affect citizens' voting behaviours and tendencies and at the same time shapes the discourses of politicians. Moreover, religious community networks mobilizes voters by drawing their attention to political agendas. Vaghefi further points out the reciprocal relationship between religion and politics by noting that while religion shapes one's value system by setting moral rules and regulations, politics shapes individual's rights and obligations.

It stands to reason from the foregoing that there is a symbiotic relationship between religious belief and political ideology. This type of relationship is however more pronounced in a theocratic government such as Iran. Nonetheless, in non-theocratic governments political and religious ideologies have also been blended. This blending has been facilitated through liberation theology that inspires movement for social justice with emphasis on Christian call for solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized (Sobrinho, 1998). A formal integration of religious and political ideologies based on some common grounds is therefore necessary for the achievement of sustainable national development. The next section will therefore consider how to carry out this integration.

Integration of Political Ideology and Religious Beliefs for the Achievement of Sustainable National Development

Political ideology and religious belief are said to be separate phenomenon that have affected individuals and societies throughout history (Irenees.net, n.d.) Their differences notwithstanding, they have common characteristics that when properly integrated, could facilitate the attainment of sustainable national development. Take for instance, the issues of morality; ethics, social justice and equity normally advocated by different religions. These are also within the purview of political ideology. A thoughtful integration of both therefore will result in conducive social environment necessary for sustainable national development.

The concept of integration is explained by Irenees.net (n.d) as a situation whereby religion and politics unite with each other in an attempt to monopolize political power. Our idea of integration in this paper however consists of merging those religious beliefs that have positive impact on national development with political ideologies that serve the same purpose in the process of formulating government policies. Such religious beliefs include:

1. The golden rule that radiates values of compassion, justice, love and mercy (Genyi, 2016). Love and compassion promote social justice and thus ensure that even the less privileged are carried along in the quest for sustainable development.
2. Virtues of beneficence, charity, truthfulness, trustworthiness, courtesy, the defense of others and piety (Effendi, 1980).
3. Human kindness, honesty, and sanctity of life are also virtues included in religious beliefs. The above religious beliefs/morals cut across the two main religions in Nigeria namely: Christianity and Islam. Hence, their integration with political ideology will serve as a potent measure for the achievement of sustainable national development.
4. Different religions believe in the importance of education. Thus, many religious bodies have established educational institutions at different levels thereby educating people for sustainable development.
5. Some religious beliefs encourage sustainable agricultural practices that ensure food security. A good example of this practice is the landmark achievement of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Diocese of Nnewi, Anambra State. According to Ujumadu (2024), the Nnewi Diocese of the church of Nigeria Anglican Communion has launched a large scale agricultural project to ensure food availability and boost the Diocese's finances. Ujumadu

reported the Bishop of the Diocese Rt. Rev. Ndubuisi Obi as saying that the diocese has acquired extensive land in various parts of the South-East for agricultural activities. The activities he mentioned include production of assorted types of crops in large quantities, fishery (they have 40 fish ponds), piggery, poultry, and snail farming. In addition, they have established rice mills, which are producing DONAC per-boiled rice; garri processing mills that are producing DONAC Garri; palm oil mills producing DONAC oil, etc. These and other agricultural and industrial ventures embarked upon by the Diocese have contributed immensely to food production and employment generation and thus, to sustainable national development.

The integration of political ideology and religious beliefs for sustainable national development can therefore be done using the following inclusive approaches:

1. Encouraging open and inclusive dialogue among political leaders and religious leaders, to foster mutual understanding and respect. This approach informed the inauguration of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council by President Olusegun Obasanjo's government in 1999 (Shitu, 2023).
2. Identifying common values and principles between political ideologies and religious beliefs such as compassion and equality and reflecting these in policy formulation.
- 3 Matching political and religious views in the development of shared vision and goals for national development.
4. Incorporating religious teachings and political ideology into policy making to ensure that policies promote common goals.
5. Religious leaders should encourage their members to submit to political authorities by carrying out their civic responsibilities.
6. Prioritizing such issues as social justice, equality poverty, and discrimination in the course of policy formulation by political leaders. Such prioritization is necessary as these virtues are emphasized by the different religions in Nigeria and are also embraced by various political ideologies.
7. Involvement of religious leaders of different faiths and their representatives in decision-making processes to ensure inclusivity. This will guarantee peaceful and harmonious society necessary for sustainable development.
8. Pursuing national unity which is a sine- qua- non for national development by basing conflict resolution on religious teachings and political ideologies.
9. Ensuring accountability and transparency in governance will enhance the cooperation of leaders and followers of different religious groups as they all preach and encourage these virtues that are necessary for sustainable development.

As complex as the process of integrating political ideology and religious belief may appear, an honest and impartial application of the above measures will definitely make for a peaceful, and stable political and economic environment without which sustainable national development will be elusive. Such integration will also ensure that citizens are given the opportunity to contribute their best towards sustainable national development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

An in-debt study of the two major religions in Nigeria namely Christianity and Islam shows that there is not much difference between their beliefs on such issues as environmental protection, social justice, poverty alleviation, morality, ethics, wealth creation, submission to leaders, dignity of labour, land use and land distribution, wise management of natural resources, integrity and honest business practices, fairness and

equitable dealing in business. Incorporating these ideals in the formulation of government policies is a way of integrating political ideology and religious beliefs and of making government policies have religious undertone. The need for such integration stems from the fact that goals are more probable to be attained when they are presented as having religious backing. This is an important step towards securing the co-operation of the citizens in the implementation of government's policies and thus, attaining sustainable national development. There is however every need to adopt a prudent and non-discriminatory approach towards the proposed integration in order to achieve sustainable development in view of the multi-religious and multi-cultural composition of the country.

Based on the above premise, we hereby recommend as follows:

1. The Federal governments should continue to encourage inter-faith dialogue among the three main religions (Christianity, Islam, and Traditional religion) in Nigeria with clearly defined goals and diverse representation. Decisions reached at this level should be conveyed to the three arms of government at the national level to guide them in policy formulation and implementation.
2. The Federal government through the Ministries of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction and that of Women Affairs and Social Development should engage religious leaders in the education of their members on social issues.
3. The Federal Ministry of Regional development and the two ministries mentioned above should encourage community development and economic empowerment initiatives such as the Anglican Diocese of Nnewi agricultural project (mentioned in this paper) and recommend similar efforts to other religious groups.
4. The Federal Ministry of Education should ensure the inclusion of civil education as part of religious studies curriculum in the primary and secondary schools.
5. Religious beliefs that encourage such virtues as national unity, equity, love, honesty and industry, should be incorporated by the legislators at the Federal and state levels while enacting laws that border on the development of the country.

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