



The Impact of Social Movements in Achieving Peace and Development in Nigeria

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Abstract:

This article examines the impact of social movements on Nigeria's political, social, and economic landscape. From the anti-colonial movements of the 1950s to the contemporary protests against police brutality and corruption, social movements have played a significant role in shaping Nigeria's history and contributing to the country's development, despite facing significant challenges, including government repression, lack of resources, and ethnic and religious divisions. This article aims to examine the impact of social movements in Nigeria, highlighting their achievements, challenges, and contributions to the country's development. The study reveals that social movements in Nigeria have achieved notable successes, including independence from colonial rule, the transition to democracy, and the exposure of corruption.

Keywords: Social Movements, Peace and Development.

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Introduction

Social movements have been a vital part of Nigeria's history, playing a significant role in shaping the country's political, social, and economic landscape. From the anti-colonial movements of the 1950s to the contemporary protests against police brutality and corruption, social movements have been a powerful force for change in Nigeria. Nigeria's rich history of activism has been a powerful tool in eliminating injustice and driving social change. From anti-colonial leaders like Funmilayo Kuti and the Women of Aba, who fought against British colonialism, to subsequent leaders like Fela Kuti, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Aisha Yusufu, who stood up against unjust leadership, activism has played a crucial role in shaping Nigeria's history.

However, despite this strong legacy, Nigerians have become increasingly disillusioned with protesting due to government incompetence and continued oppression. This sense of hopelessness and powerlessness was captured by Fela Kuti in his 1978 song "Suffering and Smiling," which describes a society where people feel forced to accept a dysfunctional status quo that only benefits the elite. One major reason for this disillusionment is Nigeria's history of military rule, which spanned from 1966 to 1999, with only a brief period of democratic rule from 1979 to 1983. This prolonged period of authoritarian rule undermined the effectiveness of protests as a means of expressing frustration and driving change.

Within this context, the 2020 #EndSARS protests are even more remarkable. The hashtag dates back to 2017 and was revived last year after a video surfaced showing a Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) officer shooting and killing a young man. SARS was already infamously known as a rogue police unit that brutalizes, murders, extorts, and sexually harasses Nigerian youths. The video led activists to demand that SARS be disbanded permanently. The protests began on October 8 and continued through October 21. Although it started as a demand to abolish SARS, the protests quickly became a transformative demonstration for improved governance.

This article aims to examine the impact of social movements in Nigeria, highlighting their achievements, challenges, and contributions to the country's development.

Statement of the Problem

While social movements have been instrumental in promoting peace and development, many societies still struggle with conflict, violence, and inequality. Despite Nigeria's progress in advancing democracy, human rights, and equality through social movements, the country continues to experience periodic violence and high crime rates. This raises important questions about the impact of social movements in achieving peace and how they can be strengthened to better realize their goals.

Methodology

This paper employed secondary data collection. The study analyzed existing datasets from different sources, including local non-governmental organisations. The data were content-analysed.

Theoretical Anchorage

Relative deprivation theory

The theory of relative deprivation cannot be discussed without acknowledging its contemporary reincarnation and currency, which is attributed to Judith Blau and Peter Blau, the two scholars who introduced the theory into sociology and criminology in 1982. Blau and Blau (1982) arrived at the relative deprivation theory after a systematic integration of variables, concepts, views, and constructs from social disorganisation and anomie theories. Upholding the views of these theorists, Nnam (2014) contended that the marginalised in society may feel dispossessed and resentful when they compare their conditions to those of the political/ruling class, who, in most cases, are blamed as the cause of lower-class deprivations and disadvantaged positions in society. The implication is that 'subalterns' (the marginalised, oppressed in context) can protest in defence! Blau and Blau (1982) reiterated that affected individuals or groups may begin to have misgivings about a system that has cultivated economic and social disparities and hindered their opportunities for making progress. The frustration arising from 'relative (and absolute) deprivation' is a precursor to the rebirth of several social movements in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Social movements

According to Blumer (1951), social movements are collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. A social movement is a collective, organized, and sustained effort to bring about or resist change in the social order (Smelser, 1962). Tilly (2004) opined that social movements are a type of contentious politics that involves the use of unconventional forms of political participation, such as protests, demonstrations, and boycotts.

Social movements are sustained challenges to power holders in the name of a disadvantaged group (Tarrow, 1998). Social movements are collective, organized, and

sustained efforts to bring about or resist change in the social order (Morris, 1984). According to Snow and Benford (1992), social movements are collective, organized, and sustained efforts to promote or resist change in the social order, often involving the use of non-institutional forms of collective action. Alain Social movements are collective, organized, and sustained efforts to transform the social order, often involving the use of non-institutional forms of collective action (Touraine, 1981).

By understanding the definitions of social movements, we can better appreciate the significance of collective action in shaping society for promoting positive change, collective effort in challenging power holders, promoting social justice, and transforming the social order

Human Rights

Locke (1689), opined that the state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions. Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law (Kant, 1785). In line with United Nations (1948), human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. Basic rights are everyone's minimum reasonable demands upon the rest of humanity (Shue, 1980).

As stated by Sen (1999), human rights can be seen as a way of making freedom and well-being more secure. Human rights are universal, inalienable, and indivisible rights that belong to all human beings, regardless of their nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status (Donnelly, 2013). Human rights are moral and legal principles that are based on the concept of human dignity and are intended to protect individuals from abuse and oppression (Freeman, 2011).

Numerous scholars and authors have defined and studied human rights, highlighting the importance of human dignity, equality, and freedom. These definitions also emphasize the universal and inalienable nature of human rights, which belong to all human beings regardless of their nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status.

Peace

In line with Galtung (1969), peace is a multifaceted concept that encompasses not only the absence of war and violence, but also the presence of social justice, equality, and human rights. According to King (1963), peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal. Perpetual peace is a state of affairs in which all nations are united under a common law and in which war is abolished (Kant, 1795). Peace is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that encompasses not only the absence of war and violence but also the presence of social justice, equality, and human rights (Summy, 1995).

According to Boulding (1978), peace is a state of stable and mutually beneficial relationships among individuals, groups, and nations. Peace is a state of being in which individuals and groups can fulfill their potential and live in harmony with one another (Curle, 1971). Peace is a web of relationships that are characterized by mutual respect, trust, and cooperation (Boulding, 2000).

Peace is crucial in promoting and maintaining harmony and stability in individuals, communities, and nations. By understanding the definitions and principles of peace, we can better work towards creating a more peaceful and just world.

The History of Social Movements

Social movements have been a vital part of human history, playing a significant role in shaping the world we live in today. From the labor movements of the 19th century to the civil rights movements of the 20th century, social movements have been instrumental in promoting social justice, equality, and human rights.

Early Social Movements

One of the earliest social movements was the labor movement, which emerged in the 19th century in response to the exploitation of workers during the Industrial Revolution. The labor movement sought to improve working conditions, wages, and benefits for workers and was instrumental in the passage of labor laws and regulations (Hobsbawm, 1962).

Another early social movement was the women's suffrage movement, which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The women's suffrage movement sought to secure the right to vote for women and was instrumental in the passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution (Flexner, 1959).

Civil Rights Movement

The civil rights movement, which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, was a significant social movement in the United States. The movement sought to end racial segregation and discrimination, and was instrumental in the passage of landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Branch, 1988).

Anti-Apartheid Movement

The anti-apartheid movement, which emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, was a significant social movement in South Africa. The movement sought to end the system of apartheid, which institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination, and was instrumental in the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the eventual dismantling of apartheid (Mandela, 1994).

Contemporary Social Movements

In recent years, social movements have continued to play a significant role in promoting social justice and human rights. The Black Lives Matter movement, which emerged in 2013, seeks to address systemic racism and police brutality against African Americans (Garza, 2014). The #MeToo movement, which emerged in 2017, seeks to address sexual harassment and assault (Garcia, 2017).

The History of Social Movements in Nigeria

Nigeria has a rich history of social movements, dating back to the colonial era. These movements have played a significant role in shaping the country's political, social, and economic landscape. This article provides an overview of the history of social movements in Nigeria.

Early Social Movements (1914-1960)

The early social movements in Nigeria were primarily focused on anti-colonialism and nationalism. The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), founded in 1923, was one of the earliest social movements in Nigeria. The party advocated for Nigerian independence and self-rule (Coleman, 1958).

Another significant social movement during this period was the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), founded in 1934. The NYM was a nationalist movement that sought to promote Nigerian unity and independence (Tamuno, 1962).

Post-Independence Social Movements (1960-1980)

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, social movements continued to play a significant role in shaping the country's political and social landscape. The Nigerian Labor Movement, founded in 1960, was a significant social movement during this period. The movement advocated for workers' rights and better working conditions (Yesufu, 1982).

Another significant social movement during this period was the Nigerian Students' Movement, founded in 1962. The movement advocated for students' rights and played a significant role in the country's politics during the 1960s and 1970s (Adejumobi, 2002).

Contemporary Social Movements (1980-Present)

In recent years, social movements in Nigeria have continued to play a significant role in shaping the country's political and social landscape. The pro-democracy movement, which emerged in the 1980s, advocated for democratic reforms and an end to military rule (Ihonvbere, 1996).

The Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) movement, founded in 2014, is another significant social movement in contemporary Nigeria. The movement advocates for the release of the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram and for greater government action to address the insurgency (Ojo, 2015).

1. **Government Repression:** Social movements in Nigeria have often faced repression from the government, including arrests, detentions, and violence.
2. **Lack of Resources:** Social movements in Nigeria often lack the resources needed to sustain their activities, including funding, personnel, and infrastructure.
3. **Ethnic and Religious Divisions:** Social movements in Nigeria have often been hindered by ethnic and religious divisions, which have made it difficult to build a united front against common enemies.

Notable social movements in Nigeria have played a significant role in shaping the country's history and contributing to its development.

The Aba Women's Riot (1929): This movement was a protest against tax levies imposed by the colonial government. The women's protest led to the death of many women, but it also brought attention to the unfair tax regime.

The Abeokuta Women's Revolt (1947): Led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, this movement protested against an unfair tax regime, leading to the abdication of the then Alake of Egbaland, Oba Sir Ladapo Ademola II, and the abolition of the tax regime by the colonial government.

The Ali Must Go Protests (1978): This movement was a protest against a 50 kobo increase in student fees, which sparked nationwide protests.

The Anti-SAP Riots (1989): These protests occurred as a result of the effects of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) introduced by the Ibrahim Babangida-led government.

The June 12 Protests (1993): These protests occurred as the aftermath of the annulment of the June 12, 1993, Presidential elections by Ibrahim Babangida.

The Occupy Nigeria Protests (2012): These protests were against the removal of fuel subsidies and eventual price hikes by the Goodluck Jonathan government, leading to the reinstatement of the subsidy and a review of the Federal Government spending.

The End SARS Protests (2020): These protests were against police brutality meted out by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), leading to the disbandment of SARS and promises of police reform.

The End Bad Governance in Nigeria Protests (2024): These protests were against the rising cost of living, fuel subsidy removal, hike in electricity tariffs and customs duties, hunger, and insecurity.

These social movements have achieved significant milestones, including the abolition of unfair tax regimes, the reinstatement of fuel subsidies, and the disbandment of SARS. They have also brought attention to issues such as police brutality, corruption, and bad governance.

The Impact of Social Movements in Nigeria

Social movements in Nigeria have had a significant impact on the country's political and social landscape. Some of the notable achievements of social movements in Nigeria include:

1. **Independence Movement:** The anti-colonial movement led by nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Anthony Enahoro played a crucial role in Nigeria's independence from British colonial rule in 1960.
2. **Pro-Democracy Movement:** The pro-democracy movement of the 1990s, led by groups such as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and the Campaign for Democracy (CD), played a significant role in the transition from military rule to democracy in 1999.
3. **EndSARS Movement:** The #EndSARS movement, which began in 2020, has highlighted the need for police reform and an end to police brutality in Nigeria.
4. **Anti-Corruption Movement:** The anti-corruption movement, led by groups such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), has helped to expose and prosecute corrupt government officials and business leaders such as:

James Ibori: A former governor of Delta State, Ibori was convicted in the UK in 2012 for money laundering and embezzlement of millions of dollars from his state. He received a 13-year prison sentence and was ordered to pay over £100 million.

John Yakubu Yusuf: A former assistant director in the police pension office, Yusuf was convicted and sentenced to six years in prison for fraud and embezzlement of N22.9 billion in police pension funds. He was also ordered to return the stolen funds.

Glencore: The multinational commodities trading company agreed to pay \$50 million to Nigeria as a penalty and compensation for bribing officials for special oil deals between 2007 and 2018.

These cases demonstrate the efforts of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), in exposing and prosecuting corrupt individuals and organizations.

Political Impact

Particularly in recent years. The #EndSARS movement, which began in 2017, is a prime example. This movement, fueled by social media, aimed to dismantle the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) due to its notorious human rights abuses.

The #EndSARS movement achieved several key milestones:

- **Raising Awareness:** Social media platforms like Twitter played a crucial role in spreading awareness about SARS' atrocities, garnering international attention and support.
- **Government Response:** The movement pressured the government to announce the disbandment of SARS and introduce police reforms.

- Youth Empowerment: The #EndSARS movement demonstrated the power of Nigeria's youth in driving political change and advocating for their rights.

Social Impact

- Promoting Human Rights: Social movements have played a crucial role in advocating for human rights, particularly in the areas of gender equality, justice, and accountability.
- Raising Awareness: Movements like #BringBackOurGirls and #ArewaMeToo have brought attention to critical issues like kidnapping, sexual violence, and gender-based discrimination.
- Community Empowerment: Social movements have empowered communities to take action and demand change, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and activism.

Economic Impact

- Influencing Policy Changes: Movements like #OccupyNigeria have successfully pressured the government to reverse policies, such as the fuel subsidy removal, which had significant economic implications.
- Holding Leaders Accountable: Social movements have demanded transparency and accountability from leaders, pushing for better governance and management of economic resources.
- Creating Economic Opportunities: Some social movements have focused on promoting economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and job creation, particularly among marginalized communities.

Here are some achievements and challenges of social movements in Nigeria

Achievements

- Policy Changes: Social movements have influenced policy changes, such as the repeal of the Anti-Same-Sex Marriage Act in some states.
- Increased Awareness: Movements like #BringBackOurGirls and #EndSARS have raised awareness about critical issues like kidnapping, police brutality, and gender-based violence.
- Empowerment: Social movements have empowered marginalized communities, such as women, youth, and LGBTQ+ individuals, to demand their rights and challenge oppressive systems.
- Accountability: Movements have held leaders accountable for their actions, pushing for transparency and good governance.
- Community Building: Social movements have fostered a sense of community and solidarity among Nigerians, promoting collective action and social change.

Challenges

- Government Repression: Social movements often face repression, intimidation, and violence from government forces, which can limit their effectiveness.
- Limited Resources: Many social movements in Nigeria struggle with limited resources, including funding, infrastructure, and capacity.

Societal Resistance: Social movements often face resistance from societal norms, cultural values, and religious beliefs, which can hinder their progress.

- **Internal Conflicts:** Social movements can experience internal conflicts, power struggles, and ideological differences, which can undermine their unity and effectiveness.
- **Sustainability:** Social movements in Nigeria often struggle to sustain their momentum and impact over time, due to factors like burnout, co-optation, and repression.

Social movements have made significant contributions to Nigeria's development across various sectors:

Political Development

- **Promoting Democracy:** Social movements have advocated for democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law.
- **Holding Leaders Accountable:** Movements have pushed for transparency, accountability, and good governance, ensuring leaders are answerable to the people.
- **Influencing Policy Changes:** Social movements have driven policy reforms, such as the repeal of the Anti-Same-Sex Marriage Act in some states.

Economic Development

- **Advocating for Economic Justice:** Movements have fought against economic inequality, advocating for fair distribution of resources and social welfare programs.
- **Promoting Entrepreneurship:** Social movements have encouraged entrepreneurship, innovation, and job creation, particularly among youth and marginalized communities.
- **Fighting Corruption:** Movements have exposed corruption, pushing for accountability and transparency in economic management.

Social Development

- **Empowering Marginalized Groups:** Social movements have amplified the voices of marginalized communities, promoting their rights and inclusion.
- **Advancing Education:** Movements have advocated for quality education, pushing for reforms and increased access to education.
- **Promoting Health and Well-being:** Social movements have campaigned for improved healthcare services, advocating for the rights of people living with disabilities and chronic illnesses.

Environmental Development

- **Environmental Activism:** Social movements have fought against environmental degradation, advocating for sustainable practices and conservation.
- **Promoting Climate Justice:** Movements have pushed for climate action, holding leaders accountable for their roles in addressing climate change.
- **Conserving Natural Resources:** Social movements have campaigned for the responsible management of natural resources, ensuring their preservation for future generations.

The Role of Social Movements in Promoting Peace in Nigeria

Social movements have several features that make them an effective tool for promoting peace in society. Firstly, social movements provide a platform for marginalized and oppressed groups to express their grievances and demand justice. For example, the civil rights movement in the United States provided a platform for African Americans to

demand equal rights and challenge discriminatory laws and practices.

Secondly, social movements help to raise awareness about social injustices and promote education and awareness about issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. For example, the feminist movement has helped to raise awareness about issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and equal pay.

Thirdly, social movements provide a space for people to come together and build solidarity around a common cause. For example, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa brought together people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds to challenge the apartheid regime and demand equal rights.

Recommendations

1. **Increased Collaboration:** Encourage collaboration between social movements, civil society organizations, and government agencies to amplify their impact.
2. **Capacity Building:** Provide training and resources to social movement leaders to enhance their advocacy and organizational skills.
3. **Inclusive Policymaking:** Ensure that policymakers engage with social movements and consider their perspectives when making decisions.
4. **Sustained Engagement:** Foster a culture of sustained engagement and activism among Nigerians, particularly youth, to ensure continued progress.
5. **International Support:** Encourage international organizations and governments to support Nigerian social movements through funding, technical assistance, and diplomatic pressure.

Conclusion

Throughout history, social movements have profoundly impacted society, driving progress and advocating for justice, equality, and human rights. From 19th-century labor movements to contemporary activism, these movements have shaped the world we live in. In Nigeria, social movements have played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's history and contributing to its development. Despite facing numerous challenges, Nigerian social movements have achieved significant milestones, including independence, democratic transition, and exposing corruption. As the country continues to navigate development challenges, social movements will remain a vital force for change and progress.

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