

Can Nigeria's internal contradictions be mediated?

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Introduction

By any standards, Nigeria is a deeply complex state. Its complexity is by no means limited to often cited factors such as its rapidly growing population (currently estimated at 140 million) and associated diversity issues. It is also to be found in the competing paradigms that have shaped Nigeria's historical evolution, underpinned by the organising systems and operating assumptions of its largest ethnic influences (Hausa-Fulani, Ibo and Yoruba) and an inherited "Westminster" political system. Beneath these systems lies a more diverse population of about 250 ethnic groups and approximately 600 languages along with an enormous natural resource endowment.

In addition, the Nigerian state is riddled with internal contradictions. Indeed, it is confronted by a crisis of authority and legitimacy, with the co-existence of multiple systems – economic, social, justice and security – in which the non-state systems are more trusted than the formal state-led systems. The failure of the political elite to make state systems more responsive and accessible to the vast majority of citizens exacerbates this crisis. The inability, or perhaps unwillingness, of Nigeria's governing elite to resolve or manage the country's contradictions raises questions about its capacity to cope with crisis on several fronts. The most recent of these have been in the Niger Delta where the attacks by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) against the state only recently subsided; and in Northern Nigeria, where *Boko Haram* has escalated its campaign against the state.

This paper assesses Nigeria's internal contradictions and the factors underpinning its crisis of legitimacy. It offers some proposals for reversing the recent negative trends. In particular, the paper avoids leaning toward a mainstream mediation approach in a country where neither its ruling elite nor supposedly aggrieved groups, such as excluded youth (as seen in the situation in the Niger Delta) or faith-based groups like *Boko Haram*, have signaled a genuine need for such. Contrary to some recent proposals for mediation between *Boko Haram* and the Federal Government of Nigeria, the paper proposes a multilayered approach in which the very first layer of response is one that focuses on negotiating to resolve divisions among the elite – a central factor in Nigeria's internal contradictions. A second layer would include the facilitation of an elite behaviour pattern that places citizens' concerns at the core of governance. It is only then that it will become possible to chart a path toward successful mediation between actors like *Boko Haram* and the Nigerian Government.

Markers of internal contradictions

Like many other African countries, two parallel systems – formal, state-led and informal, non-state – coexist across all spheres of life in Nigeria. Similarly, like so many other African states, this situation is best understood within a historical context. The real concern, which cannot be explained away without first identifying its historical antecedents, is that the formal state systems struggle to command the loyalty and trust of citizens, while the informal systems are able to secure the commitment and loyalty of citizens relatively easily. Arguably, this is the single most important factor at the heart of the crisis of authority and legitimacy faced by Nigeria at this moment in its history. Consequently, it ought to be a starting point for any effort to construct a formula for mediating the situation in Nigeria.

A fate sealed by history?

The traditional societies that existed in pre-colonial Nigeria had their own logic of governance and operating systems for the maintenance of social order and for managing conflict. Colonial rule reconstructed these systems and re-engineered relations within, and between, the ethnic nationalities. Their institutions of governance were retained while they were subordinated to the new civic systems of the colonial regime. This was the basis of British *indirect rule*, which has been well documented elsewhere¹. In effect, traditional authorities, as they were previously constructed, were eroded.

A new system of administration was superimposed on top of the re-arranged traditional society. The resulting laws, regulations, court system, police force and criminal code were completely alien to the population. Hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups were lumped into the geographical area known as Nigeria and expected to fit the key defining characteristics of statehood in the modern Westphalian sense, with a defined territory and citizenry (Herbst 2000). The new state would reserve the right to acquire monopoly over the means of violence; levy taxes; secure the political loyalty of citizens and their support in situations of war; adjudicate in disputes among the population; and represent them in international society.

This was a marked departure from the pre-colonial period, when sovereignty was determined not on the basis of defined territory, but on the ability of authority to command the loyalty of the population. However, the extent to which the population was committed to the institutions of the new state would come to matter significantly in the bid to successfully sustain the Nigerian state. The “inheritance elite” who assumed a moral high ground and a corresponding degree of legitimacy when it wrested power from the colonial regime would bear much of the responsibility for rallying the commitment of the population around a nation-building agenda.

Successor elite: incapable, unimaginative or disinterested?

The Nigerian state that was created by arbitrary order under colonial rule did not completely do away with the traditional society with which most Nigerians identified. In effect, the modern civic system coexisted with a non-formal system in a dynamic environment, which served to emphasise the artificiality of the new state.

At the same time, the successor elite did not systematically pursue the only other option that might have rallied the commitment of the population – effective service delivery. Having said that, in those cases where some political elites have pursued this option with commitment, the gains in terms of securing citizens’ loyalty have been significant. Nigeria is not devoid of examples in this regard – free education in Western Nigeria in the 1960s, or effective service delivery in present day Lagos State. Extending this commitment countrywide might have ensured that institutions and processes became relevant, responsive, accessible and reliable.

Citizenship was not necessarily perceived as a principle that united a nation. Thus, the idea of social and political transformation in ways that promoted the participation of every citizen and created opportunities for all was not systematically explored. In reality, what occurred was a process of state-building without simultaneous democratisation (i.e. people-centred political processes that entailed popular participation). Any effort to build peace and strengthen the Nigerian state must not overlook this reality.

The very absence of a sustained effort by successive regimes to place citizens at the heart of nation-building raises interesting questions about the capability of the successor elites and the sincerity of their intentions. In defense of the successor elites, they appeared to have nation-building in mind but a different strategy for achieving it including, for example, the pursuit of uniformity when it came to development. There was considerable emphasis, for example, on maintaining a ‘federal character’ in

1. For example, in Crowder 1968.

the distribution of opportunities or allocation of positions across federal institutions such as civil service and educational establishments. Successive regimes failed to find a formula for social and political transformation and maintained a status quo that entrenched the ruling class in power regardless of the type of regime in charge of the machinery of government (military or civil). In time, repression, service delivery gaps, graft and a gross lack of accountability characterised successive governments. Indeed, the security services, courts and prisons gradually became instruments of repression and deception. The net effect of all of this is that many citizens feel compelled to operate outside the realm of the state, having been driven away from the formal state system – a key indicator of the crisis of legitimacy confronting Nigeria.

It was difficult for Nigeria's post-colonial leaders, and the governments they led, to fundamentally transform the duality of traditional and post-colonial government. There was neither a strong sense of national identity nor a 'grand norm' around which the multinational populations of the state could be united. There was no shared historical memory behind which the successor elite could rally the loyalty and commitment of the people as one nation comprising approximately 250 ethnic groups.

Religion and ethnicity also became powerful influences on the approach of Nigerians to issues in the public sphere, particularly in the absence of strong ideological parties. For the vast majority of Nigerians, religious and ethnic identities overlap. Religious organisations in Nigeria (both Islamic and Christian) enjoy more committed membership than any other non-state actor. As such churches and mosques are powerful voices in public discourse. Similarly, the vast majority of Nigerians still identify strongly with their ethnic communities to which many willingly make contributions. However, the impact of religion has been both positive and negative. It has played a constructive role, drawing Nigerians together across ethno-religious lines. However religious leaders, just like the political elite, sometimes use the patronage system, to influence public policy toward the fulfillment of narrower sectarian or personal interests, thus further alienating the formal system.

All of these factors have no doubt sustained the parallel existence of rival systems – which Peter Ekeh refers to as the "two publics" – the primordial and the civic (Ekeh 1975).

The inevitability of a crisis of authority and legitimacy

Four important and inter-related factors are worth bearing in mind when considering the coexistence of multiple systems of governance i.e. the duality of the state and non-state sphere, and the eroding legitimacy of state institutions.

The first is the relative legitimacy of informal, non-state systems among Nigerians, which in turn generates a decline in legitimacy for the state. A second and related factor is the degree to which the state-led and the informal systems are removed from each other, which leads to the near absolute separation of these systems.

The third factor concerns the behavior of the political elite, whose patterns of governance have tended to alienate a vast majority of citizens. The unwillingness of this power elite to make state systems more responsive and accessible is crucial in this regard. Intra-elite struggles and the scramble for the rewards of the patronage system have strongly contributed to this situation.

A fourth and worrying factor – and one which goes to the core of this paper – has to do with demographic shifts, which serve as catalysts for a dangerous intersection that potentially transforms citizen exclusion into violence. This is the 'youth bulge' – the rising proportion of young people in the population.

All these issues must be considered if we are to more effectively understand how to mediate Nigeria's contradictions and address its crisis of legitimacy.

Key areas of challenge to state authority

Nigeria's internal contradictions and the state's crisis of authority are particularly noticeable in the economy, the justice system and the security sector.

It has been estimated that at least 90 percent of new jobs in the country come from the informal economy, which is also thought to contribute up to 65 % of Nigeria's GNP.² This is untaxed and unaccounted for in Nigeria's GDP.

Multiple systems of justice – traditional, religious and modern – compete for citizens' loyalty. This has produced such a degree of irregularity that the modern, statute-based system which operates in the civic realm struggles to secure the commitment of citizens. In the vast majority of situations, informal systems have proven to be more responsive in addressing the needs of citizens. Ordinary Nigerians tend to retreat from formal state institutions which are seen to be difficult to access, slow and unaffordable³.

Typically, Nigeria's security establishment has not positioned itself to serve citizens but to serve the ruling elite. It retains its colonial coloration with a focus on securing the regime of the day. Many of the colonially-created systems have remained intact and focus on population control rather than public service. Security legislation (for example, the Nigerian Police Act of 1943) has remained largely unchanged from the colonial period, and it has been difficult to adapt colonial legislation to changing realities (Olonisakin, Ikpe and Badong, 2009). In effect, the successor elites successfully traded places with their colonial counterparts. In response, a number of civil militia and informal security actors have emerged and grown by accretion including the Oodua's People's Congress (OPC); the Egbesu Boys; the Hisba Corps; and the Bakassi Boys, who were, for a period, co-opted by the Abia State Government to provide security (Agbu, 2004). Although many militia and vigilante groups were subsequently proscribed in Nigeria, it is instructive that some communities still rely on them for protection in whatever form they still exist.

Elite behaviour

On the surface, it appears that the real challenge that Nigeria's state institutions confront is that of capacity, which leads to the increased demand for alternative systems. However, a closer examination reveals the complicity of the ruling elite and four patterns of elite behaviour support this position.

The first is the apparent hostility of state officials toward alternative systems of justice and security. State actors tend to defend some of the supposed sovereign rights of the state over its other roles in public life. The security sphere represents a particularly prominent site of struggle between state and non-state actors and one which perhaps best demonstrates the contradictions and the crisis facing the Nigerian state. As may be expected, state actors appear more hostile to informal security systems whose effectiveness clearly undermines the state's supposed monopoly over the use of force.

The second pattern is that ruling elites tend to use formal security and justice institutions as their private property, and this can also extend to its use by their peers. As such they are seen as far removed from the citizenry. Thirdly, governing elites tend to show an interest in informal security groups when they need to strengthen their support base and/or respond to emergencies, as was demonstrated by the Abia State Governor's reliance on the Bakassi Boys. Curiously, at the highest levels there is no real interest in making informal security systems complementary to formal ones in ways that could actually boost capacity.

The fourth and final pattern is intra-elite competition for the gains from the patronage system. In far too many cases, governing elites distort the course of justice and steer outcomes toward their interests. One area of competition is elections, where those who challenge results often wait for long periods without any guarantee of fair outcomes. Some of the more popular decisions of electoral tribunals (which were perceived to reflect the true choice of the electorate) following the 2007 elections might have started to change the perceptions of citizens but it is still too soon to tell whether this symbolises real change.

2. *Vanguard Nigeria*, "The Informal Economy and Entrepreneurial Development", 24 May 2010 available at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201005240257.html> Accessed 9 April 2012.

3. Olonisakin, Ikpe and Badong, 2009.

The struggle for power among elites is deep-seated and has had the effect of exacerbating conflict across society. It is not uncommon that, during elections, political elites use informal security groups to provide security or coerce opponents. Indeed, all too often vulnerable young people, whether or not they are in organised vigilante groups, are co-opted as political party thugs during elections and sometimes serve as hired guns to settle scores between feuding elites (Olonisakin, Ikpe and Badong, 2009). This factor partly accounts for the escalation of the situation in the Niger Delta and the emergence of *Boko Haram* in Northern Nigeria.

A rising youth bulge: fuel for conflict in the Northeast and the Niger Delta

Nigeria exemplifies the challenges posed by a rising ‘youth bulge’ amid failed national planning – a problem that is prevalent across Africa. In Nigeria, about 65 % of an estimated population of 140 million are under the age of 30. Like the rest of Africa, the proportion of young people will continue to rise until 2050 (World Bank, 2010). It is estimated that by 2100, Nigeria will be the fourth most populous country in the world after India, China and the US (UN Population Office, 2011). Without proper national planning and provision of adequate services, a rising population of young people places severe stress on existing systems (such as education, health, employment, security and justice). With more than half a million University graduates each year, Nigeria cannot boast of decent jobs for even 10% of these young people.

Invariably, many talented young people are pushed to the “edge” of society. This, in turn, creates dangerous and extreme intersections between the rise in numbers of young people, socio-economic exclusion, and manipulation by elites. There are real concerns that vulnerable and marginalised young people, who do not find a place in mainstream socio-economic life, will become a ready pool of recruits for the pursuit of elite struggles, as well as for militant and violent extremist groups. Not surprisingly, these intersections have already begun to breed radicalised and militant young people who, in some cases, have ventured into violent extremism. If left unaddressed, this situation threatens to further challenge the authority and legitimacy of the Nigerian state.

How can we best understand the conflicts in the Delta and North-eastern Nigeria?

Since its return to civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian state has witnessed violent contestation from several sources including most recently, the *Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta* (MEND) and *Ahlan Sunnah Lid Da'waati wal Jihad Yaanaa*, commonly known as *Boko Haram*. The origins and activities of these groups are often discussed as separate and isolated cases. In fact a similar set of factors shaped their origins even if their manifestations are different and their actions have played out differently in these regions.

A common set of narratives connect the militants in the Delta and the sect in northern Nigeria. The first concerns socio-economic exclusion and a perceived disinterest by a massively corrupt elite class. The widespread experiences of poverty, unemployment and unmet needs and expectations constitute a common storyline of serious grievances, which serve to generate various layers of conflict. In both regions, accumulated neglect led to the mistrust of the state, which one group (*Boko Haram*) condemns as having been corrupted by Western education and the other (i.e. MEND) denounces for its exclusionary governance.

None of the issues at the core of these conflicts initially prompted radically violent responses. The actors and their methods mutated over time. Youth militancy in the Niger Delta began as a response to the clash between local demands and the national interests of the state (Alao, 2007). The campaign for the emancipation of the Delta began as a non-violent movement led by Ken Saro Wiwa, who was hanged by the Abacha regime in 1995 for daring to speak out about the neglect of the Delta and pollution of the local environment. The conflict later transformed and the rise in militancy was a response not only

to Wiwa's killing but an expression of determination to pursue justice for the Niger Delta (Obi, 2007). Similarly, *Boko Haram* was an offshoot of a religious movement which initially lived in relative peace within its neighbourhood.

To varying degrees religion, ethnicity and regional affinity have served as important rallying tools for the pursuit and sustenance of conflicts. Religion is a central feature of the *Boko Haram* campaign while the Niger Delta militants have focused on their regional identity. *Boko Haram* has a zero sum approach to its use of religion, characterised by its demand for an Islamic state and for the conversion of government officials (including President Goodluck Jonathan) to Islam before they agree to negotiations. As discussed below, this zero sum mentality plays out differently in the two conflicts.

It is arguable that the most significant factor in these conflicts is elite complicity. Each of these conflicts is marked by elite manipulation, which has manifested itself in two significant ways. One is the co-optation by local political elites of the narratives of exclusion (i.e. poverty, unemployment, neglect, etc.) in respective regions, with a view to securing their own place in the formal state system. Elites in the Niger Delta (an oil-producing region) prominently articulated the grievances of people in the region, most notably the fact that its young people have not collectively reaped the benefits of increased revenue from the Federal Government or payouts from oil companies. Indeed, distrust of their leaders both within the community and in Government is a recurring theme in dialogue among young people in the Delta.

Similarly, since 1999 the political elite in northern Nigeria has, in many cases, warmed to the use of Sharia Law as an operating system. Recourse to Sharia has been a provision of the Nigerian constitution since the First Republic. However, the use of Sharia since the return of civilian rule in 1999 has become more exclusionary and severe than at any time before then. The argument has been made elsewhere that, as a result of the northern elites' loss of control of the machinery of government when a southerner, Obasanjo, emerged as President in 1999, some have used religion to rally support and consolidate their political base (Uzoehina, 2012).

Another way in which the elites have manipulated young people is the direct use of these groups in the pursuit of intra-elite struggles. The evolution of MEND and *Boko Haram* is replete with stories of young people being armed by political elites as party thugs during elections, in exchange for invariably unfulfilled promises. Recent pronouncements by *Boko Haram*, for example, have indicated that senior political figures are either members or sympathisers of the sect. For example, the Public Relations Officer of *Boko Haram* who was recently arrested provided names of senior politicians who are allegedly sponsors of the sect. His accounts (in Nigerian media) appear to reveal the different ways in which politicians directly employ these groups in pursuit of class and elite struggles.⁴ The Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, has also spoken publicly about the complicity of some people in his government who are seen to be involved in activities of *Boko Haram*. In early 2012, he claimed that some people in his government were *Boko Haram* sympathisers, stating: "... some of them are in the executive arm of government; some of them are in the legislative arm of government, while some of them are even in the judiciary."⁵

These militant groups invariably grow beyond the control of their political elite sponsors. Implicit in their actions is the recognition that, even if there are meeting points between their agenda and that of their political sponsors, the latter's interest is far narrower and incapable of delivering the needs of the collective. The reality is that political elite sponsors of *Boko Haram* are no longer able to control or direct the actions of the 'monsters' they let loose on society. Interestingly, *Boko Haram*'s narratives potentially

4. See, for example, *Nigerian Vanguard*, "Boko Haram spokesman fingers senator, ambassador as sponsor", 22 November 2011 available at: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/11/boko-haram-spokesman-fingers-senator-ambassador-as-sponsors/> Accessed 23 April 2012.

5. BBC, "Nigeria's Goodluck Jonathan: Officials Back Boko Haram" available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16462891> Accessed 11 May 2012.

serve the interests of the northern elite. The group's threat to bring down the government in the next few months ensures the continued undermining of Goodluck Jonathan's government for the foreseeable future. Northern elites can, of course, use the threat of *Boko Haram*'s actions to negotiate increased resources from the central government.⁶

Response from the State

There are no doubt fundamental differences between the campaigns and activities of the two groups and the resulting impact on the ground, and this may have determined the nature of the response from the Federal Government. Militant activities in the Delta continued for well over a decade until a solution was found in 2009/10 under the regime of President Yar'adua. The Niger Delta militants as well as the region's political elite emerged as big winners in the resolution of the conflict in two ways. One was the amnesty granted to the militants and accompanying programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The other was the emergence of a President (Goodluck Jonathan) from the Niger Delta. This second factor was, of course, fortuitous given that it only became possible as a result of the death of President Yar'adua. The selection of Goodluck Jonathan as Yar'adua's running mate in the 2007 elections had already been seen as a win for the Niger Delta region.

The Government's response to *Boko Haram* is different from the response to militancy in the Niger Delta for a variety of reasons. Firstly, in the Delta there were clearly identifiable leaders with whom negotiations could take place, which is not the case with *Boko Haram*. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the issues involved in the Niger Delta conflict were clearly articulated and the demands made by the movement leaders over time were not zero sum in nature. Finally, the militants' methods of conflict, although violent, did not always entail fatalities – although the use of kidnapping and hostage-taking was traumatic for those concerned. *Boko Haram*, on the other hand, has no clearly recognisable leadership; its issues are not clearly articulated beyond a central, absolute demand for a particular type of Islamic state; and its form of violence, which graduated from violent attacks to suicide bombings targeting innocent citizens robs it of any moral claim.

While the Government faces a serious challenge in responding to this type of opposition, its responses have been largely ineffective for a number of reasons. Three of these are worth noting here. Firstly, the Government has relied overwhelmingly on the use of force with the aim of destroying or paralysing this group. No other option has been pursued with such determination. Yet the enemy on the other side of the Government's heavy artillery fire is not easily recognisable and its size, influence and membership are not really known. More importantly, the factors that produced the *Boko Haram* phenomenon are not subjected to scrutiny or placed at the centre of national debate.

Secondly, the Government response, even if disproportionate, appears to be largely unco-ordinated. There appears to be a belief among the ruling elite that this canker can be dealt with in the same way that the state dealt with its previous incarnations – such as Maitatsine in the 1980s – through brute force. Yet the state faces this challenge in a new age when technological advancements serve to connect a fierce global terror network that can wreak maximum havoc in a short space of time. It is not certain that the Nigerian Government has a full understanding of the ramifications of this challenge.

The third reason why the Government's response has been largely ineffective is that it does not appear to have in mind any effective alternatives to the military response. Clearly, this situation calls for a sophisticated mix of responses that takes into account all the political and socio-economic factors at the root of the challenge. In failing to tackle the challenge, the Government risks an escalation of the conflict to other parts of the country, particularly if *Boko Haram* expands its base of operations or persistently targets other groups.

6. See *Nigerian Vanguard*, "Revenue Formula: The barricade before northern governors" available at: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/03/revenue-formula-the-barricade-before-northern-governors/> Accessed 24 April 2012.

There is a real possibility that the *Boko Haram* threat could spread and challenge the authority and legitimacy of the Nigerian state far beyond northern Nigeria. The structural conditions discussed in the earlier part of this paper create a situation in which Nigeria is awash with alternative security groups. Many of the civil militia groups which were supposedly proscribed (for example, the OPC, the Hisba Corps, the Bakassi Boys and the Egbesu Boys) have remained in operation or transmuted in ways which have kept their command structures intact. Despite the amnesty and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts in the Delta, MEND seems able to resume operations at short notice. The fact that these militia groups continue to exist with strong regional identities and interests increases the potential for the spread of violence if they perceive *Boko Haram* as a direct threat.

Strong statements recently made by Niger Delta groups pledging reprisal attacks in response to *Boko Haram*'s promise in April 2012 to bring down Goodluck Jonathan's government within three months are the clearest indication yet that the violence and insecurity in northern Nigeria could easily spread to other parts of the country. It also suggests that *Boko Haram* may have far broader political motivations than previously assumed.⁷ In its statement, the defunct Niger Delta Liberation Force (NDLF) said:

... any attempt on President Goodluck Jonathan's life shall spell doom for the entire nation. We will resist violently because we have said it over and over again that the Presidency for the South-South was a sympathy vote by the entire country to appease Niger Delta ex-militants and the region over federal government criminal abandonment of the region's oil and gas wealth being exploited over 50 years.⁸

In the same vein there are rumblings from the south western militia, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), who claim that if any bomb goes off in the west attributable to *Boko Haram*, no "northerner" based in the south-west will escape unhurt. The combination of a resurgent Niger Delta militancy and operations by militia groups like the OPC will severely threaten peace and stability in Nigeria.

Can this situation be mediated?

Observers of Nigeria tend to see its immediate crisis in relatively simple terms. As a result, some of the ideas that emerge as a possible response to *Boko Haram*, for example, do not look beyond mediation, amnesty and military solutions. However, the problem is complex and workable solutions will require in-depth engagement and commitment from several groups of critical actors.

Even if straightforward mediation were to be preferred by all concerned, the immediate situation involving *Boko Haram* is not ripe for mediation of any kind, whether internal or external mediation by a third party. This is because, as indicated earlier, the main leaders and members of *Boko Haram* are largely unknown, the group's demand is too unrealistic, and the Nigerian Government has exacerbated the situation by pursuing a largely military solution. The killing of *Boko Haram*'s leader, Mohammed Yusuf, while in police custody in 2009 not only bred further mistrust, it contributed to the escalation of the crisis. Yusuf's former deputy, Abubakar bin Muhammad Shekau, now self-proclaimed leader of *Boko Haram*, is seen mostly through his video recordings and rarely in person – which is not surprising given he faces the same security risks as his predecessor. The spate of armed attacks and bombings by *Boko Haram* has increased significantly since 2010. All of this probably explains why the apparently half-hearted attempts to begin a mediation process between *Boko Haram* and the Nigerian Government have failed to yield meaningful results. The claim of complicity by some of the ruling elite in the activities of *Boko Haram* further compounds this problem (see Pham, 2012).

If a permanent and lasting solution is to be found, a radical shift will have to be made from the present approaches to conflict resolution. It is difficult to divorce the state of the nation from the behaviour of the political elite and the approach of successive regimes to governance. The initial post-colonial failure

7. "Ex-Niger Delta Militants warn Boko Haram to stay off Goodluck Jonathan", *Vanguard*, 16 April 2012.

8. "Ex-Niger Delta Militants warn Boko Haram to stay off Goodluck Jonathan", *Vanguard*, 16 April 2012.

to develop an inclusive state-building agenda was a lost opportunity. A turnaround in Nigeria's fortunes requires a new national vision for social and political transformation as part of a grand peacebuilding and state-building agenda. The need for a re-orientation of the political elite toward such an agenda is, perhaps, even more crucial. The single most important barrier to any attempt to forge such a national vision and a peacebuilding agenda is the ruling elite, which continues to scramble for the spoils of the patronage system and opts for a zero sum approach to resolving their differences. The elites ought to be the first target of an attempt to resolve the contradictions and conflicts within Nigeria.

However, several layers of mediation must take place in order to secure the commitment of ruling elites and citizens to a new agenda. Given internal struggles and deeply-embedded interests within the elite class, mediation efforts ought to begin here. The differences among the political elite will require in-depth mediation in order to secure their collective commitment to transformation. This is a precursor to any effort to address Nigeria's internal contradictions.

A second layer of intervention might then entail the facilitation of a state-building process that aims to make the parallel systems (formal and non-state) complementary so that, collectively, they can secure the support and loyalty of Nigerian citizens. This will then create the basis for dealing with a third layer, which might include a process of conciliation between the Nigerian state and the various excluded groups within the country.

There are three difficult questions to be addressed when considering how such a multilayered mediation process might be initiated. Firstly, given that the ruling elite have not indicated a readiness to give up their positions or a willingness to find a resolution, who has the clout to persuade them otherwise? Nigeria has never experienced direct external intervention or mediation. It is too big and too revered by its neighbours who do not have sufficient clout to prevail on the regime or ruling elites. Secondly, who would be the most acceptable and credible mediator between the Nigerian elites? Thirdly, who has resources – human and material – to sustain the complex peacemaking process that might be required to deal with the issues at the centre of the conflicts in Nigeria?

In terms of legitimate third parties who can mediate, two factors are crucial – where the greatest influences on the ruling elite reside and how legitimate such actors will be in the eyes of Nigerians. Interestingly, a pattern has developed in which the ruling elites tend to be more responsive to external partners and constituencies than to the local population – hardly surprising given the historical patterns discussed earlier. Typically, great nation allies like the US and the UK have previously held sway over particular elite groups. This has been a pattern evident in Nigeria's foreign policy and international engagement (with the clear exception of the Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo regime of 1979–1983 which had an Africa-centric policy). However, searching beyond Nigeria for acceptable interlocutors poses a problem: no matter how well meaning and ground-breaking the agenda, such efforts might be seen as an externally-driven process.

One group of external actors that could potentially gain acceptability are respected regional African (ECOWAS and/or AU) leaders. While it has not yet been the case that African regional organisations have stood up to their bigger, richer and more influential members (as evident in the struggle to craft a response to Libya at the early stages of the crisis in that country in February 2011), the potential impact of the escalating crisis in Nigeria might compel a group of African states to come together to prevail upon its ruling elite. This approach is not without challenges but well worth considering.

In the end, a non-government framework might offer the first part of a solution – in which a genuine dialogue among concerned Nigerians gains momentum and draws the attention of the ruling elite to the need for political and social transformation. This might also take the form of a national dialogue. This, in itself, is not an easy feat to achieve given the fact that the citizens are, as discussed earlier, also divided along various lines. Whichever option provides a way forward, it is certain that Nigeria's contradictions must be mediated and that the priority is to resolve divisions among its governing elite.

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