

Review

## The cost and benefit of Nigeria's peace mission in Sierra Leone

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In the 1990s Nigeria has heavily invested huge amount of resources in promoting peace and stability in many African countries, especially its involvement in the conflict-riddled Sierra Leone. These activities have been perceived by many foreign policy experts as misplacement of priorities considering its domestic security challenges that have been neglected for over two decades. For instance, the growing insurgency and the increasing activities of militant groups across the country like Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) in the oil-rich South-south, the MOSSOB in the South-east and more recently the emergence of a terror group (Boko Haram) in northern Nigeria has greatly undermined Nigeria's national security and its corporate existence. In light of these domestic security challenges, how can the huge investments of Nigeria in Sierra Leone be justified within the theoretical contexts of foreign policy and international relations? Does the costs of Nigeria's engagements in Sierra Leone outweighs its benefits or vice versa? The paper, therefore seeks to examine the trends of Nigeria's principle of promoting security and stability abroad and its implications on the competing needs for attention to domestic concerns, particularly the domestic security challenges that threatens the continued survival of the Nigeria state.

**Key words:** Foreign policy, conflict, mission, cost, benefit.

### INTRODUCTION

The need for domestics and international security and other development provisions had continued to bring sovereign states into closer cooperation and sometimes fierce competition. States foreign policies therefore are usually designed along the desire to achieve security and development at both domestic environment, and international system. This perhaps explains why a state may be directly or indirectly not only interested but become a key stakeholder in promoting peace and stability outside its territories. The argument is that one

state's peace and stability, for example, security is a function of another state's peace and stability, all things being equal. For example, countries in Western Europe have numerous programmes for promoting peace and security in addition to joining forces with US, EU, UN, AU, OAS and other western countries and organizations to promote peace and stability within and outside their geopolitical regions. Peace and development today remain the dominating themes of interactions among sovereign states. In addition to the efforts of the West to

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promote peace and stability in Africa, some countries within the continent have also demonstrated keen interest in the promotion of peace and stability projects within the region. Nigeria, for example, strongly believes in the indivisibility of peace, that a threat to peace anywhere in Africa is a threat to peace everywhere in the continent (Adebajo, 2008). By extension, an Africa at war and in distress is also a threat to world peace and security (Adebajo and Mustafa, 2008). Nigeria has always looked beyond its borders for development and peace projects. While Africa has been the corner stone of its foreign policy, Nigeria has always seen itself and been perceived by others, as a global player (Jega and Farris, 2010). This is because of its historic role in peace mission in African countries which include Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan. Nigeria, through its foreign policy had persistently sought to achieve security and development in the West African sub-region. The country's commitment towards the promotion and sustenance of peace and stability especially in the countries ravaged by civil wars had drawn the attention of many foreign policy experts on the motives of such foreign interventions.

Nigeria's intervention in the promotion of peace and stability, especially in Sierra Leone, was a logical policy corollary to the dedication of its leaders to African independence from colonialism and foreign domination, its sense of itself as a regional power with a determination to keep other nations from exercising strong influence in what it considers its sphere of influence, and above all, its reflection of what constitutes its national interest (Okolie, 2010).

In the 1990s Nigeria heavily invested huge amount of resources in promoting peace and stability in many African countries, especially in Sierra Leone. These activities have been perceived by many foreign policy experts as misplacement of priorities considering its domestic security challenges that have been neglected for over two decades. The paper therefore examines the background of Nigeria's peace mission in Sierra Leone. It also explained the cost and benefits of its mission in the country and Nigeria's security interests in the sub-region.

### **National Security Interest**

Countries all over the world design and implement foreign policies in order to guide their external relations as well as protect, promote and defend their vital national interest. This could be in areas like defense of territorial integrity, the promotion of economic, military, strategic and diplomatic interests and whatever a country might consider as its vital national interests. According to Deutsch (1989:97), foreign policy of every country deals, first, with the safeguarding of its independence and security, and second with the pursuit and protection of its economic interest. Deeply, involved with these interests, in the case of the major powers, at least, are a concern

with resisting any penetration and manipulation by foreign countries and ideologies. Finally, closely linked to the national security, economic interest, and clandestine warfare interest of each major power are its policies of economic aid to foreign nations, its efforts to spread its own national and ideological propaganda in foreign countries and its support of cultural and scientific exchange missions favorable to that end (Deutsch, 1989:99).

Bande (2010) argues that a state's national interest informs and guides its foreign policy objectives towards other states. The national interest determines how countries relate in the global system. He pointed out that foreign policy is the systematic effort by states to protect and advance their national interest in their conduct in the international system. International organizations like United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have become instruments for advancing Nigeria's interest. The Nigeria's interest towards Sierra Leone was pursued under the umbrella of ECOWAS, AU and the UN.

Military security in today's world is provided primarily by individual countries as part of their foreign policy objectives. Each state is responsible for its own protection and tries to maintain a military capacity to defend its national interest. Other countries normally come to the aid of a country that has been attacked only if they find it in their national interest to do so. Nigeria's involvement in Liberia and Sierra Leonean conflicts was to ensure the security of West Africa States and itself in particular as provided in her foreign policy objectives. Similarly, Afghanistan and Iraq provide good examples. The United States of America attacked the two countries under the pretext of fighting terrorism and searching for weapons of mass destruction, respectively, which are considered as threats to the USA national security (Jega and Farris, 2010).

The United States and Russia and to a significant extent also China, Great Britain and France are powers so large that no one could abolish their national independence. Yet it is precisely the United States and Russia that are spending the most money, labor, resources, and efforts in pursuit of what their governments, elites, and peoples consider their national security interest (Deutsch, 1989:98). In Africa, Nigeria is considered as a "super power." The country has spent billions of dollars in trying to protect its national security interest within the West African sub-region. Military intervention in conflict-riddled Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s has cost the country huge amounts of money and resources (Okolie, 2010). The explanation is simple. It is a kind of "Parkinson's law" of national security: a nation's feeling of insecurity expands directly in relation to its power. The larger and more powerful a nation, the more its leaders, elites and often its population increase their level of aspirations in international affairs (Deutsch, 1989). The recurrent international situation continues to

undergo profound and complex changes. Peace and development remain the dominating themes of interactions among sovereign states.

### **Nigeria's domestic security challenges**

Nigeria like other developing countries has been enmeshed by series of domestic intricacies which adversely affects its corporate existence. Nigeria since independence had been battling with the domestic crises which consist of insecurity, political violence, economic predicament, insurgency and corruption. The crisis had thrown major challenges to the country's desire to achieve security and economic development at both domestic and international levels despite its human and economic potentialities.

Peter (2007) argues that, among the powers in Africa, the one with potentials the most significant strategic heft as well as the greatest geopolitical importance is Nigeria (Peter, 2007:2). Its almost 200 Million people makes the country the most populous African State, with a demographic weight equal to second- ranked Egypt and third- ranked Democratic Republic of Congo combined. Moreover, the population includes, in both relative and absolute terms, a large number of well-educated citizens who represent a wealth of human capital. Its vast oil reserves, estimated to total some 35 billion barrels, export some 2,146,000 barrels a day, making Nigeria the 8<sup>th</sup> largest exporter in the world (Peter, 2007).

These potentials gave the country capacity to address its developmental needs which include provision of peace and security. However, regardless of the economic strength and human resources, Nigeria's successive governments failed to afford adequate security to the teeming population. Virtually, almost all parts of the country are witnessing different forms of terrorists' activities. For example, in the Oil rich South-south Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has become the major terrorist group that threatens the economy and security of the country. On the other hand, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB) in the South-east agitates for Biafra Republic. In the North the emergence of new terror groups called Boko Haram is threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria as sovereign state. Recently the terrorists captured major towns in the North-east part of the country. The Boko Haram named one of its captured towns to "*madinatul islam*"(City of Islam)(Daily Trust, Monday, December 8, 2014). Many believed that lack of commitment of the country's leaders and misplacement of priorities are affecting the country's peace and security. The three terror groups MEND, MOSSOB and BOKO HARAM are central to Nigeria's domestic security challenges and even beyond its borders.

The MEND is one of the largest military groups in Nigeria. The group claims to expose exploitation and

subjugation of the people of the Niger Delta and devastating of the natural environment by public-private partnership between the Federal Government of Nigeria and collaborations involved in the extraction of oil in the Niger Delta (Agbedo, 2012). The MEND's actions in the search of the freedom of Niger Delta people were eventually turned into terror activities in the region. The violent nature of the group posed a serious security threat to the country. Prior to amnesty deal between MEND and Nigerian government in 2006, MEND as a group has no clear leadership structure. The only known face of MEND is its anonymous or implied spokesperson Jomo Gbomo, who is known only through press statements distributed to the media. The movement is a loose coalition of indistinct groups and variety of leaders scattered across the states of the Niger Delta, who sometimes are unaware of events undertaken by other cubicles until such events are published. The decision not to have a single authority structure but a different and unstructured leadership is to make the movement vague, but effective in guerilla warfare extending over the whole region (Courson, 2009:20). This strategy was aimed at avoiding the fate in earlier movements in the region which a visible leadership such as Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), and Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) whose top hierarchy was easily targeted for elimination, or compromised by the oil companies and the government (Courson, 2009:20). This "indiscernible" nature of MEND is an important factor making it difficult for the government, oil companies and even the military to target the organization and effectively neutralize its activities in the troubled Niger Delta (Courson, 2009:20).

The Niger Delta conflict gained prominence in the 1990s at the height of Nigeria's peace missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Thereafter, the conflict degenerated into violent resistance movement, particularly between 2005 and 2008. The new dimension witnessed huge destruction of oil installations, kidnapping of foreign and indigenous oil workers, disruption of oil production and illegal oil trade or bunkering (estimated at 80,000 and 300,000 barrel per day). The disruption of oil production and distributions affects the security of the nation (Amaragbu, 2011). The incessant rebellion in the Niger Delta which has been boiling for years has assumed a dangerous dimension, which undermines the growth of Nigerian economy. For example, MEND roughly succeeded with its threat to cripple the Nigerian oil industry (IRIN, 2006), largely on account of high dependence of the Nigerian economy on oil. The advent and proliferation of militant groups and the sophisticated nature of their attacks have made the Nigerian economy vulnerable to stagnation (Paki and Ebiefa, 2011:142). The MEND operation in June, 2008, almost grounded oil business in Nigeria and made the country to cede her position as the primary oil exporter in Africa to Angola (Punch, 2009).

The reporting of the Ledum Mitee led Technical Committee on the Niger Delta estimated that, Nigeria lost about \$61.6 billion to oil theft and sabotage in the unstable Niger Delta region between 2006 and 2008. Facts of the account indicate that in 2006 alone, the total cost of oil loss due to the actions of MEND was \$272 billion, while an extra \$1.9 billion was lost to the oil bunkering (Paki and Ebiefa, 2011:142). In 2007, the country as well lost \$18.8 billion to the devastating Niger Delta crisis. Again, Nigeria lost an estimated revenue of about \$23.7 billion to attacks on oil installations resulting in shut downs and spillages in the first nine months of 2008 (Ajaero, 2009). Apart from the inability of Nigerian government to meet up with its Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quota and other negative economic effects, the oil Multi-National Co-operations (MNCs) on their part allegedly lost billions of dollars to the conflict. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) between 2003 and 2007 lost about \$10.6 billion (Nwofor, 2010). The losses have virtually affected the economic potency of Nigeria and also contributed to the deterioration of other developmental institutions in the country.

In the 1990s the country's efforts to promote peace and security especially in Sierra Leone received more attention than growing insurgency in the Niger Delta region. The level of commitments shown by the Nigeria in ensuring peace and security in Sierra Leone outweigh the country's efforts in curtailing its domestic security challenges particularly during the intervention. The amount expended in promoting peace and stability in Sierra Leone has not been committed in addressing the insurgency threat in the Niger Delta. Nigeria's involvement in the Sierra Leone conflict provided favorable atmosphere for the MEND to expand their mission and achieved some of its aims. Despite the efforts made to curtail the activities of the MEND which led to the establishment of Ministry of Niger Delta and increase in the revenue allocation formula to the region, the group is still one of the major domestic security challenges in the country.

Boko Haram is an Islamic terrorists group whose name in Hausa Language means 'western education is forbidden'. The group officially calls itself '*Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah Lid-Da'wah wa'l-jihad*' (Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad). The terrorist group normally operates in northern part of the country mostly affects the police force at the initial stage of their attacks and later targeted civilians. It is leading an armed revolt against the government and security forces. The ultimate ambition of the group is to establish an Islamic state which partially succeeded after the members captured the town of Mubi in the north-eastern part of the country. Over 700,000 Nigerians were internally displaced in 2014 as a result of their violent crises (Daily Trust, Monday, December 8, 2014).

The Boko Haram insurgency has recently introduced a

terrorist facet into the crime space in Nigeria. The trademarks of the Boko Haram are gratuitous destruction of lives a property with reckless abandon, through bombings, abduction and slaughtering of human beings, principally in Northern Nigeria. This has created flagrant fear and sense of insecurity in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2014). Since July 2009, more than 15,000 people have been killed in bombings and gun attacks by Boko Haram (Agbibo, 2013). Since the emergence of Boko Haram from the shadows about six years ago, one of the first obvious economic concerns was the almost immediate drop in foreign direct investment (FDI). According to the World Investment Report (WIR) 2013, FDI flows into Nigeria dropped by 21% in just one year – from \$8.9 billion in 2011 to \$7 billion in 2012. The loss of \$1.9 billion for a country in desperate need of money such as Nigeria was a staggering blow. A scientific study revealed that a unit increase in FDI into the Nigerian oil sector will increase the country's GDP by approximately 16 units (Gillespie, 2015). Sam Nzekwe (2012) lamented that:

The activities of Boko Haram are causing an incalculable damage to the nation's economy. Though it is difficult to quantify the damage in absolute terms, the level of insecurity occasioned by the sect's activities is preventing the inflow of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) into the country. If there is anything foreign investors are scared of, it is insecurity. Boko Haram with the recent bombing of United Nations (UN) building in Abuja has put Nigeria on the group of terrorist nations (Titus, 2012).

The *Boko Haram* activities in the northern part of the country have undermined the security capabilities of Nigeria. The terrorist groups have weakened the economic strength of the country by destroying businesses in the country especially in the northern part of Nigeria. The security challenges have impacted negatively on both the private and public sectors of the economy as many businessmen and traders have relocated their businesses from the areas worst affected by the violence. About 35 per cent of the over three million Igbo businessmen and traders in the city who engaged in both small and medium scale businesses are reported to have fled to Abuja and the South-east due to the growing insecurity posed by the activities of Boko Haram (This Day, 2012). Security institutions were generally considered ineffective considering their inability to defend lives and properties of the citizens of the country. Their ineffective performances had been largely attributed to corrupt nature of the country's political institutions and failure of relevant authorities to provide the needed equipments required in provision of security.

The activities of Boko Haram equally created not only security threats to the citizens of the country but the sovereignty of Nigeria as an independent state. In the late 2014, the terrorist captured over 20,000 square kilometers of territory in three North Eastern states of

Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. The land mass was about the size of Wales in the United Kingdom or the state of Maryland in United States, and bigger than Northern Ireland (Daily Trust, 2014). Boko Haram posed stern security problem in the country. The government was accused of not providing the necessary measures to stop the killing of innocent citizens on daily basis. Foreign policy experts raised many questions on the capacity of Nigeria's government in providing peace and security in Sierra Leone and could not achieve that internally.

### **Motives of Nigeria's Missions in Sierra Leone**

As one may expect, external factors have central influence on Nigeria's foreign policy towards Sierra Leone crisis. Journalists and scholars over the years described Nigeria's foreign policy as 'moral and legitimist; conservative, timid and leisurely and dynamic and radical' (Nuamah, 2003). These appellations of course emanated from analysis of Nigeria's foreign policy process and the orientation of the foreign policy elites. Policy formulations and decision making are in many respect guided by certain general principles, not necessarily systematically enunciated or outlined, but sometimes found in pronouncements of the policy making elites or in the fundamental law of the land (Okolo, 1987). Nigeria's efforts in promoting peace and stability in Sierra Leone were a turning point in the country's external relations. Hashimu stated that:

Ever since, Nigeria was widely recognized in the international community as a dedicated and unrelenting supporter of world peace. Nigeria demonstrated her commitment towards promoting peace and stability in Africa. Her contribution in conflict in Sierra Leone is still stands as incredible (interview, Hashimu, 2011).

This could be clarified on the speech delivered by military leader, General Sani Abacha to ECOWAS Ministers on 26<sup>th</sup>, June, 1997 to justify Nigerian's involvement in Sierra Leone's conflict. He stated that:

Permit me to say that the position of Nigeria is one of peace and stability. As a nation, we have always chosen the path of peaceful negotiations wherever possible. Similarly, we have consistently striven to pursue policies which guarantee peace and save lives (see *New Nigerian*, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1997).

The reasons and the motives of the country's involvement in the conflict *vis-à-vis* the intent to promote peace and stability are hard to explain and justify. Nigeria's huge losses in both human and material resources make it difficult for the intervention to be justified. This is even against the backdrop of the country's mission to maintain peace in West African sub-region. In addition to the huge

losses recorded during the intervention, the international community also dragged Nigeria to extend the same battle management roles in order to restore peace and security in Sierra Leone. For instance, the United Nations Peace Initiative in Sierra Leone perceived any international intervention incomplete without the involvement of Nigeria (Adeshina, 2002). Abdullah (2013) argued that:

The origin of Nigeria's involvement in Liberia and later in Sierra Leone still needs to be analysed, a lot of it we will never know. It was not because the Nigerian military dictators loved the people of Liberia or Sierra Leone so much as we are made to believe. What I will say through this medium is that the political leaders from the West African countries and their armies in the peacekeeping force had individual and some vague notion of national interests, which made them get involved in the war, first in Liberia and later, in Sierra Leone (interview, Abdullah, 2013).

There was lot of controversies regarding the factors that influenced Nigeria's involvement in Sierra Leone. These controversies mostly arose because of high level of commitments shown by Nigeria in Sierra Leone. Many believed that the promotion of peace and stability alone could not have justified Nigeria's involvement in Sierra Leone. The debate and discourse relating to Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone were formed around divergent issues. Some of these issues could be explained within the context of Nigeria's national interests.

National interest is an important concept in the study of foreign policy. Indeed, it is regarded as the main determinant of a country's foreign engagement. Promotion of peace and stability is an essential instrument for advancing national interest and fostering global peace and security. However, peace and security promotion is an activity full of contradictions. Internationally, United Nations (UN) is the primary agency for promoting peace and stability and the maintenance of security. States in contemporary world politics face many challenges. Many conditions and interests both from outside and from within do influence its foreign policy. Differences in states and their international circumstances inter-linked to paint a diverse picture of the ways in which they conduct themselves in international affairs (Beasley *et al.*, 2002). Nigeria's participation in Sierra Leone crisis was therefore, informed by the country's concerns to guarantee its national security interests. Many nations in the world have justified their foreign policy actions on national security interest. Since independence, successful Nigerian governments have justified the country's peace keeping missions in many parts of Africa and the world on the ground of security interest. The Sierra Leone case was not an exception. In a meeting of African Ministers on situation in Sierra Leone, Former Military Head of State,

General Sani Abacha firmly stated that:

Since assuming office as Chairman of ECOWAS one of my primary concerns has been to ensure that peace and stability reign throughout our sub-region. This is because of our belief that without peace and stability, development and growth which are the core objectives of Nigeria (ECOWAS) cannot be realized. I am happy to note that substantial progress has been made in this regard, over the past eleven months. It had been our desire and expectation that with the conduct of elections in Liberia on July 19, 1997, followed by the installation of an elected government in August, this chapter of one preoccupation with the issues of political instability in the sub-region would come to an end. We still believe that this is feasible. We have been acutely aware of the linkages which exist between events and developments in Sierra Leone and events and development in Liberia, it is logical therefore that if there is no peace in Sierra Leone, stability and normalcy will be difficult to establish in Liberia. This is why I took prompt action to the very beginning of the crisis in Sierra Leone to contact some of my brother heads of state in answer to the urgent request made by President Tejan Kabbah (*New Nigerian*, 1997: 17).

The above indicated that Abacha's regime was determined to ensure the security of the sub-region in order to promote the growth and development of the ECOWAS states. Nigeria's involvement in the conflict was not only to provide normalcy in Sierra Leone but the stability of the sub-region. Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone could be justified given its dominant position in ECOWAS and the leadership role expected of it not only by the weaker states in the sub-region but also by the international community as a whole. Moreover, the large influx of the Sierra Leone refugees to many parts of West African states had created fears of insecurity and spread of violence in the sub-region. During the civil war, Nigeria received a large number of refugees from Sierra Leone. Influx of refugees contributed in spreading violence in many parts of the world. The fears of spill over to many parts of the sub-region necessitated Nigeria's intervention in the conflict to restore peace and security not only in the country but to the region at large.

Moreover, Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone has been perceived by many foreign policy experts and diplomats as a pursuit of its economic interest. The economic interest of Nigeria in the sub-region has been influencing its foreign policy for long. The desire of the country to maintain or advance its economic strength and dominance among West African states influenced Nigeria's active involvement in ECOWAS and particularly the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone that lasted for close almost nearly two decades. The primary motive of Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone was not merely to defend the principle of democracy and restore

constitutional order, nor was it to wage war but to help protect innocent and defenseless citizens against further atrocities from RUF (Kabbah, 2010:141). Nigeria's military intervention in Sierra Leone was considered controversial given the nature of the regime that orchestrated intervention. Nigeria's mission in Sierra Leone generated mixed reaction especially among advanced democracies of the world and the international community: while in some quotas it was seen as credible and acceptable, some viewed it as a mere adventure by an autocratic military regime aimed at winning the confidence of the international community at a time when the it was facing a stiff pressure as a result of its domestic abuse of human rights and failure to democratize.

Domestically, Nigeria faced pressures to end the military dictatorship. The intervention was meant to distract the concentration of the international community's pressures on Nigeria to return to democratic rule. General Sani Abacha, side-tracked Nigerian soldiers to another peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone to avoid tension within the military and the possibility of a military coup against his regime. The defense of democracy in Sierra Leone or the attempt to do an American-style reinstatement of Haitian President Aristide in 1994 was nothing more than an attempt to enhance the damaged domestic and international image of Nigeria and in particular its military head of state, General Abacha.

The Nigerian military leadership under Generals Babangida and Abacha had subverted the democratic wishes of the Nigerian populace when it annulled the results of 12 June 1993 general elections, clamped down on all democratic forces in the country, and caused the suspension of Nigeria from Commonwealth in 1995. Without democratic credentials and legitimacy, why did General Abacha defended democracy abroad and resisted democratic transition at home? The Sierra Leone civil war provided the opportunity for the Nigerian military leader to burnish his battered international image and to establish his domestic democratic credentials. The Sierra Leone pro-democracy adventure by General Abacha was a ploy to further strengthen his international credibility and silence his critics. This was partially achieved after the political settlement of the Sierra Leone civil war in 1997. Though Nigeria's aspiration in Sierra Leone remain debatable, foreign policy experts shared divergent views on the specific motives of Nigeria's peace keeping mission in Sierra Leone.

#### **THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF NIGERIA'S PEACE MISSION**

Nigeria through its foreign policy has always pursued its interest in West African sub-region and the continent at large. Nigeria had been involved in different peace missions in the world since the country's independence in the 1960s (Jega and Farri, 2010). Specifically, the

country's involvement in conflict riddled Sierra Leone in 1990s had cost Nigerian government huge amount of resources in its efforts to advance peace and stability in the later (Hirsch, 2001). The country's effort in providing and sustaining peace and security in Sierra Leone at the forefront of the foremost domestic security challenges still remain an issue of scholarly concern. A lot of foreign policy experts and diplomats perceived Nigeria's mission in Sierra Leone as dissipation of resources considering the vast domestic security challenge. From the 1990 when the war started in Sierra Leone to date Nigeria's governments are battling terrorism, corruption and political instability.

### Costs of Nigeria's interest in Sierra Leone

By the 1990s and during Nigeria's peace mission in Sierra Leone and Liberia, a number of development in the country notably continued military dictatorship; the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, which condensed the country's democratization process; self-succession schemes of military leaders; increase human rights abuses; and subjugation of appointed groups were contrasting with the evolving globally acceptable norms of state craft and governance, threatening Nigeria's claim to leadership as a regional power. The country came increasingly under the regime change agenda of global powers and the international community, which took the form of imposition of sanctions, isolation of the Nigerian government, and threats of suspension from major international organizations (Osaghea, 2010). General Abacha's military junta used all sorts of repressive methods to clamp down on political opponents and consolidate its grip on power (Osaghea, 1998). Foreign policy was guided by a survivalist imperative geared towards diverting attention away from Nigeria's domestic problems.

When the country intervened in the conflict in Sierra Leone, the Nigeria's GDP growth rate fell from 8.2% in 1991 to only 1% in 1994. Price inflation reached 60% in 1994 (Osaghea, 1998), and by 1997 Nigeria's external debt stood at \$37 billion (Wright and Okolo, 1998). A rise in oil prices during the Gulf War of 1991 provided a short respite but the damage had already been done and in fact revenues from oil sales during the Gulf War were stashed away in the overseas personal accounts of top military officers (Kargbo, 2006). Thus, 90% of economic resources needed to conduct intervention in Sierra Leone were left to Nigeria alone to take the burden at the expense of its internal security. As Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo noted during an address to the UN General Assembly in 1999:

The time has come...for the Security Council to assume its full responsibility, specifically in Sierra Leone and other flash points in Africa. For too long, the burden of preserving international peace and security in West

Africa has been left almost entirely to a few states in our sub region...Nigeria's continual burden in Sierra Leone is unacceptable draining Nigeria financially. For our economy to take off, this bleeding has to stop (Adebajo, 2002:90).

Nigerian economy, which largely relied on oil exports, experienced rapid decline in the 1990s. The oil export revenues provided a credible economic basis for Nigerian foreign policy, especially during the 1970s when a boom in oil sector propelled the country towards the centre stage of international politics. The country's foreign policy came to be described as 'dynamic, progressive and it earned the country much respect as the country is frequently consulted on issues of peace and security (Gambari, 1999). During the period of the intervention, Nigeria's government faced a series of economic sanctions especially during the Abacha's regime for failing to return the country to democratic political system. The sanctions affected the country's economy in such a way that other important domestic issues like internal security challenges had to be abandoned to continue financing the foreign policy mission in Sierra Leone. Even after the sudden death of Sani Abacha and the country's return to democracy Nigeria continued to struggle with economic and security challenges which led to the former president Obasanjo to seek for assistance from the international community to relieve the country from the burden of debt repayment. Hashim added that:

Nigeria faced serious challenges in her efforts to restore peace and security in Sierra Leone. Apart from financial problems, lack of support from the citizens of Sierra Leone has also affected the basic aspect of the peacekeeping in the country. Nigeria's soldiers and diplomats were considered by most Sierra Leoneans as destroyer of human and natural resources in Sierra Leone (Interview: Hashim, 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2011).

Finances were very paramount in pursuance of a country's foreign policy objectives particularly in the difficult task of restoring and sustaining peace-building and stability abroad. Despite the economic strength of Nigeria, it could hardly sustain a daily expenditure of \$1 million for the Sierra Leonean operation. The operations and provision of some logistics during the military intervention had to be halted due to inadequate funding, though many scholars and diplomats believed that the funds were diverted for personal interest of the then military top officers. This was emphasized by Igrebor (1997), the Editor, *TELL* magazine, who noted that:

Charity, it is said, should begin at home. But Nigeria's is beginning abroad. Armed with the moral support of the international community and the ringing endorsement of the Organisation of African Unity, OAU, and Nigeria's military junta ordered the commencement of military actions to flush out the new military junta that seized

power in Sierra Leone in a bloody coup. The military actions seemed the logical outcome of the failure of moral suasion to get Major Jonny Paul Koroma and his gang of coupists to step down, so that the elected government of President Ahmed Tejjan Kabbah and parliament could be restored immediately. ECOMOG forces, made up of mostly Nigerian troops, launched series of bombardments against Sierra Leonean army positions in Freetown to the cheers of the delegates at the OAU summit of heads of state government in Harare, Zimbabwe, and the chagrin of Sierra Leoneans who support the universal call for the junta to step but oppose external military operations, the regime of General Sani Abacha did not deem it necessary to explain to Nigerians why our troops are leading the battles to get rid of an unwanted junta and restore constitutional order in another country. This was, however, not, surprising; it just demonstrated once more, the utter contempt Nigerian military juntas have for the people they rule. Nigerians were resigned to contemplating the great paradox of their country that has been ruled by military juntas for 28 out of 37 years (1960-1997) of independence and successively for the past 13 years, posturing as the outraged guardian of democratic values and fighting another military junta in another land for doing what its own army has become notorious for illegal seizure of power (*TELL*, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1997).

Nigeria's military leaders came under a serious pressure from different actors and interest groups who believed that its action in Sierra Leone was a Father Christmas's gift. However, given the high and unprecedented level of poverty, unemployment, ignorance and infrastructural decay in Nigeria, such worthless ventures only deepens the crisis of development in the country. This gave rooms for terrorists groups like MEND, MOSSOB and Boko Haram in the Northern part of the country to launch their operations.

Similarly, the number of Nigerian soldiers killed in the civil war was believed to be the highest casualties recorded in the history of any sub-regional peacekeeping operation since the end of the Cold War. After the January 1999 attack, pressure was mounted within Nigeria— for, ECOMOG's withdrawal from Sierra Leone. By the end-of May 1999, the war had claimed the lives of over 1800 regional peacekeepers, most of them Nigerians (Rashid, 2000:27). As a result of that many Nigerians took to the street to demonstrate against the Nigeria's foreign policy action in Sierra Leone calling the war baseless. Ibrahim added that:

[...] during the war in Sierra Leone, Nigeria was spending almost millions of dollars a day in order to maintain the ECOMOG (soldiers), whereas the economic environment in Nigeria was not good enough to cater for her citizens. This has made Nigerians to condemn the unilateral intervention of Abacha's military in Sierra Leone. But Nigeria was determined to achieve its mission in the

country (Interview: Ibrahim, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2013).

Despite the challenges posed to Nigeria's government and the unstable economic situation of the country, Nigeria was able to continue its mission which was believed to be in line with the foreign policy objectives of the country of ensuring peace and security in the sub-region and Africa at large. The Determination shown by the country's leaders generated mixed reactions on the specific mission the Nigeria's government want to achieve. Many scholars argued that benefit of Nigeria's peace mission in Sierra Leone outweigh its cost considering the stability achieved in the sub-region and heavy economic interest of the country in the later.

### **BENEFITS DERIVED FROM ITS INVOLVEMENT**

Nigeria for decades has been recognized as the "Giant of Africa". This was perhaps because of its leading role in peace-making and peacekeeping activities across the political landscape of Africa, which fosters peace and regional integration (Adebajo and Mustapha, 2008). In its numerous foreign policy pronouncements, Nigeria has shown profound interest in the economic development and social well-being of African States, especially its closest neighbors of West African sub-region. In West Africa, Nigeria's foreign policy goals were closely linked to considerations of national security and economic development. Its abundant natural resources gave the country enormous responsibility for peace, security, and stability in the sub-region.

Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone helped the country to re-establish itself as the hegemonic power in the sub-region (Jega and Farris, 2010). The former President Tejjan Kabbah (2010:45) stated in his speech at farewell reception to Nigerians Peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone that:

*I have often expressed my Government's gratitude to ECOMOG and to Nigeria, in particular for the sacrifice they made in rescuing our democracy and the Sierra Leone from total destruction by rebels of the RUF and their cohorts. Without their timely and sustained engagement, the country would probably have been reduced to rubble (Kabbah, 2010:45).*

Nigeria and many Nigerians had won international laurels on the account of their contributions to peace consolidation in West Africa especially in Sierra Leone (United Nations, 2003). Nigeria, in this regard, has been consistent in the restoration and consolidation of stability in Sierra Leone not only in the political but also in the economic realm. The involvement helps to strengthen the bilateral relationship between Sierra Leone and Nigeria and expands the later's trade relations internationally. Nigerians had the highest economic investments in Sierra



Leone more than any other people in Africa. These economic investments had really improved the economy and the living standard of the people of Sierra Leone. Jobs were created for Nigerians in the country. High Commissioner of the Republic of Sierra Leone to Nigeria, Henry Olufumi Macauley stressed that:

We have discovered with joy that we have many Nigerian companies and individuals fully participating in the economy of Sierra Leone. For instance, we have over 10 Nigerian banks. A few years ago, the Sierra Leone branch of GTB posted the highest amount of profits and we also have Nigerian businesses in the oil sector. Our oil and gas sector is developing now. We have Nigerian businesses in the informal sector. The relationship has transcended from slavery to educational, to military assistance, now to investments and business (*Punch Newspaper*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2013).

Even before the civil war in Sierra Leone, Nigeria maintained large economic activities in the country (Interview: Alie, 2013). In Africa, Nigeria has the highest economic investment in Sierra Leone (Classified Document, 2011). Virtually, in all aspects of Sierra Leone economy, Nigeria provided the needed resources and technical knowhow in the development of the economy. Similarly, citizens of Nigeria dominated the largest part of petty businesses in the country. The large percentage of the banking business in Sierra Leone was owned and controlled by Nigerians. Statistics showed that Nigeria controlled 65% of Sierra Leonean economy. About 300,000 Nigerians earned their living through the Sierra Leonean economy (Interview, Bello, 2013). These, among other factors were believed to have influenced Nigeria's intervention in the conflict to promote peace on one hand and its economic interests on the other. Nigeria has strong commercial interest in Sierra Leone under Kabbah's regime. Sierra Leone's oil refinery was sold to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and there were persistent rumors of diamond deals between Abuja and Freetown which some analysts saw as too lucrative to surrender (Adebajo, 2008:194). Lahai, for example stated that:

[...] There were also many economic ties between the Nigerian Government and Sierra Leone before the war. A lot of trading was going on between the two countries. The two countries were working on the same economic zones. They have very strong economic relationship. Therefore, Nigeria needs to intervene to safeguard the trade and economic relationship between the two countries (Interview, Lahai, 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2013).

The close economic ties between Nigeria and Sierra Leone were seen by many as the justification for former's swift intervention in the crisis of Sierra Leone. This was given the fact that Nigeria has large concentration of its

citizens in Sierra Leone dominating different sectors of the economy and repatriating capital back home. The fear of increased unemployment as a result of return of many Nigerian citizens from Sierra Leone remained a major concern to Nigerian government then. This was in addition to the fact the Nigerian military leaders were believed to be the major beneficiaries from the diamond economy of Sierra Leone. The huge business interest of the then military leaders in Sierra Leone was a remote cause of direct military intervention of Nigeria in Sierra Leone conflict. After the war, the following were the list of some of Nigeria's investment and companies: Emzor Pharmaceuticals Industry (SL) Limited, International Insurance Company (SL) Limited, Gava Forest Corporation (SL) Limited, Dangote Group (SL) Limited, Masters Energy (SL) Limited, Whitehouse Technologies (SL) Limited, Courtville Investment (SL) Limited, Vitafoam (SL) Limited, Orando Oil (SL) Limited, Chicason Group (SL) Limited, and Arik Air (SL) Limited. Out of 11 (eleven) banks currently operating in Sierra Leone, 7 (seven) were owned by Nigerians, they are: Access Bank (SL) Limited, Bank PHB (SL) Limited, First International Bank (SL), Guaranty Trust Bank (SL) Limited, Skye Bank (SL) Limited, United Bank of Africa (SL) Limited, Zenith Bank (SL) Limited and Staco Insurance (SL) Limited (Field Note, 2013).

These institutions not only provided services to Sierra Leonean and financed the government but also created jobs to Nigerians in the country. This addressed or reduced the level of unemployed youths in both Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Nigeria's economic investments remain paramount in the sustenance of peace and security in the post-conflict Sierra Leone, considering the opportunities provided not only in reinvigorating the economy but the employment provided to the teeming youths in Sierra Leone. Nigeria's campaign for increased participation of global players in the building of Sierra Leone is economy has helped in no small measure in the reconstruction efforts. Continuous development assistance from Nigeria to Sierra Leone boosts the confidence of other global players on the need to invest in the promotion of peace and stability in Sierra Leone. No doubt, Nigeria remained the leading actor in the promotion of peace and stability in Sierra Leone, but the country alone cannot achieve meaningful and sustainable peace and stability without the support of other actors in the region and the world at large.

The greatest benefit of Nigeria's peace mission in Sierra Leone is ensuring the stability not only on the later but in the sub-region and the continent at large. Nigeria's government was able to curtail the spread of the violence in other countries in West African sub-region as it was in the case in Liberian crisis. Many foreign policy experts believed that Sierra Leone civil war was a spillover of the Liberian crisis. Imposing peace and stability in the country has also assisted in reducing the proliferations of small arms and lights weapons across the African

continent which posed a grim security menace to Nigeria. Nigeria's security interest was very fundamental in its efforts of promoting peace and security in Sierra Leone. Despite the country benefits many questions are still raised on the specific mission of the then military leaders in Sierra Leone.

Notwithstanding the benefits derived from the mission, the Nigeria's intervention is believed to have been destructive. Some blamed the country for not having a strategy and follow-up actions; others accused the beneficiaries of Nigeria's largesse of ingratitude towards Nigeria (Okolie, 2010). Within that context and period, Nigeria has achieved its objectives.

## Conclusion

It is evident that Nigeria had invested heavily in the resolution of Sierra Leone conflict. Huge amount of both human and material resources were committed at the expense of the country's domestic security challenges which is threatening the county's cooperate existence. The intervention though is consistent with the country's commitment to peace and security in the West African sub-region in view of the menace posed by the conflict to the sub-region and the continent at large. The cost of the mission is thus justifiable on the bases of the country's strategic interests in West Africa. This is even against the background that the military dictators of the time appear to be the prime beneficiaries of the resources purportedly spent in the country's mission in Sierra Leone. Notwithstanding the huge public waste and corruption associated with Nigeria's mission in Sierra Leone, the mission is still regarded as one of the most successful Africa's initiative on peace and security promotion abroad.

The paper argues that though Nigeria was somewhat successful in its peace initiative in Sierra Leone, it has however neglected its own domestic security challenges. The insensitivity of the Nigerian state to its domestic security crisis is largely responsible for the upsurge of militias (MEND and MOSSOB) and insurgents (Boko Haram) threatening the corporate survival of the country. The huge investment made in promotion of peace and stability in Sierra Leone remains uncertain. The current Nigeria's security challenge was attributed to misplacement of priorities by the country's leadership in handling external security interests rather than its domestic insecurity. A lot of foreign policy experts and diplomats perceived Nigeria's mission in Sierra Leone as dissipate of resources considering the vast domestic security defy. From the 1990 when the war started in Sierra Leone to date Nigeria's governments are battling terrorism, corruption and political instability. Therefore, for Nigeria to feasibly engage in any international peacekeeping it must be seen to significantly tackle its domestic challenges and strengthen its background factors.

## Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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#### List of Informants (interview)

Bello Abba Jaye, Senior Counselor, (ECOWAS and TAC) Nigerian High Commission, Freetown, Sierra Leone; interviewed on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2013 at Nigerian High Commission's office, Nigeria House 1, Umar Yar'Adua Crescent, Hill Road Junction, Freetown.

Haruna Musa Hassan, Deputy Director, Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja, interviewed at his residence in Abuja on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2011.

Hon. Dr. Bernadette Lahai (Mrs) MP. Minority Leader Sierra Leone National Assembly, member committees on Agriculture, Mineral Resources and Legislature; Interviewed at her office Sierra Leone Parliament, Tower Hill Freetown, on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2013.

Ibrahim .V. Kondoh, Director of Africa and Regional Integration Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Internal Cooperation Government of Sierra Leone; interviewed at his office 14 Gloucester Street Freetown, Sierra Leone on 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2013.

Prof. Ibrahim Abdullah, a historian who specialized in colonial and post-colonial history; He has published in the area of African social/labour history and has taught in universities in America, Canada, Nigeria, South Africa and Sierra Leone, interviewed on 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2013.

Professor A.D. Alie, Head of Department of History and African Studies, Fourah Bay College University of Sierra Leone; interviewed at his office in Fourah Bay College University of Sierra Leone on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2013.