

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAJOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Conflicts and search for peace is as old as the history of human society, conflict is inevitable once individuals and group may like to interact conflict is normal activity that will emerge but the important thing in this paper is to consider how conflict will be resolve without much wastage of both lives and properties. This paper has discussed conflict management process in Nigerian Context, theories related to conflicts, causes of conflict in Nigeria and better conflict Management strategies. The paper reviewed various literatures that has focus on conflict management strategic in Nigeria to give us a guide on how to suggest and recommended Some conflict strategic mechanism such as acceptance of negotiation, compromise, consensus, mediation, integration and collective agreement as a means of sustaining peaceful resolution of conflict in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Conflict management, Strategies, Resolution and Social Integrations.*

### INTRODUCTION

Conflict, no doubt is a product of human relations. There is no society that will live without conflict between individuals, groups or state by state as a result of various reasons that may lead to conflict between parties due to conflicting interest or competition over power control, economic gain or violation of norms and values of one group. Conflict between individuals and groups is a universal phenomenon and the earlier the managers understand this and identify the important areas of conflicts, the better it will enable them use the people in the peaceful resolution, efficiently and effectively to achieve the societal objective peaceful society. Any attempt or failure to identify areas of conflict in society could be a great mistake which may eventually be too costly for such society. (Robbins, 1999)

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with her population of about more than 160 million people accounting for 47% of West Africa's population and a nearly a fifth of sub-Saharan Africa's population. Nigeria's population is diverse, made up of around 200 ethnic groups speaking about 500 indigenous languages, practicing two major religions - Islam and Christianity (World Bank, 2007). Nigeria, has the history of conflicts starting from the Aba riots of 1929, the independence struggle of the 1950s, the election riots of the 1960s, the Kafanchan riots of the 1970s, the Matasine massacres of the 1980s, the Odua People Congress (OPC) militancy and the Odi invasion of the 1990s, the Niger Delta militancy of 2000s to the present day Boko Haram attacks of the

2010, and the issues of kidder napping in major roads of Kaduna / Abuja roads where various categories of peoples are engage as victims of hostage by criminals demanding a huge sum of money in Millions as well as the current conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in states like Benue, Nassarawa, Taraba, Zamfara and Kaduna.

Conflicts in Nigeria is taking different dimension that touches across ethnic identity, tribal group and religious affiliation as well as the social component issues of higher level of poverty, unemployment of large number of citizens in Nigeria, where some families are living below the level earning of not more 2 dollars in day as well as drastic degree of corruption and inequality in the process of governance affairs, lack basic social amenities in both rural and urban areas in Nigeria and the failure of government to fulfill its responsibility in providing effective services in the area of security and human welfare in the country. Scholars have become increasingly interested in the study of "Conflict and Peace" in Nigeria the study has been understood based on a number of different reasons, in the first place some school of thought, has view conflict in order to be able to generalized about the nature of conflict, secondarily, other study conflicts to conventional wisdom otherwise used in explaining other forms of disagreements. Thirdly, the class of researchers who are involved in the design of effective intervention programmes in conflict situations. To this category, the primary role or goal of researchers is to develop appropriate explanations for the causes of conflicts and to utilize to respond to specific problems in managing, resolving and transforming of conflicts. (Best, 2005

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **Concept of Conflict**

Conflict has been defined in several ways by many authors, considering of various factors or variables that are related or connected to violence or misunderstanding between conflicting parties, but the reasons of this paper let us view the opinion of some scholars to help us have a clear understanding of the concept. Salau (2002), can be defined as the behavior intended to obstruct the achievement of some other persons' goals. Conflict is therefore a product of incompatibility of goals and it arises from opposing behaviors. Thomen (2006) defines conflict as the process which begins when one party perceived that the other is trying to frustrate him or her. It involves situation in which differences are expressed by interdependent people in the process of achieving their needs. It also arises when a difference between two or more people necessitates changes in at least one person in order for their engagement to continue and develop. According to Baldrige (2007), conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rivals. Duetsch (1993) states that conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur in an action which prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures, or in some way makes it

less likely or less effective for others to have their ways. According to Schmidt and Kochan (2002), conflict simply refers to any perceived opportunity which can exist for interfering with the other's goal attainment. Also, Hocker and Wilmot (1995) define conflict from a communication point of view as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interference from the other party in achieving their goals.

In Chinese culture, Yusuf (2001) opines that conflict means opportunity for changes". To this end, it is important to note that every conflict sustained might create an opportunity for change and development if the conflict is managed constructively. Conflict is also seen as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive threat to their needs, interests or concerns, it also occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motives, perceptions, ideas or desires (Harrey, 1998). However, conflict is more than a mere disagreement; it is a meaningful experience in peoples' lives and a normal experience within the work environment. It is to a large extent, predictable situations that naturally arise in any organization. From the above definitions of scholars, we can understand conflict is a social activity that demonstrate the causes of war, fight, oppression, inequality aggression, crisis and suppression that some of the leading factor that broke the social relations between conflicting parties and damage of lives and properties.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict Resolution is usually more difficult to achieve because its process is more complex than a simple" dispute settlement " A dispute resolution means a process of negotiation of interests and accommodating a major aspect of differing basic needs as well as providing for the means of respecting values and identities . While resolution is a process that requires making structural changes that may call for significant Socio-economic or political adjustments that will make the society more just or inclusive and provide improved management of public affairs. Woff (1950) sums up Simmel's view of conflict resolution and his discussion of the third party to the conflict situation. In Simmel's view, when conflict occurs between two parties and there is a third party involved, then the conflict will either be resolved through the influence of the third party or be perpetrated . By the time the third party becomes involved, the two conflicting parties have assumed positions of absolute contrasts, which prevent reconciliation on their own. Thomas (1977) sees conflict resolution, as a process of managing conflict which involves adopting one or more of ranges of conflict strategies .These are competition, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation and compromise. We can under standard that conflict resolution, can adopt different approach to be adopted that will suite and fit the needs and demands of the conflicting parties .Most of the cases of conflict in Nigeria are

ideally internal conflict which concerns goals, values or interests that do not contradict the basic assumption upon which the relationship is founded tend to be positively functional and very useful structure because it leads to the readjustments of norms and power relations within the group in accordance to the needs of the individual member.

### **Conflict management**

Conflict Management on the other hand does not focus on the resolution of conflict but on containing it and preventing further escalation or spread. This is a very good approach in long-term or deep-rooted conflicts which have been impossible to resolve or which have defied solution and many have it up as impossible to resolve. The main objective of managing conflict is to turn the conflict from having destructive to constructive impact where result of conflict can be more beneficial and less damaging to all sides. Conflict can be resolve with a gradual withdrawal of aggression and antagonism from either of the conflicting parties thus which have a similar effect on the other party/parties thus bringing about a reduction in tensions and an eventual resolution of the conflict. Most conflicting groups are not able to resolve their differences on their own without external influence or intervention. Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive aspects (Rahim, 2011). It is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of nonproductive escalation. Dalung (2013) asserts that conflict management entails the long term management of intractable conflicts. He further explained that it is the variety of ways by which people handle grievances standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong. Conflict management therefore involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for resolving conflict in the environment. It is a process that embraces all articulated strategies, interventions and institutional mechanisms in controlling the escalation of conflict.

## **THE THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT**

Various Scholars in the field of social science and Humanity have different of perception about the nature and dynamic structure of conflict all over the world. Conflict theorists posit that conflict is the basic of social life that manifests its self in the interrelationships between groups of varying interests. It is significant in resolving differences and achieving a certain level of unity in consistency with the maxim'' If you want Peace, prepare for War''. Coser (1956) argued that conflict benefits the group's structure or not depending on the issues involved and the social structure within which the conflict occur. Theories and other extensive discussions of conflict as a means of explaining the dynamics of society can be traced to the contributions of Marx (1844)

which emphasize on treatise on social relations and class conflict. The school of thought presumes that conflict is the prime moving force in the society and in history. Most of the conflict is centered on ownership and control of means of production. Lockwood(1970) argues that the scarcity of resources in society makes a competition for these resources inevitable which manifested itself in a conflict of interest. Looking at the dimension of above scholars conflict should be seen not be as an indication of absence of value consensus but is actually an integral part of social system. However, again the general assumption of conflict emergence is aspect of maintaining or secured of power between social groups, allocations of little resources that can not satisfied the groups and violation of norms and values of social groups.

## **CAUSES OF CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA**

Conflicts take on a wide variety of forms and have been classified on the basis of intensity or scale of violence, structural and character of parties of conflict with distension of class, ethnic, religious group, racial group that manifested spatial character at individual, group, national, regional or international level. However, for the purpose of this paper let us identify some fundamental and identify causes of conflict in Nigeria;

### **Conflicts over Resources**

Conflict in Nigeria has been emerging as a result when two or peoples are competing for inadequate resources over a period of time. The conflict in this aspect may be negative or destructive when available resources cannot be adequately distributed. As argued by Ros (1993) notes that: " if disadvantaged groups and individuals refuse to consider open conflict, they deny themselves what sometimes is their most effective means for bring about needed changes". A one particular group when it was deprived for an available resources that will make the other group to put an action for struggle to obtained an equal share of resource, this is the geneses of conflict in Niger Delta where the communities in Niger Delta, feels they are not properly taken care by the state as their communities is where petroleum product is drilled as result of that they are receiving various health and environmental problems in the Zone. This is the reason behind the formation of Niger Delta Militant.

### **Conflicts over Psychological Needs**

Kriesberg (1973) Conflict is as " ..... a relationship between two or more parties who believe they have incompatible goals." Conflict in various communities in Nigeria, in a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceived as being obtainable by one or more. With reference to Maslow's Theory, he has pointed that when an individual becomes dominated by a drive for the other unsatisfied needs through a process he calls " Fulfillment Progression." This show an individuals, groups

or communities with different needs and to fulfill the desired needs a conflict may rise between that individuals or groups in the process of attaining the human psychological needs.

### **Conflicts involving Values**

Conflict is a sub product arising from differences in interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations, beliefs, perceptions and tendencies. Nigeria as a country with two major religions of Islam and Christianity but in most case each religion wants to dominate the other to have multiple followers. Conflict involving values are the most difficult to understand and resolve because many religious followers can die on the grounds of theirs believe. Beliefs are interrelated and form belief system which they learned in life and are difficult to change. The last religious conflict in Kaduna and Jos was as result of different ideology from both the Muslims and Christians that lead to damage of lives and properties in the country. However, again the conflict in the North East Zone in States like Borno, Yobe and Adamawa was related to different religious ideology where those insurgent are calming Nigeria must be shari'a State, fighting security agencies and other non-muslim since 2009, despite many scholars in Islam has declared the actions of Boko Haram is not real teaching of Islam but the group members of the sect did not repents and give a peace a chance to survive. In the current visit of President Buhari to US government White House, the President of USA Donal Trium has cited his disappointment over much Christians killing in Nigeria. (Daily Trust, 2081) All this disagreement shows us the level of conflict as a result of different religious ideology in Nigeria.

### **Conflicts over Poor Leadership**

From the perspective of Coser (1956) Conflict encompasses " the struggle over values or claims of status, power and share scare resources, in which the aims of the groups or individuals involved are not only to obtain the desired values but to neutralize, injure or eliminate rival." Nigeria is battling with the domination of poor crops of leadership in the present democratic structure since the Nigerian independence but the worst part of the leadership structure is the one that is full of corruption, inequality, violation of Human Right and lack of purposeful leadership that move the country to the promise land.

## **TYPES OF CONFLICTS**

For the purpose of this paper let us identify some categories or types of Conflicts we witness in our daily day activities:

### **Intra-Personal Conflicts**

This is types of Conflict that occurs within an individual for instance conflict of choice of time, partner, goals and needs. In the process of satisfying the needs of individuals within ourselves conflicts emerge.

### **Inter-Personal Conflicts**

This is conflicts between two or more individuals over attaining a certain desire or a goal that can result to conflict.

### **Intra-Group Conflicts**

This is a conflict between individuals or disagreement and misunderstanding within a particular social group.

### **Inter-Group Conflicts**

This is a conflict between various groups from different social identities for instance Yoruba group tribe and Igbo group tribe.

### **National Conflicts**

Conflicts within a nation, involving different groups within the country, this can be conflict within interethnic, inter-religious and other tribe's conflicts.

### **International Conflict**

This is a conflict between nations, States as a result of territory, economic reason or power retention to achieve a certain national goal.

## **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES**

The essence of conflict management is a kind of activity that was aim at assisting the conflicting parties to meet a level of understanding from the initial conflicting views where the parties agree to avoid crisis and violence but accept compromise and cooperative attitude towards attaining peaceful environment. According to Ramin, (2011). Thus, conflict management is interference in an ongoing conflict process with the objectives of: reducing the level of destruction and violence; and preventing its escalation into other areas. Just as causes of conflicts are diverse so also are the strategies to curb or manage it. While scholars like Thomas and Kilman, (2007) identified five conflict management styles: competitive; collaborative; compromising; avoiding; and accommodating. However, Goldfien & Robbennolt (2007) opined that the dual thrust model of conflict management is based on two underlying themes: pro-self (that is concern for self) or pro-social (that is concern for others) goals and that the

interaction between these two themes gives rise to the five conflict management strategies which are:

a) ***Avoidance as conflict management strategy Techniques :***

Conflict manager who adopt this style allow the conflict to phase out on its own through inaction and passivity. This conflict management approach is usually adopted when the manager is not concerned about their own outcomes (pro-self) or that of others (pro-social) (Goldfien & Robbennolt, 2007). Avoiding has the advantage of giving time to better prepare and collect information before acting and is a low stress approach when the conflict duration is short. On the other hand, withdrawing may lead to weakening or losing of position as it may be interpreted as agreement, which may make matters worse. Where there are many stakeholders, withdrawing may negatively affect relationship with another party that expects the action of the conflict manager. Also important decisions may end up being made by default.

b) ***Accommodating as Conflict Management Strategy Techniques:***

Also termed accommodating or smoothing approach; It is adopted when conflict managers are determined to meet the needs of others and have a general concern for maintaining stable, positive social relationships and harmony (Forsyth, 2009). It sometimes enhances the protection of more important interests while giving up on less important ones, as well as provides the opportunity of reassessing the situation from other angles. The approach could leave the adopter subject to abuse as opponents may always expect shifting of grounds in their favour. This strategy may turn off some supporters as credibility and influence can be lost.

c) ***Competitive as Conflict Management Strategy Techniques:***

This approach involves the use of force to get the other party to accept the conflict manager's view. This strategy maximizes self assertiveness and minimizes empathy (that is concern for others). The conflict managers see conflict as a challenge of win or lose. The benefits of this approach are that it provides a quick resolution to a conflict and increases self esteem. However, the shortcomings of this style are that it could escalate the conflict and the relationship between the parties would be negatively affected. This approach might require a lot of expenses or resources and does not allow the conflict manager to take advantage of the strong points of the opponent's position. More so, losers might want to retaliate.

d) ***Cooperation as Conflict Management Strategy Techniques:***

Also termed collaborating approach; It is adopted when the conflict managers are highly interested in both their own outcomes and the outcomes of others. This style sees



conflict as a creative opportunity of which investment in time and resources could find a win-win solution (Forsyth, 2009). It might require structural changes as other possible alternatives in resolving the conflict are reviewed given available information at hand and unwanted options are discarded. Decisions usually take careful consideration and analysis. The merits of this approach are that it pilots actual problem solving, reinforces mutual trust and respect, and provides a base for effective future collaboration, Notwithstanding, the pickle of all parties must be committed to finding a mutually acceptable solution and this might be more tasking and time consuming compared to other methods. Also this strategy might be impractical when a quick response is needed.

**e) *Conciliation as Conflict Management Strategy.***

Also termed compromising approach; It is adopted when conflict managers' value fairness and in doing so, anticipate mutual give-and-take interactions. This approach enhances faster issue resolution, reduces tension and friction till a win-win solution could be achieved. However the cons are that it could result in a loss-loss situation if initial demands are too great. It also does not contribute to trust building in the long run as it could spawn cynicism if there is no commitment to honour. Important values and long term objectives could be derailed in the process. This strategy requires close monitoring and control to ensure agreements are met. It is pertinent to state here that effective conflict management strategies are not completely determined by concerns for self or concern for others but might be sensitive to value judgment of other variables such as culture, value system, religious belief etc., hence the use of traditional rulers and clergies in conflict resolution.

**f) *Mediation as Conflict Management Techniques***

This process sometimes called conciliation; is a means by which a third party, the mediator attempts to reconcile the differences between the contesting parties. The mediator may try to maintain constructive discussion, search for common area of agreement and suggest compromises. However, the mediator's decisions are not binding and need not be accepted by the contesting parties. Mediation has been view by the United Nation University of Peace "as voluntarily, informal, non binding process undertaken by an external party that foster the settlement of differences or demands between directly invested parties". (Quoted in Miller, 2003:23) Mediators manage a negotiation process but does not impose solution the parties. In the mediation process the parties to conflict must agreed to solve the pending social, economic or political problem the lead to conflict situation.

**g.) *Conciliation as Conflict Management Techniques***

A conciliator has the skill to communicate separately with parties in conflict and assist the parties to understand themselves and reduce the tension through various advocacies. Conciliation is a third party activity, which covers intermediary efforts aimed at persuading the parties to a conflict to achieve a peaceful means of resolving differences. Miller, (2003:6-7) has the opinion that conciliation as "the voluntary referral of a conflict to a neutral external party, which either suggests a nonbinding settlement or conducts explorations to facilitate more structures or techniques of conflict resolution". The conciliator has the technical knowledge to facilitate peaceful resolution with conflicting parties.

**h.) *Arbitration as Conflict Management Techniques***

This another types of conflict management which requires the intervention of third party to resolve the conflict or differences through the assistance of a neutral third party in conflict situation. The arbitrator has the comfort to listen to evidences from both two parties and the third party offer decision which usually refers as "award" which is expected to be bided by all the parties concern. In this aspect the conflict parties agree to submit to third party intervener and accept the outcomes of the final decision by the arbitrator.

**i) *Adjudication***

Adjudication is a conflict management that is applicable to use of the court and litigation processes. The parties to conflict may only decide to use court of law decision in resolving the case. The court process has various level of court hearing from the law court to highest court in the country. Adjudication as a means of addressing conflicts, which may leads to frustrations and further escalation of the conflict, because the expected outcome in terms of justice and fair play.

**j) *Integration as Conflict management techniques***

This technique requires the conflicting parties to collaborate in order to resolve the conflict. It requires both parties to have the attitude that, although they may be in conflict, they will strive to develop collaboratively a solution that satisfies the needs of both parties. Thus, the needs of the parties will be integrated by the solution. With this method too, the win-lose mentality is often so strong that the opposing integrative solution is impossible (Mankelow and Carlson, 2013). Ultimately, arbitration, Mediation and negotiation are other methods and procedures for addressing conflict. According to Salau (2002), arbitration is a method of settling differences between two parties by the use of an impartial third party called an arbitrator who is accepted to both sides and whose decision is binding and legally enforceable on the contesting parties. The

arbitrative procedure consists of the company and the union submitting their disagreement to the arbitrator. After hearing all the evidences, the arbitrator issues a decision. It is based not on what is believed to be wise and fair, but upon how the arbitrator understands the language of the contract to be applied to the case at hand. Thus, an arbitrator like a judge issues a decision based on evidence before him or her. There is no doubt that the extensive use of this type of arbitration has helped to reduce the number of strikes even in our school system.

**K.) *Collective Agreement Conflict Management technique***

The Trade Disputes Act states that a collective agreement is any agreement in writing for the settlement of disputes and relating to terms of work concluded between an employer or representative of employers in an organization on one hand and one or more trade unions representing workers on the other hand. Where this exists, such a collective agreement shall be deposited with the Minister in charge of labour matters. In the case of a collective agreement entered into before the date of commencement of the trade dispute acts, such deposits shall be within thirty days of the date of the commencement of the act, then within fourteen days of its execution. The question of the legal status of a collective agreement has received judicial determination in a number of cases. A consensus of judicial opinions has it that a collective agreement is devoid of ordinarily legal effect (Salau, 2002).

**l.) *Good Governance as Conflict Management Technique***

Good Governance is a process of running affairs of government activities in a progressive manner to deliver for good of the citizens in the country. The essence of good governance is to ensure maintenance of rule of law, transparency, accountability, separation of power that will ensure the equality and respect for the fundamental Human Right of all citizens. The existence of good governance helps to address various conflicting issues arising from the issue of equality, power sharing, and ethnic identity differences and addressing social problems of the society.

**m.) *Effective Communication as Conflict Management Techniques***

Burton, (1965) has argued that " effective communication keeps the parties seeing each other, interacting with each other talking to each other about their problem with a view to generating some workable solutions to the issues in conflict". Communication is one of important key strategy of conflict management where communication is a cheap method of preventing and resolving conflict issues, when communication is lost, there is tendency of deepening crisis and misunderstanding that may lead to emergence of conflict in the society.

Effective communication helps the conflicting parties to understand their difference through sharing of relevant information that will prevent conflict to escalate.

## CONCLUSION

The paper explained the nature conflicts existence in Nigeria and demonstrated the best and right conflict management techniques that will helps in addressing various categories of conflict in the country. The researchers adopted these techniques or approaches to the management of conflict in Nigeria. The paper addresses some nature and dynamics, roots of conflict and suggested effective solution to the problems. It is important to find a solution to conflict at individuals, groups, organizations and at community level through application of the right strategy of accommodation, cooperation, conciliation, consensus, mediation, arbitration, conciliation, integration and collective agreement. Some time conflicts lead to better ideas and enhance productivity which is positive nature and should be maintained and encourage while the negative side of conflict lead to death of peoples and damage of properties. However, each conflict situation is attached to a particular conflict situation that best be address by a one or more conflict management strategy or techniques in Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommended the following things to consider in addressing the various conflicts in Nigeria.

- Operating good governance that will provide leadership structures which is responsive, responsible, accountable, and transparent and observing the fundamental principles of Human Right in Nigeria.
- Addressing the root genesis of conflict not considering the superficial factors behind the conflicts.
- Engaging traditional institutions and other community structure in conflict management process.
- Educating the large society the importance of peaceful living than adopting conflict in Nigeria.
- Rigidity should be eliminated during negotiation. A give and take approach will promote peace.
- The third party to intervene in conflict should be honest, non-partisan and trusted by the conflicting parties.
- Effective communication Networks between conflict parties will reduce the level of tension.
- Dialoguing and bargaining should be used in a fair, honest, equitable and acceptable manner during peace talk process.

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