

## THE PLACE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE PROMOTION OF PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN NIGERIA

**Asabe S. Moukari**

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*Conflicts are featured today in the media and in our daily activities in many different forms ranging from interstate disputes to personal quarrels or disagreements. Many people today are using politics and religion as weapons of destabilization for different reasons and motives. To this end therefore, we all must learn the processes of conflict management to be able to have a national development. The causes of conflicts and how conflicts can be resolved forms the nucleus of this paper as well as styles of handling conflicts. Recommendations made include tolerance for each other, love for one another, consideration for the norms and values of others, dialogue in setting disputes and good uses of the tongue through conversations.*

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### **Introduction**

According to Webster's dictionary, Conflict means a fight, battle, struggle, a sharp disagreement or opposition as of interests, ideas, etc, an emotional distribution resulting from a clash of impulse in a person. From this definition, conflict is understood to be an unfriendly meeting of two opposing factions or parties each with its own vested interests that are quite divergent. Conflict has to do with power sharing, control, perception, misconception, self-interest, intra and inter-groups power interest. The characteristics of conflict would include war, disputes, disagreements confusion, hatred and a host of others.

Conflict is not just the absence of war but also, the absence of peace and friendliness. When there is emotional instability between people, conflict is eminent. For the purpose of our discussion however; Conflict is seen as the various encounters with the diversity and options within a person or between two or more people that may lead to strained relationship. Ahmadi (2001) it is diverse because people are not the same in personalities with each individual having unique characteristics that make us different from one another. When our differences encounter each other, they generate challenging relationships that may lead to what we may call conflict. Conflict is further an option not only because one can avoid it but because it gives the opportunity to either express it destructively or constructively. Positive change can be achieved when conflict is understood as an opportunity for growth and is constructively expressed. Hence, Conflict could indeed be an opportunity for social change and development if other people's views, feelings and interests are put into consideration even during conflicts situations and conflicts is viewed from positive perspective. Conflict can also be a source of disaster not just for individuals but the nation as a whole. Ajibuah (2007) cited in Dyaji (2012) submitted that conflicts in Nigeria have caused human deaths, fell (2007) observed that the rising spates of militias/cultists, ethnic, religious and communal conflicts with devastating consequences on lives and properties are of unimaginable magnitude.

To Imhabekhai (2009), conflict connotes disagreement, imbalance or distortion of beliefs, values and situations within, between or individuals, persons, groups, communities, states, tribes and countries. Conflict arises from an interaction of interdependent people or groups and with varied perception of incompatible goals and interference from each other to

achieve these goals. In other words, a conflict is a product of competition between and among individuals or groups for tangible and intangible things with the desire of each individual or to have more of these than others (Imhabekhai, 2009).

## **Causes of Conflicts**

### **Culture**

Since cultures differ, our understandings perceptions, world view, values etc. are different: they can be possible reasons for conflicts. Dodo (2005) postulated that conflicts do arise over interests on an issue or scarce resources or even over perceived deprivations. These interests underline positions and people's feelings about what is basically desired. In the bid to preserve, defend and guide one's r culture there might be an infringement into the rights and values of others that have different culture. People do not come from the blue skies but from different human cultures which have become part of them, if care is not taken any infringement or disrespect for the culture of a people by another, can stir up conflict.

### **Clash of Interests**

God has created us with a choice of interest where individual's interests differ from another. They could be interests over resources, territory, money, energy resources, food, sports, ideas and opinions, dressing etc, and how these interests will be justly distributed. There could be interest over power and how control and participation in decision making are allocated. There is also interest over identity which people believe that they are and should be treated with respect and dignity. Also, they want their traditions and social positions respected. There is also interest over values particularly those embodied in system of government, religion and ideology, where one feels that his interest is not considered in any given situation or decision, conflict begins to wail from the inside.

### **Clash of Personality**

Every human being is created with an ego which he tries to defend at all costs. When some people consider themselves more important than others and believe therefore, that they must be heard and respected by others believed to be less important, there is the tendency to fight back by the belittled others who also have their egos. When people interact together, it is important to respect each other as individuals because people cannot and must not all be the same and behave in the same manner always. Struggle for respect and personality recognition stirs up conflict.

### **Unnecessary Arguments**

Doubtless to say, some people will like to argue and ask unreasonable and provoking questions and such people are never be satisfied with answers. It is better not to engage in unnecessary arguments, because they produce quarrels. When going for social meetings and interaction sessions, some people prepare long lists of questions they will ask to hold the meeting to ransom. They create inconclusive atmosphere for others just to boast at the ends that they were most intelligent. During such arguments, there is always the tendency that sarcastic comments will come out and in response a quarrel or fight has started. When each

person insists on his view being upheld against the others, conflict begins to loom and others may take sides.

### **Wrong Use of the Tongue**

Sometimes the things that are said can stir up conflict in the society. Every individual should know what to say, when to say it, where and how to say it. Careless talks and comments mount up tension. An anonymous writer wrote: A wise old bird sat on an oak. The more he saw, the less he spoke, the less he spoke, the more he heard, lord make me like that wise old bird. He went on to say that "wisdom is knowing when to speak your mind and when to mind your speech", what one says will either kill the spirit of conflict or fuel conflict. Though small, the tongue can cause conflict which can set a whole nation into confusion. It is wisdom to always mind one's tongue is speaking. It is even in the midst of provocation. Tale bearers, "busy bodies" or "gossip" cause conflict significantly. When a little thing happens within a short time, they have told virtually all who come in contact with them, thereby causing strife and conflicts. It is no exaggeration to say "without wood a fire goes out; without gossip, a quarrel dies down". People become victims of lies and are disregarded because of gossips which no efforts are made at finding out the truth.

### **Transferred Aggression**

Some people may have hatred for their fellow members either as a result of what happened to them in their homes or misunderstanding they might have had somewhere else. Whenever such people meet at any given situation, they ventilate the carry over aggression on those who offended them or transfer such aggression and frustrations to others who might be innocent. By so doing, they disturb the peace of the people. Sometimes, wives who feel maltreated by their husbands in an attempt to fight back descend on their innocent children with the intention to get at their husbands through the children. At other times superiors in the offices transfer the problems and frustrations in their homes to their subordinates in the office. Such attitudes stir up conflicts when one feels cheated and humiliated innocently.

### **Role Models**

People usually have people they look up to as their role models. Whatever such role models say or do they support blindly. As a result, anyone who challenges their models or mentors attracts their wrath which often results in conflicts. This is because mentors differ from individuals to individuals and each individual respects the opinion of his mentor and defends the interest of such a mentor even when sometimes they are wrong. Bad mentorship therefore can cause conflicts among people.

### **Selfish Desires and Ambitions**

When some individuals want power to control by all means, they will fight tooth and nail to get it. Anyone who stands on their way must be crushed even if it means blackmailing or creating problems for their victims. If these people do not have their desires met, they make life unbearable for other. They make use of their money and influence to bulldoze their way. At time, if these bulldozers have a common interests or desires, and each one wants to have it his own way, then there is conflict. Thus the saying "when two elephants fight, the

grass under them suffers". Many people will be hurt if not crushed. Such people become too proud to humble themselves as giving up to them mean failure and defeat. Conflict therefore becomes eminent because it is true that pride only breeds quarrels but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

### **Human Tendencies**

Any human behavior that is prone to racism can also be a source of conflict. It is worse if it is institutionalized and enshrined in a constitution and justified by an ideology of the superiority of one ethnic group over another, e.g. the civil rights movement in the 60s in the United States of America and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Discriminatory legislations which limit to one degree or another civil and religious rights of those belonging to religious and ethnic minorities which are of different ethnic groups and religious from those of the majority citizens. Ethnocentricity is a very widespread attitude. Whereby a people has a natural tendency to defend its identity, downgrading that of other to the point that at least it refuses to recognize the full human quality of others. This behavior no doubt response to an instinctive need to protect the values, beliefs and customs of one's own community which seem threatened by those of others communities. Rejection of difference can lead to genocide by the dominant culture. When rights of the minorities are not respected, conflicts can easily arise (Yakubu, 2012). A desire to impose one's own culture, religious beliefs, ideologies and rules upon others among several others are also sources of conflict. Hope (1978) Cited by interfaith Mediation workshop (2008) remarks that "behavior is the result of instead which are present in man since birth".

### **Conflicts Resolution**

#### **Effective Communication/Dialogue**

Some people approach issues with hidden agenda. Those involved will quickly know through communication or dialogue. It is not right to judge others by condemning them even when you have not heard the other version of the story. A channel of dialogue and communication should be opened for the participants to feel free to express themselves in the issue. The moment any participant realizes that any party intervening or dialoguing has made up his mind against them before coming, he will not cooperate and will not give listening ears to the discussion or dialogue. The parties concerned in the conflict should be involved in the dialogue and each party be given a listening ear and of course a fair hearing before judgment is justifiably passed, given room for the parties involved to make up.

#### **Forgiveness**

For a conflict to be resolved, each party should be ready to forgive his opponent no matter the offence or the hurt. Sometimes we may consent to forget and forgive, but she never drops the habit of referring to the matter now and then. It is often said; "to err is human and to forgive is divine", but it is difficult to keep to this. Give to men what you expect them to give you. In other words, do unto others what you want done to you. Difficult though, forgiveness is paramount conflict is to be resolved. This will involve a "give and take"

exercise. People involved must be prepared to give and take by accepting defeat or surrender some of their rights in order to arrive at a reconciliatory point.

### **Respect for the Cultures and Values of Other**

In the process of handling conflicts, appeal to the culture of the people where such cultures conflict with your personal ethics for peace to be arrived at. Where the norms, beliefs and values are at variance, one should not be condemned in preference to the other instead, implore to appeal and make both parties see reasons and understand through an appeal which should not be to one side only.

### **Love**

It is profitable that we should love each other, even our enemies. Where love prevails, there will hardly be any situation that can go out of hand. If there is love, there will be consideration for others. Even when a misunderstanding comes in, it will be resolved easily and amicably. Hatred is a serious factor that brings about violence and conflict in human existence. Once hatred is not there, love exists, and where love exists, there will not be fault finding, blames, irritations etc against others.

### **Good Conversation**

There is joy, happiness and togetherness to leave at peace with all men which should reflect in our manner of conversation. Words either provoke or calm an aggrieved individual. It is therefore very important how one uses his/her tongue in any given situation. A soft answer turns away anger but grievous words stir up anger. A lot of conflicts have resulted from simple pronouncements by people.

What is said has the power to cause conflict, going by recent happenings in Nigeria. Therefore, people should cultivate good habit in their conversation in order to keep conflicts and quarrels out of relationships. Any person in life who is able to control his tongue without making mistake with his tongue is a complete man, a perfect man. Everyone should always mind his words and language anywhere, anytime and anyhow.

### **Tolerance**

Tolerating others and accommodating their mistakes can create an atmosphere of peace and understanding. Even when mistakes and wrongs are committed, the culture of accepting others with their different peculiarities will avert unnecessary conflict. In the event that each person strives to understand the culture, norms and values of the other, conflict can be minimized when wrongs and mistakes are expressed, offenders should accept their wrongs and make peace before the situation gets out of hand. 'This can only be achieved when people accept the fact that as human beings, we all have individual differences.

### **Conflict Handling Styles**

The interfaith mediation centre (MCDF) (2008), Kaduna however, grouped conflict handling style into three:

- i. Avoidance/Denial

We may decide to avoid the other person or pretend that the conflict does not exist even while hurting or angry. This style creates more hurts, frustration, annoyance,

anger and resentment. This approach creates an atmosphere of win/lose option where one person gets the expected desire and the other gets nothing. This does not solve the problem but buries it for some time. However, avoidance in some situations is useful because it can be a stop gap to reflect on what next to do.

ii. Confrontation/Fighting

Some people may decide to drag it out with the other person in conflict situations. They yell, push, threaten, insult and hold tenaciously to their view disagreeing with the other person's points of view. This approach often lead to violence and creates lose/lose option where both parties loose, none benefits anything. Sometimes, it leads to the stronger party with bigger winning power and the weaker and smaller losing power.

iii. Problem Solving

This approach affords both parties to listen with intention of understanding the underlying elements in the conflicts and attack the issues. Using this approach shows respect for differences and seeks ways to resolve the problem. People that use this style are not concerned about who is right or wrong but rather, they view conflict as a problem for both of them which require their mutual collaboration to resolve. This style makes room for win/win solution and both parties come out of the conflict satisfied because their needs have been met and their relationship restored.

### Recommendations

1. Peaceful co-existence can only be found in a conflict free society; therefore individuals should endeavour to create a conducive atmosphere free of conflict.
2. The religious believes, cultures, customs, norms and values of people should be respected so that the society can be rid of conflict.
3. Let genuine love be in the heart of everyone, love others from a sincere heart and do not pay lip service or show facial and pretentious love.
4. Everyone should mind his tongue in any given situation; say healthy things to your hearers.
5. Individual members should respect the feelings of other people in any situation rather than being self-centred.
6. Dialogue should be adopted in all facets of life to bring about proper understanding in issues that can fuel conflicts.
7. Problem solving style in handling conflict should be used to stop the accumulation of ill feelings and hurts resulting to conflicts.

### Conclusion

Proper crisis management which implies a somewhat mechanistic view of the relation between state or parties as a system which needs to be managed by its chief member so that crises or conflicts in their relation with one another may be prevented. Conflict situations call for means of resolving them. It calls for efforts to increase co-operation among and between the parties to a conflict and deeper their relationship by addressing the issues or conditions that led to the conflict to foster positive attitudes allay, distrust through

forgiveness and reconciliation initiatives and building or strengthening the institutions or processes through which the parties interact e.g. through the following steps among so many that space time will not permit us to discuss here.

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**ASABE S. MOUKARI** is a Lecturer in the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, Federal College of Education, Zaria, 08030800174, 08029990635  
[aminamoukarin@gmail.com](mailto:aminamoukarin@gmail.com)