

Women and Conflict Management in West Africa; The Nigerian Perspective

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Abstract:

Conflicts usually exist where there are different views on certain issues. It can occur as a result of different principles, ideologies, beliefs, culture, religion and reasoning. When conflict erupts, the need for its management arises. Conflict management is a strategy to bring peace or avoid war and violence and women can play their active role in conflict management be it among individuals, groups of people, communities or states. The paper therefore evaluates the concept of conflict and conflict management, kinds of conflict, causes of conflict and methods or strategies for its management in Nigeria. The paper also examines some theories in conflict management and the need for peaceful co-existence in a nation or effective conflict management or violence free society. The paper therefore recommends proper training and guiding of their children, youths and other grown up in their environment by inculcating the need for peaceful co-existence and tolerance as regards to the issue of religious, cultural and political difference (Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria). It also recommends an inculcation of conflict resolution studies into the Nigerian educational curriculum.

Key words: Women, Conflict and Management

INTRODUCTION

Conflict management is a crucial issue that needs urgent attention in most of the third world countries, most especially

Nigeria. Conflict exists in every society starting from family level, communal, local, state and national level. Different conflicts at different level can lead to serious problem. In Nigeria, there is always political conflict, intra-party and inter-party conflict, social conflict, economic, cultural, psychological and religious conflict that undermines a country's development existence. Conflict and management strategy determines the nature of a country's economic and social development. Women are always in a better position to manage conflict by their nature.

Women are the vessels created from the ribs of men as helpmates by God according to the Christian Holy bible.

Women are second in command in every home. Women have roles to perform in homes, churches or mosque, community, government and indeed in the entire society. Women have strategic roles to perform, in the school, church and society and more active role in character modification of children. Women should be seen as a mirror in Nigerian society for character transformation and molding. Women are the role models. Women can easily convince their husbands and children to behave well in our society.

Any nation blessed with a greater number of well-behaved women will hardly encounter social ills and domestic disasters. Women are always helpful in nation building.

Women can have active role to perform in conflict management in Nigerian society. From the time Nigeria got her independent till the present time, Nigeria and indeed, Nigerian government have been facing serious challenges on religious, political and ethnic conflicts.

In Nigeria, there are three major ethnic groups, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba's that share plural cultures and two major religion such as Islamic and Christian religion.

Absence of peace in any given environment is war. It could appear in form of:

Physical battle, which leads to exchange of weapons, economic crisis, academic crisis, religious/ spiritual crisis or tension and anxiety in society, Goultung (1996:30).

For there to be any meaningful development in any given society, the crisis/ conflict must be properly managed and well addressed.

Conflict as a matter of fact need to be well explained in this work. Conflict is a concept in frictions, crisis, misunderstanding and disagreement that may lead to war or disunity which in turn may result to loss of life and property. Conflict may as well be referred to as:

The contradiction inherent in power relations and which manifest themselves in individual and group interaction with one another and with nature in the pursuit of limited resources or opportunities. It is the motor of transformation and is either positive or negative. It can be creatively transformed to ensure equity, progress and harmony. Destructively transform to engender acute insecurity, (Borisoff and Victor 1989:82, Dechurch: 2000, Thomas 1970).

In Nigeria, one of the major challenges that hinders the development in this country is conflicts and war, showing that one of the things that challenges the Nigeria system is conflict. Culture, religion, political and social conflicts are serious disturbing issue in Nigeria.

In the south, youth restiveness and communal clashes, in the north religious and Boko Haram disturbance/ activities of the Fulani herdsmen in the people's agric. farm, in the east is now an international issue because it leads to social insecurity that scares the foreigners from coming to invest economically in the nation. (Daniel 2016 P 20, Nwankwo 2012, p 4 and Ibeanu 2006).

Conflict can as well be referred to as:

A situation in which people, group, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument. Violence

may erupt as a result of a political and ethnic conflict, (Wall, J and Callister 1995:55, Kaln and Poole 2000:590).

While no single definition of conflict exists, most definitions seem to involve the following factors:

That there are at least two independent groups, the groups perceive some incompatibility between themselves, and the groups interact with each other in some ways, (Rahim, 1992:16, Van de Vliert and Kasanoff, 1990:60).

Two example definitions are:

Process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party, wall and Callister 1995:517).

And a scholarly observation of the conflict as an; Interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities (Rahim, 1992:18).

Conflict can as well be defined as;

A struggle over values and claims of scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are neutralized, injures or eliminate their rivals, (Cose 2009:45, Manville 1993).

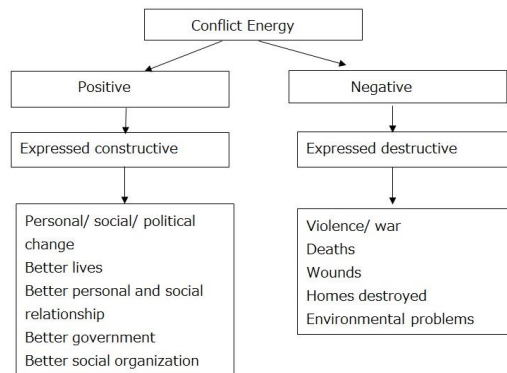
In another development, conflict is defined as;

A situation in which differences are expressed by interdependent peoples in the process of achieving their needs and goals (Korp 1997:111).

Conflict management and resolution became important because of the magnitude of conflicts taking place around the world today. In any situation where there are two or more divergent views or groups, conflicts are bound to arise. The magnitude and dimension such conflict eventually takes depends on value placed on the contentious issues by the parties involved and methods adopted to resolve such issues. Most conflicts, especially in Africa have ethnic, economic or religious undertone. This trend has left mark all over the places colonized by the Europeans.

Conflict indeed has many definitions, conflict is a common and essential feature of human existence. When expressed and handled constructively, conflict can act as a catalyst for personal, social and political change and transformation. When it is expressed destructively, conflict then can foster violence and damage that is familiar in wars and violent conflicts, (Woodhouse and Duffey 2000:21).

This is illustrated in figure 1 below called conflict energy.



Source: woodhouse 2000: 42

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human life, which is seen as something that is desirable. Stedman is of the view that conflict stems from:

The basic fact of human interdependence, seeking to satisfy their needs, wants and desires, people make demands upon themselves, upon the physical environment, upon other people, and whatever organization and institutions that appear to be in a position to help them, (Stedman, 1997: 39).

This definition is clearly not narrowed to the African situation, conflict was equally defined by a social scientist as a situation in which two or more human beings desire good which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both in which each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a

desire object or situation, and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal (Stagner 1967: 16).

The British defense doctrine however defined conflict as:

A human struggle manifested as a clash of wills between two opposing leaders or leadership groups. (British Defense doctrine 1996:24).

It may also become a contest of wills between opposing populations who are suffering as a result of hostilities. The similarity of these definitions shows that conflict can be said to be a familiar and basic phenomenon of human interaction. Coser notes that, there are occasions for conflict in every group as rivalry develops over control of resources, leadership, position and the like. Conflicts in Africa arise from problems basic to all populations: the tugs and pulls of different identities, the distribution of resources and access to power, and competing definitions of what is fair, right and just (Stedman 1997: 31). Conflict in Africa are predominantly intra-state rather than inter- state. The danger however lies in the spillover effect resulting in cross border actions and refugee situation.

Theories of Conflict Management

The first school of thought consists of those who equate conflict management purely and simply with the peaceful resolution of confrontation, success become wholly dependent upon the avoidance of war. Implicit in this view is the notion of conflict as a pathological occurrence to be ended or defused as quickly as possible. The aim is to control the situation and turning down the conflict. While the second school of thought about conflict management lies at the opposite side and interprets conflict management as an exercise in winning. The object is to make the enemy back down, to gain concession from him and thereby to further ones ambition in the international arena. Crises are not regarded as pathological or distasteful but rather as opportunities for aggrandizement. It appears that this school

regards a conflict as a zero-sum game, situation in which the gain accruing to one side automatically mean a loss for the opponent. These two interpretations of conflict management are almost diametrically opposed, and it seems inconceivable and that there could be any possible meeting ground between them. These definitions have generally leaned heavily to the one side or the other. Lesile Lipson defined conflict management as “Reaching a solution acceptable to both sides without resorting to war. This crystalizes some of the critical features of conflict management.

Lipson emphasizes on the avoidance of war and resolution of the dispute has to be balanced against emphasis by Kintner and Schout have national objectives and argued that conflict management is concerned on one hand with the procedures for controlling and regulating a crisis so that it does not get out of hand or lead to war and the other with ensuring that the conflicts is resolved on a satisfactory basis in which the vital interest of the state are assured and protected. The second aspect invariably necessitate vigorous actions carrying substantial risks. One task of conflict management is to reduce the risks to keep them as low as controllable as possible, while the other is to ensure that they conceive diplomacy and risk taking tactics are as effective as possible in gaining concessions from the adversary and maintaining ones position relatively intact, Francis (2007 p 38).

The Causes of Conflict

Conflict may occur when:

- A party is required to engage in an activity that is incongruent with his or her needs or interests.
- A party holds behavioral preferences, the satisfaction of which is incompatible with another person’s implementation of his or her preferences.

- A party wants some mutually desirable resources that is in short supply, such that the wants of all parties involved may not be satisfied fully.
- A party possesses attitudes, values, skills and goals that are salient in directing his or her behavior but are perceived to be exclusive of the attitudes, values, skills and goals held by the other (s).
- Two parties are partially preferences regarding their joint actions.
- Two parties are interdependent in the performance of functions or activities, (Rahim 2002: 207).

The overarching hierarchy of conflict starts with a distinction between substantive (also called performance, task, issue or active) conflict and affective (also called relationship or (the opposite of agreeable) conflict. If one could make a distinction between good and bad conflict, substantive would be good and affective would be sad. However in a meta-analysis of the current research, De Drue and Weingart (2003) showed that these two concepts are related to each (corrected correlation. Substantive conflict deals with disagreement among group members about the content of the tasks being performed or performance itself Dechurch and Mark 2001: 45, Jehn, 1995). This type of conflict occurs when two or more social entities disagree on the recognition and solution to a task problem including differences in viewpoints, ideas and opinions (Rahim 2002)

Affective conflict deals with interpersonal relationships or incompatibilities, (Behfar, Peterson, manni and Trochim, 2008). It is generated from emotions and frustration (Bodtker and Jameson, 2001) and has a detrimental impact on group, organizational outcomes (i.e information processing ability, cognitive functioning of group members, attributions of group members behavior, group loyalty, work group commitment, intent to stay in the environment.

Conflict occur when group members argue over alternative related to the group task, whereas (affective) conflicts result over interpersonal clashes not directly related achieving the group's goal (Amason, 1996, Guetzhaw and Gyr 1954, Jehn 1992, Dechurch and Mark 2001). Other clashes include, ethnicity, religious, cultural, land disputes, social conflict, commmunial and selfish conflicts.

The vast majority of conflicts in the world have occurred in developing countries and the continent of Africa has had more than its fair share. One in five Africans lives in a country is severely obstructed by conflicts.

The direct annual costs of conflicts in central Africa for instance has been estimated to be us & I billion, to which can be added us% 500 million, as the cost associated with refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPS), (Jackie, C 2002: 68) these costs exclude indirect costs to neighbors and the ineffective economic management of the economy undermining the promise of African democratization and development, armed conflicts contributor to political decay. It facilitates state collapse, cause wide spread human right violations, generate refugees and internally displayed persons (IDP).

Conflicts also divert scarce resources away from social services, disrupt trade and contribute to the breakdown of family structures. The pervasiveness and persistence of conflict also have psychological consequences as children are traumatized or become accustomed to a culture of violence.

Most of the wars in Africa are mainly internally and these internal conflicts appear to be increasing.

The causes of conflict in Africa are many and they frequently reoccur, contrary to popular belief, African conflicts do not primarily stem from ethnic violence and genocide as witnessed in some African countries like Rwanda and Burundi (woodhouse 2000:11) conflicts can be caused as a result of poverty, underdevelopment, lack of economic diversification,

and by political systems that marginalize large parts of the population.

These are often real causes that lie behind social turbulence and allow the mobilization of ethnic and religious differences for political gain by political elites. The cause of conflict are also not always structural in nature.

Apart from the root cause which are economic, social or political exclusion, there are also “aggravating factors which do not as such directly cause violent conflict, though they are likely to contribute further to a climate conducive to violent conflict or to the escalation an existing conflict.

Common to many Africa conflicts is the unsatisfactory nature of inter-state borders inherited from colonial times. The organization of African unity (OAU) now the African union (AU), recognizing that to open the question of borders would ferment discord and strife, maintained the performance and sanctity of existing borders.

Consequently, there were splitting up of tribes like the kwakwa between the three borders, Somalis, between five and the Beja between the three borders, all in East Africa. If some new resources like oil are found, it will likely cause conflict.

Ethnicity problem can as well cause conflict, either intra-state or intra-state in Africa (Brain 1996: 36. A more basic and long-term cause of conflict has been the catastrophic economic performance of many African leaders. This is coupled with debt burdens, poor flow of private capital and insufficient foreign aid. As Neil points out, economic discomfort can boil up conflict. It was noted in 1992 by Bontos Ghal the then secretary General of UN that:

The deepest causes of conflict are: economic despair, social injustice and political oppressions. (Furley 1995:50).

Ted Gur noted that conflict in Africa is often:

a fight for shares of a shrinking pie of economic resources, protecting patterns of distribution and control, (Tielet 1991:68, Ted Gur 1979:103).

In 1992, Timour listed 29 major causes of tensions and conflicts. They are summarized as follows:

- a) Military: inter-state aggression, annexation, intervention or hostility.
- b) Political/ international: ideology or political campaign, territorial claims, regional rivalries, terrorism, coercion or discrimination respecting the trade or economies of other state.
- c) Political/ domestic: power struggles, hostile groups, overpopulation, demands for democracy, communal or ethnic violence related to economic, social, religious, cultural or ethnic issues, economic or religious disparities.
- d) Persecution: violation of human rights, mass movement of refugees, poverty or instability caused by the mismanagement or ineptitude of government (Furley, 1995: 40, Barry 2003:81).

Considering the causes of internal conflicts as witnessed in Africa today, scholarly literature on internal conflicts has identified four main clusters of factors: structural factors, political factors, economic/ social factors and cultural/ perceptual factor. (Vogt and Aminu 1999:204) The three main structural factors include weak state structures caused by lack of political legitimacy and ineffective political institutions capable of exercising effective control. When state structures weaken, violent conflicts often follow.

Secondly when states, structures are weak, individual groups within these states feel compelled to provide for their own defense, they have to worry about whether other groups pose security threats. The third structural factor is ethnic geography. More specifically, states with ethnic minorities are more prone to conflict than others, especially when they are marginalized.

Political factors include discriminatory political institutions, closed authoritarian systems generate resentments especially if some groups are inadequately represented. Secondly, the prospects of violence are great, if groups have ambitious objectives, strong sense of identity and confrontational strategies.

Thirdly, elites politics more especially the tactics employed by desperate and opportunistic politicians and economic turmoil.

Two broad economic and social factors can be identified as potential sources of internal conflict. First, economic problems can contribute to intra- state tensions. In Africa, transitions from centrally planned to market-based economic system created several problems from high unemployment to rampant inflation.

Secondly, discriminatory economic systems, whether on the basis of class or ethnicity can generate feelings of resentment and levels of frustration prone to the generation of violence.

Two cultural perceptual factors have been identified as sources of internal conflict. First is cultural discrimination or either traditional law or enacted laws against minorities. Problems include inequitable educational opportunity and constraints on religious freedom to mention but a few. The second factor has to do with group histories and group perception of norms and more of themselves and others. Many groups have legitimate rights or grievances against others for crime of any kind or another committed at any point in time in the past.

Conflict management as it name applies is:

The reduction, elimination of all forms of conflict in any given environment (Scheeling 1966: 83)

When people talk about conflict management/ resolution, they tend to talk about terms like: negotiation,

bargaining, mediation or arbitration (Goldberg 1992:86). Conflict management in itself involves:

Designing effective macro level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning in a system. (Rahim 2002: 208).

Conflict management and resolution indeed, Gilenn has observed that the term “conflict management” has been used rather vaguely in the literature with a variety of meanings and emphasis. Rather than elaborating what are often very subtle differences between the various interpretations, however, it seems more useful for present purposes to polarize interpretation into two main schools of thought.

The first school consists of those who equate conflict management purely and simply with the peaceful resolution of confrontations. Success is wholly independent upon the avoidance of war. Implicit in this view is the notion of a conflict as a pathological occurrence to be ended or defused as quickly as possible. The aim is to control the situation and dampen down the conflict.

The second school of thought about conflict management lies at the opposite extreme and interprets conflict management solely as an exercise in winning. The objective is to make the enemy back down, to gain concessions from him and thereby to further ones ambitions in the international arena. Crisis are not regarded as pathological or distasteful but rather as opportunities for aggrandizement. It appeals that this school of thought regards conflict as a zero sum game situation in which the gain accruing to one side automatically mean a loss for the opponent.

These two interpretations of conflict management are almost diametrically opposed, and it seems inconceivable and that there could be any possible meeting ground between them. These definitions have generally leaned heavily to the one side or the other.

For instance conflict management is defined as: reaching a solution acceptable to both sides without resorting to war (Lessile Lipson 2006)

This crystallizes some of the central features of conflict management. Lipson emphasizes on the dispute of war and the resolution of the dispute has to be balanced against the emphasis by Kintner on obtainable national objectives. They argued that:

Conflict management is concerned on one hand with the procedures for controlling and regulating crisis so that it does not get out of hands or lead to war, and on the other hand with ensuring that conflicts is resolved on a satisfactory basis in which vital interests of the state are assured or protected, (Lipson 2006: 106).

The second aspect almost invariable necessitates vigorous actions carrying substantial risks. One task of conflict management, therefore, is to temper this risks to keep them as low and as controllable as possible in gaining concessions from the adversary and maintaining one's own position relatively intact.

Conflict in itself is treated in synonyms with violence which serves as a turning point between the fortunate and unfortunate. Conflict management attracts decision making.

It was observed that "conflict is followed by an important outcome whose consequences shapes the future of lie and condition of the people" (Weirner and Kan 1965:48). Conflict management occur in order to reduce tension, anxiety and cohesion in the society."(Sandole and Vander 1993:11)

It can be said to be:

An act of tackling issues and matters that will affect development of individuals, communities, state and country. (Merwe and Dennis J.D 1993:48).

Conflict management brings resolution and positive changes in the society. Conflict management gives those who

are deprived the opportunity to air their views and make demand of what exactly they want to be done in order to allow peace to reign.

In recent times, Nigeria has been experiencing ugly tend of killing of innocent citizens residing in various part of the northern Nigeria. This ugly experience have been condemned nationally and internationally and even by God who created the country and the people inside it. There is no doubt, that such ugly act was instigated by a particular group of political, religious and ethnic leaders. Then, what can be done to control the situation in Nigeria. It is a very big challenge to Nigerian women, who are as a matter of their position either wives, mothers, sisters, mother-in-law, political office holder, religious leaders, wives take up their positions to manage effectively the religious, political and ethnic problems facing our nation. This if achieved effectively will attract other women all over the world to wake up to the challenges of their various nations.

The Role of Women in Conflict Management

Women as a matter of fact should start on time to inculcate the culture of love and violence free ideology into the culture of their children since they spend more time in children upbringing. Women should educate their children the implication of living in a chaotic society, which nothing but leads to poverty, hardship and underdevelopment. This makes such society to be recognized the international community as uncivilized nation. Women when involved in the political affairs of their nation should actively manage any issue that may result to crisis/ conflict that may threaten the unity of the country, such as religious and ethnic matters. This can be done by educating their ethnic and religious brothers the danger of their actions. Women by their nature are peace makers, they can use different measures to appeal to the conscience of their husbands, children, even their difficult sons, their religious leaders etc. by crying, pleading, fasting, yeanning, begging etc. to

manage crisis and restore peace, not only in their homes but in the entire society.

Women can as well embark upon prayer, enlightenment campaign, instructing, counselling, advising etc. to appeal to the conscience of the key actor in crisis of their communities.

In 1949 during the colonial era in Nigeria, women managed the crisis that erupted between Nigerian women and the colonial masters over the issue of tax imposition on women.

In western region in Nigeria, a woman mobilized other women to dethrone an oba who proved to be a tyrannical king in their region. Queen Amina in northern Nigeria also organized a peaceful protest to achieve their own aim in northern part of the country.

Mrs. Margret Ekpo in the east was a good politician, she represented women and other people during the first presidential regime in Nigeria. Fred- mensah (2008).

The Need for Conflict Management and Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria Society

Nigeria is country made up of people from different cultures, language, belief, principles and ideologies. It is a nation that has people who speak over two hundred different languages, religious practices and geographical background. Indeed is a plural society that need to be bound by understanding of each other, tolerate and love one another. If conflict erupts in such society, need to be handled amicable without foreign intervention or loss of life and property. In fact, no meaningful economic and social development can be achieved in a troubled society. Peaceful co-existence of people in a particular environment promotes unity, understanding and social security, improve development and care among various groups, communities and states, attracts foreign investment and investors with their advanced technology and durable goods. Conflict management and peaceful co-existence gives way for

the establishment of industries that can generate employment opportunities for good governance.

Strategy for the Conflict Management

- A. Through negotiation: the individual or group of people involved are always invited by the women who will look into the matter of grievances. They try all the possible measures within their capacity to negotiate and restore peace among them, sometimes, they place fine, sanction or punishment to the offenders.
- B. Use of dialogue: in the method of dialogue, women do not always allow both parties to lay their complain before each other in order not to allow the break of war among themselves. Women use their wisdom, talents, initiatives and special gift deposited in them by nature to restore peace.
- C. Use of traditional cultural method such as invitation of African masquerade cult. This use of masquerade facilitates peace faster and do not encourage social injustice in the land.
- D. Women may also use customary court; Because of the level of education among some African women, they can take any matter to court for peaceful resolution. This may be customary court, high court etc. it can as well be done through attraction of government officials or attention for absolute conflict management.

Other measures women can use for peace and conflict management include use of international organization and association.

Invitation of regional forces or organization such as army, police or other forces, use of African leaders, use of technology/ electronic media and mass media. Heitler (2011), Maihi and Woodhouse (2001).

Conclusion

Women should have confidence in them because they can carry their national and international assignment on peace and conflict management effectively, most especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular, women should not be underrated and intimidated by culture and any religion and the government of every African country should enact a law or policy for gender equality.

Women should not be treated as second class citizens whose function is limited in home keeping, house help, baby making machine or factory and sex partner to their husband. Joyce meyer 2006.

Recommendation

1. Women should be empowered economically in order to give their best when called upon to carry responsibilities especially in the area of peace and crisis management.
2. Women should be assisted in the area of educational improvement and professionalism to enable them to embark upon an efficient conflict management technique for fair justice.
3. Women should be free from some African cultural ties that limit them from conflict management work.
4. Women should be given free hand and support by the government and the society whenever they are involved in peace and conflict management in Nigeria.
5. Women should try to give their children good training that will help them to do something that will lead to wars and violence in Nigeria.
6. Women should always make their children and men to understand that religion should not be an instrument for war and destruction rather, an instrument for peace and development.
7. Women should as well teach their children and relatives the need for peaceful co-existence of people irrespective

of culture, sex and religion for a meaningful economic development to exist.

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