



Conflict Management Mechanism in Contemporary Nigeria; Problems and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is to examine the conflicts management mechanisms in the present-day Nigeria, their impacts for resolving conflicts and good governance in the country. The paper adopts content analysis methods using secondary source of information from newspapers, books, journals and internet materials to discuss the major conflict issues in Nigeria. Literature on the subject matter were reviewed to analyze the issues on conflict management mechanisms in the country. This work was anchored by structural conflict theory as the theoretical framework due to its importance on conflict management. Findings revealed that the conflict management mechanism in contemporary Nigeria is at a low ebb in resolving the conflicts in the country. The paper observed that the conflicts management mechanisms in contemporary Nigeria are ineffective due to the bad leadership, corruption; ethno-religious factors, undemocratic practices, poor security system, and non-adherence to the tenets of the rule of law. As a consequence, peace, development and stability have been negatively affected resulting in backwardness in growth and development in Nigeria. The study recommends that good governance must be put in place to repair the entire systems and/or institutions in the country to ensure effective management of the conflicts in the country.

KEYWORDS: *Conflict, Conflict Management, Development, Good Governance, Good security*

1 INTRODUCTION

Currently, the democratic regimes in Nigeria have witnessed more conflicts than the military era (Onimajesin, 2005 as cited in Yakubu, Adeboye, Ubah, & Dogo, 2005). Karl Marx claims that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources (Okojie, 1997). It is unarguably that conflict is a part of human existence and inevitable. Conflicts could be the instrument of change or destruction in any society and also depends on their causes and management. Conflicts arise when two or more individuals, groups, communities, or nations pursue mutually exclusive or unharmonious goals. Often times, the underlying factors include a scarcity of resources, a clash of interests, incongruence of values, standards and principles, and a perception of being displaced by other parties in pursuit of desired goals.

Conflicts can originate within an entity resulting in intra-personal, intra-group or intra-national conflicts; or they could reflect incompatible actions between contrasting groups or persons leading to interpersonal, intergroup or international conflicts. Depending on how they are handled, conflicts can serve a constructive role leading to a re-examination of basic assumptions and practices, or in the alternative, to a disruption of life and general wellbeing of a people. The challenge for leaders and managers is how to make conflicts constructive rather than destructive, overt rather than covert, marginal rather than fundamental, peripheral rather than pivotal. (Osisioma, 2016).

Today, the country has been engulfed with conflicts and agitations from different geographical areas. In the North-East, the Boko Haram menace; in the North Central region, the Banditry; the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the East; and the Shiite-Sunni face off in the North-West of the country. In addendum, Southwestern part of Nigeria also engulf with agitation and succession. Across the length and breadth of the North and South of the country, the Fulani herdsmen attack agrarian communities especially in the southern part of the country, which led to the creation of different regional security outfits such as Western Nigeria Security Network (called Amotekun) in the south-west, and Eastern Security Network in the southeastern parts of the country. Once conflict is unavoidable, the mechanisms must be put in place to keep that conflict within acceptable bounds. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine the effectiveness of the conflict management mechanisms in contemporary Nigeria.

1.1 Conceptual Clarification

Conflict: Traditionally, conflict has been defined as opposing interests involving scarce resources and goal divergence and frustration (Okojie, 1997).

Conflict management: Conflict management is the deliberate action to deal with conflictive situations, both to prevent or to eliminate them. To Best (2012, p14), conflict management is a process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with

and through the parties involved in that conflict. It is sometimes used synonymously with conflict regulation and covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at differently stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive. It also involves negotiation, mediation, arbitration and reconciliation. Generally, conflict management involves a process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of it (Osisioma 2016, p3).

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the paper was to examine the effectiveness of the conflict mechanism management in the present-day Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. examine the sources of ethno-religion conflicts in Nigeria;
- ii. ascertain the effectiveness of ethno-religion conflicts management mechanisms in the contemporary Nigeria; and
- iii. outline possible strategies to effectively manage ethno-religion conflicts in Nigeria.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts content analysis methods using information from newspapers, books, and journal and internet materials to discuss the major issues in the study. Literatures on the subject matter were reviewed while secondary sources were employed to analyze the issues under study. Structural conflict theory was adopted as the

theoretical framework due to its importance on the subject matter.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the structural conflict theory in explaining the nature of conflicts and their management in the contemporary Nigeria. The theory is propounded by the Marxist dialectical school with exponents like Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, V.I. Levim etc. and another version of it is the liberal structuralism ably represented by scholars like Ross (1993), Scarbo (1998) and Johan Galting (1990) on structural violence. The theory sees incompatible interest based on competition for resources, which in most cases are assumed to be scarce as being responsible for social conflicts (Collier, 2000:2). The main argument of the structural conflict theory is that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized (Johnkenedy & Christopher, 2014). The theory focuses on social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequality, poor governance, etc. as sources of conflict. The structural basis of conflict is a theory that attempts to explain conflict as product of the tension that arises when groups must compete for scarce recourses (Kennedy et al. 2014). For instance, for all the crises in Nigeria all the above features manifested causing labour crises, intra and inter political party crisis, religion crisis, ethnic crisis, economic crises, boundary conflicts etc. The emphasis of this theory is based on how the competing interest of groups ties conflicts directly into social, economic

and political organizations. Thus, when the social, political and cultural processes are monopolized by a group (Class), they create the condition that makes people adopt an adversarial approach to conflict. Mark et al. (1943:20) posited that: “Man’s biological nature is good nor bad, aggressive nor submissive, warlike nor peaceful but natural in these respects”. He is capable of developing in either direction depending upon what; he is compelled to learn by his environment and by his culture. The structural conflict theory is therefore germane in explaining conflict situations in different dimensions in Nigeria and also in highlighting some of the factors such as poverty, corruption ethno-religious upheavals, political instability, boundary disputes, and bad leadership, to mention but a few that encourages and execrates conflicts in the continent (Kennedy et al. 2014).

You are (hopefully) never presenting a personal opinion or arguing for preconceived biases. The value of your work rests squarely on how well it conforms to the principles of the scientific method. Other scientists are not going to take your word for it; they need to be able to evaluate firsthand whether your methodology is sound.

In addition, it is useful for the reader to understand how you obtained your data, because it allows them to evaluate the quality of the results.

3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

3.1 Sources of Conflicts in Contemporary Nigeria

Listed below are some of the sources of conflicts in the contemporary Nigeria:

- i. Sit tight syndrome of political officers and taut competition for political power;
- ii. Bad governance;
- iii. Injustice and unequal treatment;
- iv. Socio economic deprivation;
- v. Political oppression;
- vi. Physical violence perpetrated by the government using its agents;
- vii. Disputes over land-space and the resources available;
- viii. Boundary disputes;
- ix. Population growth and expansionist tendencies to sustain ethnic-bound occupations;
- x. Secessionist movement;
- xi. Religious fanaticism;
- xii. False promises and disinformation;
- xiii. Economic Crisis and Poverty;
- xiv. Porosity of borders; and
- xv. Non adherent to the tenet of the rule of law.

3.2 Conflicts in Contemporary Nigeria

In Nigeria, the large number and high intensity of manifest or potential violent conflicts emanate from political, socio-economic, ethno-religion, injustice and the people’s everyday lives. Since the beginning of the democratization process in 1999, the number and intensity of

violent conflicts has tended to increase rather than decrease (Heinrich, 2008). Conflict management styles can be persuasive, collaborative, compromising, avoiding, coercive and accommodating (Ramin, 2011). Effective conflict management strategies can minimize the negative impacts of conflict on different parties and help create a trusting environment that builds healthy and improved interpersonal relationship, peaceful co-existence, economic growth and national development (Ramin, 2011).

Looking at contemporary Nigeria, in view of the various dimensions of conflicts (such as political, religious and ethnic) among various ethnic and religious groups in different parts of the country, one should ask the question, to what extent has the various approach in managing conflict, yielded positive results? This question can be answered by looking at the present scenario of the crises that has engulfed the political and socio-economic system of the country. Government has made concerted efforts to address conflict situations, especially those that are religious and ethnic in nature. However, Nigerians are still experiencing conflict related problems in spite the fact Government is making efforts in conflict management and resolution.

In contemporary Nigeria, several mechanisms have been adopted to manage conflicts but it's very regrettable that none of the mechanisms absolutely minimized or put an end to the conflicts in Nigeria, what we have mostly is the escalation of conflicts as a result of poor management system of the conflict and

the insincerity of the government and its agents to properly manage the conflicts (Dike, 1999). Government is saddled with the responsibility to maintain peace and order in the country and to ensure safety of all using all the resources available at its disposal, but reverse is the case because government appears to be major cause and the promoter of conflicts in the country.

Successive Nigerian governments have managed Nigerian crises and conflicts in different but coercive and unconstructive ways. For instance, Abacha's administration used police and military to resolve Ife Modakeke crises in 1997, but all to no avail until peaceful intervention of United States Agency for International Development/Office of International Initiatives (USAID/OTI). Soldiers were also drafted in 1999 to quell conflict in the Arogbo Ijaw-Ugbo Ilaje crises by Obasanjo's administration. The same administration, in its bids to settle and resolve Niger-Delta crises sent Military Joint Task Force (JTF) to the area with ideological slogan 'Operation Restore Hope', in order to win legitimacy. Also, in most of the religious and tribal clashes, soldiers had been drifted to such areas in order to quench crises and restore 'peace', little or no attention was paid to restore permanent peace between and among the concerned groups after temporary peace was restored (Albert, 2003). All the coercive interventionist strategies employed to solve the myriad socio-political religious crises in Nigeria have yielded next to no achievements.

It was only the administration of late Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar-Adua the former

President of Nigeria- that looked the other way and employed alternative dispute resolution spectrum to resolve Niger-Delta crises, the crises that have become phenomenal albatross round the neck of Nigeria (Afongu, 2019). He took determined and strategic steps to resolve the problem once and for all. He created Niger Delta Ministry and granted amnesty to the Niger Delta Militants. This has greatly yielded a lot of results, and peace is gradually returning into the region.

From the era of Goodluck Jonathan up to the present administration, it is observed that conflicts have not been resolved in Nigeria because of the continuous fight among ethnic and religious groups for supremacy and domination e.g. the issue of Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram in mostly northern parts of the country. Despite the approaches of dialogue and negotiation to settle the problem, the tension of conflict in most parts of Nigeria is still perpetual. This shows that conflict management techniques have not yielded the desired result in Nigeria.

Since the Fourth Nigerian Republic's founding in 1999, farmer-herder violence has killed thousands of people and displaced tens of thousands more. Insecurity and violence have led many populations to create self-defense forces and ethnic militias, which have engaged in further violence. The majority of farmer-herder clashes have occurred between Muslim Fulani herdsmen and Christian peasants, exacerbating ethnic religious hostilities.

Today, the challenges are becoming more daunting than ever. In the North-East the Boko Haram peril in the North Central Region, the Fulani herdsmen brutal attacks of innocent villagers, the Shiite-Sunni face off with the religious leader Zakzaky still in detention. In the South-South the long the age-old MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People) to the more recent MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta), and lately, the NDA (Niger Delta Avengers) and the NDV (Niger Delta Volunteers). In the South-East, the MASSOB (Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra) is fast giving way to IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra). The Biafran movement has all the makings of a serious case for independence, complete with flags, national anthem, national symbols, and all other paraphernalia of sovereignty. In the face of this over-bearing burden of discontent and disenchantment, country is not at peace, and the conflicts are escalating rather than abating.

3.3 Conflict Management Mechanisms in Nigeria

Among the modern mechanisms that have been adopted in managing conflicts in Nigeria are:

3.3.1 Strategic withdrawal: This response mechanism looks like avoidance/ denial on the surface; but it is not. It has to do with not taking any immediate action on the problem or taking a mild action but seizing the opportunity to buy quality time and space to plan and take a more decisive action. The Jonathan and Buhari administrations

adopt this mechanism of conflict management. Both administrations failed to take a prompt and decisive action in addressing the insecurity problems in the country. Local Government Areas were taken over by the Boko Haram terrorists in the north-east during Jonathan administration, while his successor president Buhari has widely criticized for not being proactive in waging war against the violent herdsmen terrorizing the villagers across the country.

3.3.2 Third party decision making:

This has to do with having to refer the conflict to a higher body with decision-making power for settlement. In most cases, this approach involves judicial settlement: a legal mode of pacific dispute termination. This type of conflict mechanism is mostly slow to dispense justice and manage the conflict.

3.3.3 Confrontation/force: This has to do with the use of the police or military to reverse a conflicting situation as we recently witnessed in Maiduguri during the Boko Haram crisis, Benue, South East, and in Jos. This could have been the best way of managing violent conflicts in the country if the security outfits of the government are promptly deployed to any violent areas in the country, but due to corruption and sentiment this method has not been effective to make the conflict in the country.

3.3.4 Negotiation/Dialogue: This is a method of resolving conflict whereby a conversation occurs between the settler of the conflict and the parties involved. Fisher et al (2000:115) defined negotiation as a structured process of

dialogue between conflicting parties about issues in which their opinions differ. To Best (2006), negotiation is a direct process of dialogue and discussion taking place between at least two parties who are faced with a conflict situation or dispute. The whole task of negotiation generally is to reach an agreement through joint decision between the conflicting parties. This method has been used by government to settle the Boko Haram conflict but did not yield any result, killings is still the order of the day in the north-east.

3.3.5 Mediation: This is a dynamic, structured, interactive process where a neutral third party assists disputing parties in resolving conflicts through the use of specialized communication and negotiation techniques. Attempts have been made to solve crises like that of Jos and Boko Haram in Nigeria, yet little has been achieved from this method.

3.4 Explaining the Ineffectiveness of Conflict Management Mechanisms in Contemporary Nigeria

The above mechanisms of conflict management have been applied in contemporary Nigeria at one time or the other but have largely proved to be ineffective due to the following reasons

3.4.1 Bad Leadership

Bad leadership entails poor performance by the person(s) at the helm of affairs in the following ways:

- when leaders do not understand the overall direction of a country, when leader(s) are not transparent enough;

- when at least a group or more who are members of an entity are marginalized or not carried along in the scheme of governance;
- when there is disrespect for public opinion on the part of leaders,
- underperformance and poor protection of fundamental human rights of the citizens by the leaders; and
- avoids or does not deal with conflict, corruption, poor flexibility and accountability.

It is evident that contemporary Nigeria is bereaved of quality leadership. Bad leadership constitutes a huge obstacle against the effectiveness of conflict management mechanisms in contemporary Nigeria such that the lack of confidence in the leaders by the people and the limited leadership skills in the leaders of the country often manifest during conflict management, consequently; frustrating the effort of conflict management mechanisms in the country in more ways than one.

3.4.2 Corruption

Corruption connotes the use or manipulation of public office for private interest. A form of dishonesty or criminal offence undertaken by a person or organization entrusted with a position of authority, and acquisition of illicit benefits or abuse power for one's private gain is considered as corruption. Corruption no doubt, numbers among the key hindrances against the effectiveness of conflict management mechanism in contemporary Nigeria. Efforts at managing different conflicts in the

country had been stymied by corruption. The case of managing insurgency in the North Eastern part of the country quickly comes to mind where military corruption has undermined the efforts of conflict management mechanisms to address a conflict that has consumed over 20000 lives and displaced millions. In the words of Transparency International (Reuters.com), "corrupt military officials have been able to benefit from conflict through the creation of fake defense contracts, the proceeds of which are often laundered abroad in the UK, U.S. and elsewhere". Nigerian Vice President submitted that around 15 billion dollars had been stolen from the public purse through fraudulent arms procurement deals. This had left the military poorly equipped, poorly trained in the act of conflict management, low morale and under-resourced and has crippled the same in fighting an aggressive ideologically inspired enemy such as Boko Haram. Corruption has dealt a heavy blow to the effectiveness of conflict management mechanisms in contemporary Nigeria in more ways than military corruption.

3.4.3 Ethno-Religious Factors

Nigeria is a country whose religious status has been blurredly described by the 1999 constitution as secular. However, the country is enmeshed in a confusion of secularism status such that the constitution gives to it a not-clear-enough theoretical status as a secular state, but in practice; religion seems to influence and feature prominently in the activities of the state and the people. In addition, ethnicism is a key factor in most

decisions within the entity. Our focus here is where conflicting groups define themselves along ethno-religious lines, religious and ethnic identities can create sharp distinctions between parties, and increase group mobilization. More disturbing is the propensity of such ethno-religious realities to hinder the progress of conflict management mechanisms in the country. The case of Shiite versus the Nigerian State is still fresh. The allegation of one-sidedness of the governor of Kaduna state (at the time writing), Mallam Nasir Ahmed El-Rufai against the people of the southern part of the state is another germane case where ethno-religious factors or biasness had created distrust and hindered the success of conflict management mechanisms in contemporary Nigeria. The southern Kaduna people are alleging that the governor of the state is secretly siding with Fulani (his tribe and religion men) who are attacking and killing them, little wonder he does not seem to exhibit any seriousness at ending the conflict. Any effort by the governor at bringing the conflicting parties to a consensus that would relegate the conflict to the pages of history has been viewed by the Southern Kaduna people as a staged tactics to conceal the real intention of the government. This is one of the numerous ways which ethno-religious factors facilitate the failure of conflict management mechanisms in contemporary Nigeria.

3.4.4 Undemocratic Practice

Conflict management mechanisms can achieve the set goal of conflict management maximally only in

democratic settings where the tenets of democracy are highly adhered to. Respect for human rights is one of the key tenets of democracy. In contemporary Nigeria, cases abound where the violation of certain democratic practices had led to conflict and/or hinder the effectiveness of conflict management mechanism. Election malpractice for instance is one of such undemocratic practices, which birthed the post-election violence of 2011.

For instance, many lives were lost in Kaduna State, Nigeria. In addition, distrust was created and the failure of the Peace and Reconciliation Committee convoked by the then governor of the state, (late Sir Patrick Ibrahim Yakowa) to manage the conflict and prevent the re-occurrence of the same. Similarly, the violation of life to life (killing) of around 348 Shiite Muslims in 2015 by the Nigerian State is another germane example of how undemocratic practices can create and hinder conflict management. When the atmosphere is not democratic enough, conflict management mechanisms can do only little or nothing in pursuing conflict management.

3.4.5 Poor Security System

The poor relationship and coordination between and among the various components and sub-components of the Nigerian security system is a challenge to conflict management in contemporary Nigeria. In the same line, the seemingly poor skills in intelligence gathering, forensic investigation/analysis, preservation and the use of information,

weak relationship with communities also stand as strong hindrance to the smooth success of conflict management mechanisms in contemporary Nigeria. A proper application of conflict management mechanisms depends on the availability of well-investigated facts to address the remote and immediate causes of the conflicts. However, with a security system that is characterized with the aforementioned weaknesses, reliable facts would certainly be difficult to uncover thereby, hindering the effectiveness of conflict management mechanisms.

3.4.6 Non-Adherence to Rule of Law

Similar to undemocratic practice, disrespect for the rule of law is also a challenge against effective conflict mechanism management in present-day Nigeria. When the law is not considered supreme, when none are equal before the law, when the law is not allowed to seamlessly protect human rights as posited by Albert Venn Dicey; conflict management mechanisms can do little or nothing to manage conflict. There are cases of disrespect for rule of law coexisting with expectations for effective conflict management in contemporary Nigeria. A relevant example is the refusal by the Nigerian government under President Muhammadu Buhari to release the leader of Shiite group in Nigeria, Sheikh Ibraheem El-Zakzaky whom a Federal court of competent jurisdiction had granted bail. This is a violation of rule of law and is responsible for the continuous protest by the Shiite group in different parts of the country. Rather than contributing to solve conflicts between

the group and the Nigerian States, it can be said to have created distrust and hindered the easy management of the conflicts in many ways. Conflict management mechanisms cannot be effective in an atmosphere that accords very little or no respect for rule of law. The atmosphere in Nigeria is one such atmospheres.

3.5 Strategies for Effective Conflict Management in Contemporary Nigeria

Provided the above obstacles to effective conflict management are alive and well, conflict management in contemporary Nigeria will remain a dream.

To manage conflict effectively, the obstacles to effective conflict management must be done away with. The challenge of bad leadership must be addressed through a well-planned and administered elections capable of producing quality leaders who have all it takes to govern. Quality leaders who give everyone some sense of belonging, respect human rights, address the challenge of corruption, embrace constitutionalism and enforce the secular status of the Nigerian State. In addition, quality leaders who respect the rule of law, and reform the security system of the country.

The most important factor is the need to have good governance. Good governance entails a legitimate government that is transparent and accountable, respects public opinion, treats all equally, respects human rights and rule of law, respects the principles of constitutionalism, has

national interests top on its priorities, carries all along to give high sense of belonging. It means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. With good governance, the obstacles to the effective application of conflict management mechanisms in contemporary Nigeria will be no more. Good governance possesses the propensity to repair the faulty system that had constituted huge hindrance to conflict management in contemporary Nigeria.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have attempted to explain conflict management mechanisms in Nigeria, clarified some concepts, adopted the structural conflict theory as theoretical framework, and examined the causes of conflicts in the country. The findings of this study revealed that conflict management mechanisms in Nigeria are not effective to mitigate conflicts in the country. Yet, the hope for bringing the conflicts to the minimum level in the country lies in promoting the logic and principle of good governance enthroned. Conflict is inevitable yet it is the responsibilities of the government to create a conducive environment for everyone to pursue his happiness by effectively managing the conflicts in the country. To strengthen the conflict mechanisms in the present-day Nigeria, good governance must be put in place to repair the entire systems or institutions in the country to ensure effective management of the conflicts in the country.

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