CONFLICT: CAUSES, EFFECTS AND MANAGEMENT

Olusola O. Isola
Research Fellow Peace and Conflict Studies Program
Institute of African Studies,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the causes of conflicts and the effects that poorly managed conflict could have on the society. It establishes that while conflict is a usual phenomenon in any human environment, violence is destructive and unusual and conflicts should not be allowed to degenerate into violence. Skilfully managed conflicts can propel development in any human environment, but violence can lead to disintegration and destruction. Four methods of handling conflicts are discussed, each method having an implication on the outcome of conflict. Furthermore, the components of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) are discussed. The advantages of the ADR which accounted for its growing popularity globally over the adversarial court system are emphasized. Finally, the paper examines the role of youths in peace building and advocates for integration of peace education into the curricular of the educational institutions for the benefit of the youth.

Introduction

Human beings are created differently by God. No two individuals are the same and God has done that for a purpose. We are created males and females; we come from different families, from different ethnic backgrounds; we share different biological features, different physical features; and so on. In spite of our differences however, God has enabled us to share some common features as His creature. We share the same ancestry; we cannot do without our communities; and we need our social networks to make progress in life. Above all, we are a member of a universal community of humans who are inter-connected in spite of geographical distances and environmental differences.

Our differences are often at the roots of many of our conflicts. As a result of the diversities in our nature, conflict is very common among us. Conflict is always with us in our homes, in our communities,

in our places of work, and in our nation at large. However, God has also put into us the ability to manage our conflicts in such a way that they will not be destructive to us. In essence, the extents to which we are able to manage our conflicts often determine the amount of progress we make in life. This ability to manage our conflicts and diversities can be learnt and practised so that we can become better persons and be more productive, especially when we live in a multi-ethnic and diverse society. In this way, we will be more useful to our environment and to ourselves.

The objective of this paper is to expose some of the ways we can live together peacefully and make progress in a diverse society in spite of the obstacles and challenges we face. The paper is also focused on the responsibility of the younger segment of the society towards peace building. Younger people will find this paper more useful in their preparation to occupy leadership position, as some of the skills they will learn are likely to assist them in this preparation.

Features of Conflicts

Conflict can be defined as differences in our preferences. Such differences are not altogether a negative thing. In fact, there is progress in working out our differences positively. Conflicts prevent us as individual members of society from being stagnant. The consciousness of the consequences of conflicts encourages us to do the right things and respect the rights and aspirations of other people we interact with, knowing that the doing otherwise could affect our own progress. It is only when conflicts are managed negatively that it becomes destructive to us. Such destruction can come in form of violence. Violence is defined as any activity that seeks to injure the other person or groups physically, psychologically or structurally (Shmid P. Alex, 2000). While ***conflict is a usual*** feature in human societies, ***violence is an unusual*** event, and it is a feature that must be avoided because of its tendency to destroy us as individuals and as a group. It could also destroy our societies.

It is also important to note that some conflicts are fleeting while others could be protracted. We resolve conflicts every time in our lives, but when we find it difficult to find quick resolution to some conflicts, they could linger on and expand and even spread to other places to involve other parties. Many violent crises that take human

and material tolls often start with small conflicts which are mis-managed. For instance, several ethno-religious conflicts which have ravaged Nigerian society originated from mere dis-agreements among individuals, which spread to other members of their communities and eventually became a regional matter. From being regional issues, if such conflict is left unmanaged or if mis-managed it becomes national crisis. The global terrorism crisis also started from the local level, simply because authorities in some countries are not able to manage religious and racial differences among their citizens.

The common causes of conflicts in any society have been identified, and they are categorized into four major causes. They include: Resources, Values, Psychological Causes and Communication Breakdown. Resource-based conflicts occur as a result of lack or insufficient resources to go round among people. Such resources are tangible and intangible objects such as money, clothes, jewelleries, love, sex, shelter, etc. Conflicts occur because resources are scarce and can never go round equally among people. It is either some people have too much of a particular resource or others are denied of access to such resource, in which case there is bound to be frictions between the two categories of people. At the inter-personal level, the denial of an individual of a tangible or intangible resource could elicit negative responses from the person being denied. In essence, the only way the person being denied could be appeased is through the provision of the needed resource. Countries have gone to war because of conflicts over resources in the past and more countries are likely to fight over resources in the future (Christopher and King, 2005).

Value-based conflicts are rooted in differences in the value systems of individuals or groups. Such conflict could result from differences in religious values, in cultural values, ethical values, customs and traditions, and so on. Human beings have the tendency to react violently to any attempt to desecrate their value systems because of the importance attached and their emotional attachments to such values. Conflicts often arise when two or more values contend within the same environment. Such contention could be in form of one value attempting to dominate or subjugate the others. If such conflict is not skillfully managed, they could result in destructions in the environment.

That is why ethno-religious conflicts are so vociferous and deadly in some places. They involve values which people are born with

and grow up to understand and which shape their lives. The unending crisis in the Middle East is a result of competition between Islamic and Judeo-Christian religions, even though the two religions originated from the same part of the world. The numerous ethnic violent conflicts in Nigeria are often vociferous because they are value-based conflicts.

People were ready to lose their lives and properties because of the depth of their emotional attachments to their ethnic origins and religious affiliations.

Psychological-based conflicts are rooted in the biological and environmental make-up of individuals. Some individuals are pre-disposed to conflicts as a result of their genetic make-up while others are pre-disposed to conflicts as a result of the nature of their environments. For instance, people who inherited psychotic traits from their parents have the tendencies to be agitated and could be emotionally and psychologically unstable. Such individuals are more pre-disposed to conflicts. In the same vein, the environment in which an individual grew up could influence the individual's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Such environmental factors could affect individuals' pre-disposition to conflicts. Several studies have proved that individuals who were brought up in decent, organized environments are not likely to be inclined to violence, whereas those individuals who grew up in less organized and chaotic environments are more amenable to violence or anti-social behaviour.

Communication breakdown is another veritable source of conflicts and probably the commonest cause. When communication is hampered and understanding is lacking in any human environment, there is a tendency for mis-interpretation of actions and purposes.

Conflict often results from such lack of understanding and wrong interpretations. If communication problems are not effectively addressed and it leads to misunderstanding, it could degenerate into violence. Such lack of effective communication had led countries into war in the past and has devastated families and communities. The use of signs and symbols in communication modes could also lead to conflicts. Unacceptable varieties of such signs and symbols are likely to elicit negative responses from parties in communication process which can easily lead to conflict and if not well managed violence.

It is logical to assume that conflicts could be easily resolved if the causal factors are identified and addressed. However, it is often not

that easy. Some of the causal factors of conflict are easier to address than others. The easiest among the causes of conflict to be resolved is the resource-based conflict. If the resources that are lacking are provided, there is the likelihood that the conflict may be resolved.

Value-based conflicts tend to be more difficult to be resolved because, more often, they are deep-rooted and ingrained in the nature of the individuals and groups involved in the conflict. Issues of values are difficult to negotiate among people and sometimes holders of some values are ready to lose their lives in the course of protecting their values. They will rather die than the value they so much cherish be desecrated. The protracted conflict in the Middle East has witnessed more suicide bombers than any other form of conflicts in the world because of the emotional attachment of people there to Islam (Tulliu and Shmalberger, 2001).

Psychological-based conflict can be resolved as long as it is recognized as such, and medical, counselling and other antidotes are found to address the embedded issues and the personality problems involved. The problem with this variety of conflict is that it may be difficult to recognize the cause without the intervention of a medical expert or a psychologist. Individuals with personality defects who emerge into leadership position during conflicts may not be easy to detect. Such individuals are likely to conceal their defects under the guise of fighting for the interests of the people they are leading. Often, such individuals are difficult to negotiate with during conflict bargaining process and their contribution may further aggravate the conflict and make resolution difficult.

Communication-based conflicts can be resolved through effective dialogue and restructuring of the communication system (Garth, R.J. *et al* 2000). However, the willingness of the parties involved in such conflict to revise their communication tactics is very crucial for the resolution of such conflicts. Since perception is very crucial to successful communication, parties in conflicts must also be ready to review their perception of the others and take deliberate steps to influence the communication tactics of the others in the conflict.

Another feature of conflict is that, in many cases, conflicts combine two or more of the causes when they happen. Hardly can one find a conflict that is caused by a single factor. Usually, conflicts have at their roots a combination of two or more of the causal factors such as

resources and value, value and psychological causes, resource and communication problems, and so on. The Niger-Delta conflict in Nigeria serves as a good example. The initial understanding is that inequitable distribution of proceeds from petroleum exploration was the cause of the conflict and agitation. However, it eventually emerged that the people were worried about the desecration of their ancestral farmlands, which prevented them from farming. A lot of emotions are attached to the land and fresh water which are being polluted by oil exploration. As the conflict continues to unfold, the criminal dimension was introduced to the conflict with the kidnapping and killing of innocent individuals who were doing it for pecuniary gains. The communication dimension emerged when the inhabitants of the Niger-Delta accused the government of neglect in spite of the numerous development projects the government has initiated. It eventually emerged that there was a serious communication gap between the government and the inhabitants of the Niger-Delta. That was addressed with the government communicating more about the projects the government was doing and encouraging the people to serve as watchdogs for the implementers of government projects. The lesson here, in essence, is that when the cause of a conflict is being analyzed, it is always advisable to look beyond a single cause to explain the dynamics of a conflict. Attempts should be made to explore other causes.

Conflict Handling Methods
Since conflict is not meant to destroy human environment and, in fact, is supposed to grease the wheel of progress in any environment, it is important to understand specific techniques to handle each conflict situation in order to obtain the desired outcome out of conflict. Four methods of handling conflicts will be discussed. They include: Confrontation, Avoidance or Denial, Third Party Decision Making and Joint Problem -Solving Methods. It should be noted that each of these options have implications and consequences on conflict outcomes, and so all the options should be weighed effectively before choosing them to address any conflict situation.

1. **Confrontation**: This method involves taking a hard stance on conflict issues. In this situation, the party or parties involved are not ready to compromise on their stance and if possible they

are ready to employ some elements of force to achieve their goals, not caring for the interests of other parties. In this situation, the tendency is that all parties involved will not want to soften their grounds and yield to negotiation to find a peaceful settlement to the dispute. Often, all parties lose out at the end of the day and no one is likely to become a winner in the true sense of it. Furthermore, in the course of taking hard stance on the conflict issue, violence may occur which may lead to physical damages of properties in the environment or injuries to the individuals and parties involved in the conflict.

2. **Avoidance/Denial**: In this situation, one or all parties involved in a conflict pretend as if the conflict does not exist. They tend to avoid discussing the core issues involved in order to reach an amicable resolution of the dispute. This technique is very dangerous since there is the tendency for the conflict to proliferate beyond the immediate environment and quickly extend to other parties. Moreover, the conflict may escalate beyond what the immediate parties could handle because adequate attention has not been paid to address the core issues at the appropriate time. The method may lead to distrust and accusations of lack of commitment and insincerity by parties involved in the conflict. However, this technique may sometimes be useful when the resources to meet the demands of the parties in the conflicts are not yet available. It may be used as a delay tactic by one party pending the time the resources to address the conflict will be available. A very good example of this technique is often demonstrated in conflicts between the organized labour and the government. Usually, government is not inclined to accede to the demand for wage increase by labour until it is assured that the resources to pay an agreed wage are available. Government therefore encourages labour into protracted negotiation until it is able to mobilize sufficient resources and plan for a new wage increase.

3. **Third Party Decision-Making**: This is a situation where a party in conflict allows a third party to intervene in the dispute and take some decisions on behalf of the conflicting parties towards the settlement of the issues in contention. In the alternative dispute resolution spectrum, the conflict parties are involved in

identifying and appointing a third party who could assist them in resolving a conflict. However in litigation, which involves formal court procedures, the adjudicators and judges are imposed on the parties in conflict. In this case, the conflict parties are bound by the decisions of the court and they don't have any say in the appointment of judges. This method may not bring about absolute resolution of the conflict at the end of the day because the third party decision- maker may not be favourable to the parties in the conflict. The advantage in this method of handling conflict is that it allows the intervention of external parties who may make their knowledge and resources available for a quick resolution of the contending issues in a conflict. Despite the fact that it may take the power of decision-making out of the hands of the conflicting parties, the insight and wisdom provided by an external party in this method, especially when they are neutral, may offer tremendous help towards quick resolution of the conflict.

4. **Joint Problem-Solving Method**: This involves the collaboration of the conflict parties to find a durable resolution of the issues involved in the conflict. This is the best method to adopt in conflict resolution because the interests of all parties in the dispute are recognized and taken care of in the negotiation process. The needs and interests of all the parties are discussed and negotiated, and specific steps are taken to address the contending issues. If external assistance is required, it is the conflict parties who will take decision on whom to be involved without giving away their power of final decision-making. Through mutual understanding and cooperation, the contending issues are likely to be resolved and at the end of the day everyone emerges as a winner.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Methods

The disadvantages inherent in the court system or adversarial methods of conflict resolution have made the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods popular and attractive. In the formal court system, cases take long time to be settled because of the numerous procedures involved. Moreover, the cost of filing papers, hiring lawyers, bringing witnesses are very prohibitive, and the frustrations involved in prosecuting cases have made the court system less attractive. On the other hand, the ADR is less cumbersome, less time wasting and less frustrating. Moreover, any dispute, except criminal cases, can be resolved completely only in the ADR system, unlike in formal litigation where one party can emerge a winner while the others become losers.

In many situations, cases are only temporarily resolved in the courts. They could still re-surface in the future with more virulence.

The ADR consists of six components. These include: Communication, Collaboration, Negotiation, Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration. Each of the components is discussed.

1. **Communication**: This is the first step that will be explored in ADR as soon as a conflict emerges. The two conflict parties come together and open a line of communication to discuss the core issues involved in the conflict. In the process, there is the likelihood of more understanding among the parties so that each party is ready to accede to the other and agree to work together to achieve peace. Better communication increases the chances of quicker resolution of the conflict issues because of mutual understanding.

2. **Collaboration**: Sometimes, communication alone is not sufficient to bring about a resolution to a dispute. The conflict parties must take proactive measures to sort out the issues involved. This may involve deliberate actions to address the core issues to contain the conflict so that it does not proliferate beyond the immediate environment of the conflict parties. Physical steps may be taken to visit places, to obtain documents or to address other things that are central to the settlement of the dispute. With openness, understanding and co-operation, the conflicting parties are likely to find amicable resolution to the contending issues.

3. **Negotiation**: This is a bargaining process that involves a roundtable discussion of the core conflict issues among the conflict parties. It involves giving and taking so that amicable decision could be reached on the issues in contention. Each of the parties concedes certain things while gaining other things in the negotiation process. In negotiation, each party appoints a leader or a chief negotiator, who leads his team to bargain with the representatives of the other party. In international negotiation, it is expected that all the parties are working towards peace and all could emerge as winners for a complete resolution of the conflict to take place. Negotiation is one of the instruments to prevent violent crisis at the local and global levels in the contemporary times.

4. **Conciliation**: This could take place when the previous three steps had failed. If the issues in conflict have become protracted and parties involved find it difficult to resolve and consequently break off to revert back to their previous hard positions, a third party could intervene to bring them back to the negotiation table. However, his intervention is limited to only assisting the conflict parties to re-engage in negotiation. The conciliator is not interested in the core issues in the conflict. He is only interested in peace to reign among the parties in the dispute and in the security of their immediate environment. Usually, a conciliator is someone who is familiar with the parties in the conflict and is interested in ensuring that the conflict parties settle their differences so that they could resume their friendship.

5. **Mediation**: This is a facilitated form of negotiation. This situation arises when the conflict parties find it difficult to resolve their differences by themselves. A third party intervenes to broker the negotiation and sits over the negotiation process. The mediator seeks the consents of the parties before his intervention and maintains neutrality during and throughout the proceedings. He collaborates with the conflict parties to draw out a ground rule for the mediation process. He only presides over the proceedings and ensures that the parties in conflict abide by the established rules guiding the process. The mediator does not impose any

decision on the parties since all decisions are taken by them. His role is purely advisory since he is interested only in an amicable resolution of the conflict. A number of ethical issues are now required of mediators since they are now tending towards professionalism. Many cases that would have taken time and funds to resolve in courts are now taken before mediators where they are quickly dispensed.

6. **Arbitration**: This is another form of third party intervention process whereby the parties in conflict engage an arbitrator, usually recognized by law, to assist in resolving their disputes. The parties are usually involved in selecting an arbitrator they deemed suitable. The arbitrator facilitates discussions and takes evidences from the parties in the conflict. He then takes a decision which is binding on the parties in conflict. Such decision may also be sanctioned by the court if such is agreed to at the onset of the proceedings. This method takes decision-making away from the conflict parties, even though they were involved in the selection of the arbitrators in the first instance. However, if the outcome of arbitration is not satisfactory to any of the parties in conflict, they could file an appeal and resort to litigation. The advantage, however, is that matters are quickly dispensed in arbitration and it involves less procedures and legal formalities.

It should be noted that any dispute that is not resolved after exploring all the six ADR stages is likely to be referred to litigation. Moreover, only civil cases can be settled by the ADR methods. Criminal cases are tried and resolved strictly in the courts under formal litigation procedures. However, many of the civil cases that are pending in the courts are better settled through the ADR because of its advantages.

Youths and Peacebuilding

Youthfulness is a stage in life when one is endowed with tremendous strength and vigour. It is a period when one takes a lot of initiatives and risks. Youthful vigour could be directed to both constructive and destructive purposes at this stage in life and that is why every society must pay special attention to issues pertaining to youths. Nation building depends on youths and their creativity. The strength of the

youth normally complements the wisdom of the elders to achieve national development in most nations. Usually, youths play prominent roles during conflicts and during peace periods. Such roles could range from aggravating conflicts and violence to actively working for peace in the quest for development. In essence, the youth are relevant during crises and wars, as well as in peace time. In order to build the capacity of youths and expand their skills in conflict management in a diverse society, there is need to train them and acquaint them with relevant conflict handling techniques so that they could work for peace at every level.

Youths have important roles to play in peacebuilding across Nigeria. This role is better played at every stage of conflicts: at the pre-conflict stage, during conflict, and at the post-conflict stage. At the pre-conflict stage, youths have the capacity to develop early warning systems to detect issues that can generate conflict in the society and work to forestall the degeneration of such issues into violence. They can embark on intensive campaign and activities towards ensuring mutual understanding among diverse groups in the country. With open communication and dialogues at all times, the possibilities of violent conflict breaking out become remote. It however requires constant and continuous efforts to ensure that diverse groups embrace communication and dialogue at all times.

The role of youths is even more important during national conflicts. Youths are very crucial in carrying out relief activities and bringing an end to human sufferings. Invariably, most conflicts end up to be settled at the negotiation table. It is the role of the youth to embark on intensive campaign to end violence that accompanies conflicts and to ensure that conflict parties resort to discussion and dialogue for amicable resolution of contending issues.

Post-conflict reconstructions depend largely on the energy of the youth. In essence, peacebuilding does not end with cessation of hostilities. Indeed, it is the beginning of a new phase in peacebuilding process because there is the need to ensure that the environment is not relapsed back into conflict. Youths are needed to reconstruct devastated infrastructures, to rebuild relationships, to counsel those that have been traumatized by violent conflicts and to ensure renewed confidence building among ex-enemies or parties that have previously engaged in conflict.

Conclusion

There is the need to intensify peace education among youths. Since the youth are encouraged to aspire for leadership positions, it may be dangerous for Nigeria and could amount to a waste of time and valuable resources if such youths are not trained in the rudiments of peace before they are entrusted with leadership responsibilities. Youths are now assuming leadership positions earlier in many countries and Nigeria cannot be an exception. It is in the national interest to integrate peace education into the curricular of educational institutions as early as possible.

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