

MODULE: TOWARDS ANALYSING THE DYNAMICS, ROLE AND RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES

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Background

The phenomenon of conflict in human society is found at every stage of life. This is because individuals, groups, societies, local, national and even the world community continue to experience conflicts in one way or the other. Therefore, conflict is a permanent feature of life that societies have come to live and cope with, and resolve from time to time. The pillar of worry in conflict is in its violent form, because when conflicts are not violent, that is, when they are constructive and are made to challenge existing grounds, they become a good source of social change. But when conflicts become violent, resulting to loss of lives, property, trust and their likes, it then becomes an undesirable element that challenges peaceful coexistence, order and development.

Due to the complex nature of conflict, it is pertinent then to evolve effective ways of handling the phenomenon. To deal with a conflict effectively, it first needs to be analysed and understood. This chapter seeks to provide a framework towards understanding conflict and its dynamics, as well strategies for effective resolution.

Understanding Conflict

According to Coser (1956) Conflict is a struggle between opponents over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources. This *struggle* can be intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, intrasociety or international global. And because it is mostly violence ridden, its resolution is sorted. Violence can be categorized as either small or large-scale depending on the intensity. Large scale violence is difficult to control and its consequences are hard to predict (Coady, 1999).

Conflict Analysis

In analysing conflict, getting information and evidence that is directly and indirectly related to a conflict is of paramount importance. This is in addition to interpreting and evaluating the information collected. Conflict analysis enables the identification of the type of the conflict; the reasons for the conflict; the causes and consequences of the conflict; the components and the different actors involved; and the levels at which the conflict takes place. Conflict

analysis also provides information on how the conflict is seen (for example, manifest, latent), its dynamics, the relationships and hierarchy of positions between the conflicting parties, and their interests, needs and motivations.

Conflict Analysis Methods

- Conflict Mapping
- ABC Triangle
- Onion of Position, Interest and Needs
- Tree of Conflict
- Pyramid of Conflict

Dynamics of Conflict

Here, we look at how all the different elements of conflict interact, develop and change in their lifetime. Like many social phenomenon, conflict do not happen haphazardly, there is always a source of conflict, followed by stages which then gradually conflagrate to full blown conflict. It is not always easy to establish the sequence of events that leads to the emergence of a conflict. But attempts have been made to understand the different changes that exist in the conflict process, as well the changes that occur from stage to stage. In effect, four (4) stages can be identified in the transformation stage:

- **Pre-conflict Stage:** This is characterized by conditions favourable to conflict, incompatibility of goals exist among the parties where each is nursing different expectations, goals, rights e.t.c.
- **Confrontation Stage:** Characterized by tension, in which the conflict begins to brew, demands been made, agitations and at some points polarized on their stands. This stage features low levels of violence such as minor scuffles and incidences among parties.
- **Crises Stage:** This is marked by violent confrontations and full blown conflicts, where conflicts intensifies, with casualties mostly from parties involved in the conflict, large scale population displacements, destructions of lives and property e.t.c. Though at the climax of conflict in this stage, parties tend to count on their losses and have a rethink on continuing with the conflict.
- **Post-conflict Period:** At this stage, with the secession of hostilities, the processes of addressing the underlying causes of the conflict are put in place. In particular, the

needs, fears, aspirations and grudges of the parties are looked into, and attempts are made to resolve conflict.

The stages outlined above are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories in reality. Certain overlaps tend to occur between or among them. As a matter of fact, the distinction drawn is more analytical and academic than factual.

Conflict Resolution

Since conflict is permanent, and people suffer its violence consequences, there is need for developing effective resolution mechanisms. Conflict resolution is a process by which communication is used to assemble parties to conflict with a view to reducing differences and resolving conflicts. This will enable the parties arrive at amicable and satisfactory consensual ideas and views. Conflict resolution implores variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflict through constructive solving of problems. It is also conceived as an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties. The solution should also be self-sustaining in the long-run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries. From a broader perspective, there are two (2) methods conflict can be resolved. This includes Regular Dispute Resolution (RDR) and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

a. Regular Dispute Resolution (RDR)

The regular dispute resolution includes the regular system of administrative, judicial or legislative decision making processes of conflict resolution. This also includes litigation in court, that is, through legal process. Under this system, the winner takes it all. There is always a winner/loser ending, (Peters, 2006). This particular form of conflict resolution method is not much in practice as it tends to delay resolution or sometime becoming ineffective.

b. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

As its name implies, this includes the methods that are alternative to the regular system. In this type of dispute resolution strategy, people are encouraged to go for a win-win solution (instead of a win-lose or lose-lose situation). ADR is associated with a variety of specific conflict resolution options such as mediation, conciliation, arbitration, dialogue amongst

others, (Tjosvold and Van de Vliert, 1994). It is a process through which disputes are resolved privately by the parties other than resorting to litigation in the traditional courts. It is a system of multi-option justice in which a wide range of dispute resolution processes are available to parties involved in a conflict. ADR has the advantage of time and other resources because it does not allow long period before conflict or dispute is resolved as in the case of court resolution, as well making resolving conflict society rooted.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) involves the institutionalization of certain procedures, structures and apparatus in resolving conflict. The major components of such management of conflicts include: prevention of any imagined, presumed or real ongoing conflicts and resolution of brewing and existing conflictual happenings or events between and among individuals, groups and communities. Principal among these strategies of conflict resolution include:

i. *Mediation*

This involve enactment of statutory mechanisms to make it obligatory for disagreeing parties to meet within certain time frame under the guidance and leadership of a mediator mutually agreed upon and appointed by one or both of the parties with a view to amicably settling their dispute(s). In mediation, the parties appoint a neutral person who will guide them in their resolution of the conflict. The mediator does not adjudicate or give judgment. Mediation is guided by negotiation. The mediator is not a party to the negotiation but a contributory observer.

ii. *Conciliation*

Under this procedure, a conciliator is appointed for the parties for the purpose of affecting a resolution of conflict. The conciliator is to investigate the causes and circumstances of the disagreement and nature of the disputants to enable negotiation with the parties to effect settlement if necessary. In conciliation, background information has to be gathered by the conciliator in order to guide the resolution of conflicts. The conciliator needs some powers from a recognized authority, to be able to persuade and exact resolution of conflict.

iii. *Arbitration*

It is another means by which government lays down the rules on how conflicts could be resolved among conflicting parties as a step further from conciliation. It marks the beginning of judicial process for conflict resolution. This is in reference to disputes or differences between parties, where hearing from both sides is arranged in a judicial manner, by a person or persons other than a court of competent jurisdiction otherwise called an arbitrator. The arbitrator is described as an arbiter between feuding parties and any decision reached by the arbiter becomes binding or non-binding.

Here, the third party is invested with so much confidence and trust that its decisions are binding on the parties involved. It is one of the conflict escalation avoidance options. The arbiter poses and acts as a judge, listening impartially to the two parties. What makes arbitration effective is the voluntary selection of the arbiter by the disputing parties as well as an express consent that its decisions will be accepted as binding. The authoritative decision is called *award*, (Best, 2006).

iv. *Dialogue*

In dialogue, the parties meet without a third party and work at resolving their conflict. This is a very popular form of dispute resolution in most traditional societies in Africa, as parties to a conflict come together to discuss and settle their differences. Most of the times, parties to conflict by themselves see the need to resolve conflicts between themselves after experiencing the cost of conflict. This strategy has the following four ‘4’ components:

- Separate the people from the problem
- Focus on interests not positions
- Generate a variety of possibilities before deciding on what to do
- Insist on some objective standards

Dialogue is designed to de-emphasize the rigidity held in interests, sentiments, and fears. It builds mutual confidence in the ability and capacity of the disputing parties in coming together, talking together, and resolving issues together in a frank and friendly environment. The setting of negotiation is preferably a neutral ground, and the parties must shun rigidity or insistence on a particular way out of the issues. Dialogue is thus a process, which involves a

good listening attention against provocative emotions or utterances. Hence it is both cooperative and collaborative in both nature and process. (Best, 2009).

Conclusion

In all, conflict have been found to be inevitable in all human societies, and have come to be a phenomenon we must cope with in our daily lives. Not all conflicts are negative, but violent conflicts have resulted in monumental loss of lives, properties, distrust, and ultimately breakdown of peaceful coexistence, necessary for development. Thus, understanding conflict, its dynamics and resolution have become necessary in ensuring that conflicts are effectively resolved, making societies stable and progressive.