

THE CAUSES AND SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN WEST AFRICA: THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION

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The term “conflict” is derived from the Latin word “conflictus” which means struck together. It can be used in two senses. In the first sense, conflict refers to an incompatibility in a multi-party or multi-issue situation; in other words a state of affairs in which two or more irreconcilable views or options are posited towards the solution of a particular problem. In its second sense and usage, conflict refers to the open or violent expression of this incompatibility or irreconcilability.

Coser (1956:3) defines conflict as a “struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources, in which the aim of the opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate their rivals”.

Weeks (1994) conceives conflict as a relationship between parties that disagree over matters that they value, and thus perceive that their power to attain that which they value is threatened by the other party’s values, goals, perceptions, behavior, and or degree of power. This goes on to show that, in all

interactions between humans and individuals, groups or states, there is bound to be some areas of disagreement. When such disagreement impinge or infringe on the vital interests of the individuals, group or states, they may lead to clash, contention, confrontation, a battle or struggle, controversy or quarrel **(Nwolise, 1997:28)**.

Stagner, (1997) defines conflict as a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both....each party is mobilising energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation, and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal. **Kegley and Wittkopf (1989:389)** argue that:

Conflict occurs when two or more parties perceive differences between or among them and are committed to resolving those differences to their own satisfaction.

Conflict is an intrinsic product of communication and contact between peoples; when people(s) interact, some conflict is inevitable. As an essential part of all social interaction, therefore, conflict should not be regarded as either infrequent or abnormal. They further contend that conflict could be positive and desirable as it performs such positive functions as “promoting social solidarity, clarifying values, stimulating thinking and creativity and encouraging learning, which if managed properly, are constructive to human progress” **(Kegley and Wittkopf 1989)**.

From the foregoing definitions, it is apparent that conflict is an inevitable consequence of human interaction which, if not

managed properly, could lead to violence or in the extreme, war or armed conflict.

TYPES OF CONFLICT

In his analysis of international conflicts, **Holsti (1988:401)** identified six major types of conflict:

- i.** Limited Territorial Conflicts. Here, there are incompatible positions with reference to possession of a specific piece of territory. Examples in Africa include Ugandan invasion of Tanzania in 1978; Somalia's 1978 "war of liberation" in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.
- ii.** Conflicts concerned primarily with the composition of a Government. These conflicts arise from ideological differences, the purpose being to topple one regime and install another in its place. An African example is Tanzania's invasion of Uganda in 1979 to drive out Idi- Amin.
- iii.** National Honour Conflicts. In this case governments undertake military threats or actions to address some alleged wrongdoing. China's punishment of Vietnam through limited military operation in 1979 is an example.
- iv.** Regional Imperialism. One government seeks to destroy the independence of another state, for different purposes. Nazi Germany's incorporation of Austria in 1938 is an example.
- v.** Liberation Conflicts. These are revolutionary wars fought by one state to free the people of another state either for ethnic or ideological reasons.
- vi.** Conflicts arising from a government's objective of unifying a divided country. Vietnam is an example.

To the above six, can be added another major type of conflict, “Resource Control Conflict” (RCC). Usually conflict over resources occurs when a party in a relationship feels dissatisfied with the mode of control, allocation, sharing, utilisation, or possession of a valued resource.

CAUSES AND SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Niebuhr and Coser (1987:10) hold the view that all conflicts are rooted in human nature which **Garnett (1989)** rightly observes as inherently destructive, selfish, competitive and aggressive. The consequence, according to **Hobbes (1999:62)** is that:

Men are necessarily engaged in an incessant struggle for power over others which eventually leads to violence.

Zartman (1999:iv) contends that conflicts arise from the interactions of individuals who have partly incompatible ends, “in which the ability of one actor to gain his ends depends to an important degree on the choices or decisions another actor will take”.

Conflicts may also ensue between those who possess political and economic powers and those who have no access to or are denied such powers. Most conflicts, over the years, have started as symptoms of, or in reaction to, somewhat remote causes. According to Zartman, conflicts in Africa and indeed West Africa arise from problems basic to all populations, the tugs and pulls of different identities, the differential distribution of resources

and access to power, and competing definitions of what is right, fair and just.

However, **Imobighe (1989:1)** states that those who threaten the ability of the ordinary citizen to realize his self-actualization, that is, his ability to liberate himself from poverty, ignorance and disease, will automatically qualify as the enemy of the state. Equally, he considers that those who loot public treasuries, mismanage the nation's economy and scuttle the efforts towards the equitable sharing of the rewards and the burden of citizenship are also enemies of the nation. He adds that those who undermine the solidarity of the people by manipulating ethnic, religious and sectional sentiments will be counted among the enemies of the state. These enemies of the people are the obvious **causes and sources** of conflicts in West Africa.

Furthermore, Imobighe's explanation of other sources of conflict in Africa, which is also known as the conspiracy theory, hinges on colonialism. He argues that the "seeds of conflict were sown in Africa by the former colonial masters at the time of independence". Some of the policies and the practices of the colonial masters, including the arbitrary partitioning of the continent with resultant border problems; the divide and rule system which set the chiefs and the people against each other; the acculturation policies which eroded the values of African societies; the displacement of traditional leadership systems with resultant succession disputes; and so on, have all been major causes of conflicts in Africa (**Imobighe, 1989**). To him, the failure of many post independence African leaders to articulate a proper

national security perspective for their respective countries is also a determinant cause of conflict in the sub-region.

Many of the recent intra-state conflicts in the West African sub-region tend to have been emanated from public discontent with either government policies or actions.

Cozier (1974:143), in his review of conflicts in Africa, confirms that: in virtually all the conflicts, “there were specific grievances of one kind or another, social or political, racial, ethnic or religious.” This is further endorsed by **Copson (1994:74)**, who posits that “some of the sources of African conflicts have to do with social resistance against erroneous government policies and the conduct of African leaders in office”.

It is then discernible that African politics is tribalised and the tribes highly politicized, powered by the powerful few, fueled and funded by the fundamentalists, toned with religious undertones with resultant fractionalised factional looters instead of national leaders.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICTS

Nnoli (2006:9) contends that West Africa is the most volatile of the African regions. Between 1960 and 1990, a total of 35 out of 72 successful coups in Africa occurred in this region. In the 1990s, conflicts rocked Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Casamance region of Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Nigeria and Cote d’Ivoire. Furthermore, conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Niger Delta Region of Nigeria were over access to resources or distribution of resources (**Gasiokwu, 1998:1-2**). In Cote d’Ivoire

and Nigeria again conflicts occurred from identity and citizenship **(Best 2006:333).**

Best (2006) argues that deepening economic crises in Africa generated the proliferation of ethno-regional and religious organisations and movements which sometimes pronounced political agenda.

Some of such movements are the Mouvement Patriotique de Cote d'Ivoire (MPCI) (Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast), the Mouvement pour la Paix et la Justice (Movement for Peace and Justice (MPJ), the Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest (Popular Ivorian Movement for the Great West (MPIGO)) as well as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. Such other organisations in Nigeria include the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Ijaw National Congress (INC), the Odua People's Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and since 2009 the notorious Boko Haram sect, amongst others.

Identical movements are the Mouvement et Fronts unifies de l'Azawad (United Movements and Fronts of Azawad (MFUA) in Mali and the Mouvement des Forces Democratiques de la Casamance (Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC)) in Senegal. The tendency of these groups to generate conflicts is whether or not they are armed and what they are armed for. Definitely, the foregoing demonstrates the ambitious and dangerous characteristics of conflicts in the West African sub-region. In some countries, such organisations formed ethnic militias which further complicate the political landscape. This

has been the case in Mali with the MFUA since 1990 till date and was the case in Nigeria with the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, the Niger Delta Defence Force and the MASSOB militia. Beyond claims over economic resources, they demanded for more equitable sharing of political power and sometimes, for the re-configuration of the state. Some of these claims and counter claims caused conflicts which have consumed the state and led to near state collapse, as it was evident in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Conflicts have sometimes gone beyond the regular national armies to involve a number of insurgent groups. Such groups and their activities derives and profits from the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the hands of irregular combatants including child soldiers. These cases were experienced in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire as well as Senegal (1982 throughout 1990), Mali (1990), Sierra Leone (1991), Guinea (1993), Nigeria (1997-2003) Guinea Bissau (1998) and Togo (2005) (**Best, 2006:340**).

The conflicts, however, have destroyed lives, infrastructure and other property, generated millions of refugees and displaced persons, subjected generations of young West Africans to violence, hatred and destruction. The sub-region has also been the theatre of an acute humanitarian situation which traumatised a considerable segment of the sub-regional society. Consequently, the conflicts posed and are still posing to the sub-region trends of security challenges that need to be overcome.

THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflicts can be prevented when and where they occur, they can either be kept under control or resolved amicably. The efforts taken in these regards constitute what is referred to as conflict management. According to *Evans and Newnham (1992:52)*, the term conflict management connotes:

any situation where a conflict continues but where its worst excesses are avoided or mitigated. Conflict management would, in particular, seek to avoid or terminate violence between parties

Four major approaches are usually adopted in conflict management, depending on whether or not violence has actually erupted, its intensity, pattern and consequences. These approaches are those of conflict prevention, conflict avoidance, conflict settlement and conflict resolution. Conflict prevention involves “measures which contribute to the prevention of undesirable conflict once some situation involving goal incompatibility has arisen”. Conflict avoidance refers to “efforts to avoid the development of contentious issues and the incompatibility of goals between and within actors,” while conflict settlement has been described as “a portmanteau term for the ending or termination of conflict”.

THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The point has been emphasised by several scholars that conflict resolution does not merely refer to the cessation of violence. It involves all the processes of turning the opposed positions in a

conflict situation that is the claim and its rejection, into a single outcome. According to **Braimah (1998:157)**:

The objective of conflict resolution is not merely to terminate the conflict but to remove the fundamental causes of crisis. In other words, it is to remove those factors that actually caused the conflict.

Evans and Newnham (1992:53) also underscore this assertion when they observe that, in order to achieve resolution, the parties in conflict are usually persuaded to:

Redefine their relationships in such a way as to either perceive their goals without conflict or redefine their relationships so that their goals no longer conflict.

Peter Wallensteen (1997:37) notes that:

“The concept of solution, or more specifically conflict resolution, is associated with a purposeful search for ways of accommodating the explicit interests of the parties in conflict. Thus it does not mean the same as termination of conflict through victory, nor does it refer to transformation of conflict. Victory means that one party dominates the other and is able to impose its order on the other”.

This argument tends to promote negotiated settlement based on concessions, compromises and a willingness to avoid violence. In discussing the procedures for resolving international conflicts, **Holsti (1988:411)** examined the areas associated primarily with compromises and awards. These include:

- i.** Bilateral or multilateral negotiations among the parties directly involved.
- ii.** Mediation, wherein a third party with no direct interest in the issue areas under contention intervenes in the bargaining process
- iii.** Adjudication, wherein an independent third party determines a settlement through some type of award.

In other words, conflict resolution seeks to achieve not only the cessation of hostilities on a lasting basis, but also a reconciliation of those differences and disputes that culminated in the eruption of violence, or the elimination of the inequities and injustices that provoked the resort to violence. It also stresses a convergence of perception by the parties in conflict, to the point of mutual agreement on its outcome. Depending on the nature and dimensions of the conflict at the time the resolution process was initiated, conflict resolution may involve, peace-making, peace-keeping, peace enforcement, peace-building and capacity building in post-conflict societies.

THE CONCEPT OF PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS (PSO)

According to ***Okwudiba Nnoli (2006:58)***, a Peace Support Operation (PSO) is a multi-functional operation conducted impartially in support of UN mandates involving military forces as well as diplomatic and humanitarian agencies, all designed to achieve a long term political settlement or other conditions specified in the operations mandate. The term was initially used by the military to cover peace-keeping and peace enforcement but

also other peace operations like conflict prevention, peace-making, peace-building and humanitarian operations that are principally the preserve of civilian agencies. Thus, the non-governmental organisation, ***International Alert (2002:1)***, defines peace support operation as including:

All dimensions of peacekeeping operations by the international community from the complex multi-dimensional operations to more directly visible observer operations.

This definition which is considered all embracing is largely adopted by most international relations scholars and experts.

Peace support operations are undertaken to assist in creating an environment that is free from war and strife. The underlying attribute of all such operations is their “mandated purpose” which is to “protect lives, safeguard human rights, re-establish conditions for peace, human security and stability, and increase people’s capacity to deal with crisis and the reconstruction of their societies”. Other aspects of Peace Support Operations include; Peacekeeping, Peace Enforcement, Peace Building, Peace Making, Conflict Prevention, Sanctions, Use of Good Offices and Humanitarian Operations.

THE ROLE OF PSO IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The role of Peace Support Operations (PSO) in conflict resolution involves the establishment of relative peace through peacekeeping, conflict prevention, sanctions, peace- building, peace-making, and peace enforcement. Peace enforcement is the last resort because it involves the use of armed forces in combat

with the parties or party that refuses to respect the mandate of the United Nations, the regional or sub-regional bodies that are involved in the resolution of the conflict. The major aim of peace enforcement is to ensure the cessation of hostilities, allow for humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons, (IDP) and lay the foundation for an enduring resolution of the conflict. The role of PSOs in conflict resolution, therefore, does not end at the establishment of relative peace but involves other activities after the cessation of hostilities. These include efforts towards resettlement of displaced persons and the re-establishment of institutions of governance that hitherto were destroyed.

Some of these activities include disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation (DDR) of combatants. It is also part of PSO efforts to re-integrate the society, particularly the security agencies (military, paramilitary and the state security agencies) into the mainstream of the society.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION

The concept of integration has been variously defined by different authors and authorities. **Akingemi (1980:61)** defines integration as “a phenomenon where units join together or cooperate under certain conditions to form larger units to satisfy some needs or values. This definition relegates the interplay of the productive forces and exchange of goods in assessing the desirability of regional interests which processes it seeks to advance. However, this definition also fails to state the pre-conditions or conditions

that must be fulfilled for integration to be realised. **Adetula (2009:15)**, in his own case, sees integration:

As a formal arrangement by nation states involving some political and economic sacrifices, as well as commitment, concessions, processes and political will in the participation of international economy

He focuses on the sacrificial contributions of member states but very silent on the gains to the economy of member states.

Ouattara (1999:1), however, sees integration;

As the establishment of an economic union of states in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the region.

He believes that integration has led to improvement in the economic situation of the respective countries and attributes the economic progress to domestic adjustment efforts, rather than to exogenous factors. This definition is comprehensive since it views integration as the establishment of an economic union of states to foster relations among member states for the improvement in their economic situation.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND INTEGRATION

Integration is aimed at enhancing economic growth and development thereby improving the well-being of the people. However, this can only be realised in an environment devoid of

conflict, especially violent ones. Regional integration increases interactions between nations and cooperation in the areas of trade and economy. When the economy improves, the citizens are empowered and are able to meet their basic needs. This will reduce conflicts and economic frictions.

Conflict Resolution on the other hand, creates favourable conditions for regional integration. Conflicts create refugees, pain, agony and divert resources which include reduction in foreign investments. It could be damaging to the economy since investments are linked to the development of infrastructure and productive capacity in regional economic communities. When conflict is not resolved, integration would not be possible. Conflict resolution is necessary for integration since threats to peace and stability in West Africa such as territorial disputes, armed ethnic conflicts, civil wars and the collapse of governmental authority are detrimental to economic integration and free movement of trade and persons. No integration can take place where these conflicts exist.

Therefore, conflict resolution enhances integration by creating conducive atmosphere which opens the door for socio-economic development. Accordingly, there exists a direct “cause and effect” relationship between conflict resolution and integration, thereby making conflict resolution, a sine qua non to integration, be it at local, zonal, national, regional or international levels.