

Conflict Resolution and its Role on Social Development: *A Discourse*

Mukhtar Mustapha,
Department of General Studies,
Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto.
&
Nura Ahmad,
Department of Islamic Studies,
Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto.

Abstract

Conflict resolution is as old as history, for being conflict an inevitable phenomenon of human life. Every individual/nation strives for his/her economic and social development, which can only be established in the absence of conflict. The objective of this paper is to examine the role of Conflict resolution on social development. In a society even though conflict resolution can be taken in different dimensions using various methods and processes it has a lot of roles to play in attainment of social development in a conflicting society. The paper largely relies on secondary data, taking historical documentation into consideration. And finally the paper has drawn a conclusion and offers some recommendations among which are; conflict resolution strategies must be inclusive in government policies, there must be also a system of government that will inclusive in nature and also all hands must be on deck to ensure that social development activities are maintained in the society.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, social development

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, over four million people have been killed in internal and regionalised forms of conflict. It is estimated that one third of the world's population is exposed to armed conflict, and a disproportionate number of conflicts take place in poor countries. Understanding contemporary conflict is not easy. Each conflict has its own socioeconomic, political, military and cultural setting. Nevertheless, some generalisations are possible. Most conflicts tend to be internal,

occurring between different identities groups within a state. Yet this fact should not detract from the often regionalised nature of many modern conflicts which spill across borders or are affected by myriad external factors. These conflicts tend to arise over issues of identity, economic and political marginalisation, injustice, resource scarcity, and ethnic discrimination. These conflicts tend to be long-standing and are often compounded by, and rendered more intractable, by an environment of chronic underdevelopment and poverty. Whilst some modern conflicts are short, sharp military engagements, most are drawn out over many years and generally do not display the kind of linearity associated with traditional major state conflict of: peace–war–settlement–peace. Instead they are extremely fluid and often fluctuate in and out of violence, moving from situations of political and military confrontation to armed conflict. Conflict resolutions plays a very a significant role towards social development in the society in a such a way that it enhances the government to create more jobs to the teaming youths, empowerment, taking care of the needy and the displaced/vulnerable persons. Maintenance of peaceful co-existence among individuals in the society so as to ensure sustainable development has been achieved. These and many more is what prompted the writer to venture into this study

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts that require clarification in this treatise are: conflict, conflict resolution and social development.

Conflict- conflict is defined as “a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals.” (Collier, 2006)

Conflict Resolution

According to (Barasa & Webel, 2002) the world conflict derives from the Latin “conflisere” which means to strike together. Literally conflict might be used as both positive and negative notion. Weeks (1992) described conflict as a state of being hostile, a discord of action and feeling. It is a complex phenomenon of human interaction which has also described in various synonymous terms as follows: fight, battle, clash, war, disagreement, impasse, destruction, fear, dispute, debate,

avoid, hate, wrong doing etc. It is defined as an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, combined with attempts to control each other and antagonistic feelings towards each other (Fisher, 1990).

The term “conflict resolution” is sometimes used interchangeably with the term conflict management, conflict settlement, dispute resolution, alternative dispute resolution (etc) all these terms were used/applied with some differences in practice through vital methods such as toleration, avoidance, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication coercion (Webel, 2002), collaborative law, conciliation, litigation, diploma were all the approaches used to establish peace and happiness.

Development- the concept of development is a problematic and multi-dimensional concept. This is because it is a term that means different thing to different people. However, for the purpose of this paper, the definition given by Okoh (2005) will be helpful. “Development involves a process of economic, political and social change in a progress direction towards a better social well being for the member of the society”

Conflict resolution according to Weeks (1992) means a range of methods of eradicating sources of conflict or any reduction in the severity of a conflict or the process of resolving disputes between parties. It generally works in three phases; first, prevention second reduction of the intensity of conflict and finally to an ultimate resolution.

Concept of Social Development

Social development is the process of social changes that are designed to improve the living standard of a society, by improving the economic development. It also refers to the changes in the social order within a society. It may also refer to the notion of socio-cultural revolution, or ‘social progress’.

Social development should reflect the society’s desire to live in prosperity and equality. Each member of the community must have achieved freedom from colonial rule and be actively involved in the process of development leading to a dignified and high-quality lifestyle. Social development is an important aspect in a country. When a society is strong, indirectly a country will always be strong and stable whether economically, socially, or politically. Therefore, in the building of a strong

country or civilization, the aspect of social development has to be emphasized.

The concept of 'social development' is the result of phrase 'welfare' born earlier. In 1969, the United Nations Conference of Social Welfare Ministers emphasized the social welfare activities to control the development of society by promoting and planning implementation and administration section. Social welfare is functioning in broader aspects in the social development of countries. In other words, social development can be considered to strive to meet some functions, such as providing quality service to ensure that the objectives meet the social well-being, identified the effect on changes in life and adapt to the social condition; identify the impact of policies and programs to minimize its impact on society and to identify and eliminate social factors that have impact on social problems.

In Malaysia the government's objective is to ensure social development axis to the people; community and economic resources which are used to meet the needs of human effectively. Thus, social development is the key to building a life of quality. Since independence, the main objective of development was to preserve unity and allow populations to modernize economic integration. Therefore, the process of social development plays an important role to avoid any negative impact due to economic growth. Social development covered many sector and is different in certain countries. These differences are influenced by the country's culture. In Malaysia, social development covers education, empowerment of women, employment and poverty.

The Role of Conflicts Resolution on Social Development

Conflict Resolution requires a lot of time and commitment. One of the ways to further engage your citizens in the conflict resolution process is to help them understand why conflict resolution is beneficial in the first place. If citizens can't see the need to effectively resolve conflicts they will not engage in the process, and your efforts to develop these skills in your citizens will be unsuccessful. Following are four benefits to conflict resolution that we consider essential to understanding why conflict resolution is important (Francis, 2012).

- i. Builds Relationships** - Conflict resolution allows for constructive change to occur. If problems and disagreements are ignored rather than being handled constructively, things

can only go one of two ways; either things stay the same, or they get worse. But, when people discuss their differences and work through them together, the stage is set for positive change to occur. Although it might be easier in the short term to leave things as they are, this struggle helps everyone involved in the conflict to work through the problem while developing stronger relationships.

- ii. **Leads to Goal Achievement** - One of the benefits that conflict resolution can bring to your citizens is that it can facilitate goal achievement. As they work through conflicts, they make progress toward accomplishing their goals. This is true in terms of their specific, individual academic and career goals, as well as the overall goal of becoming more unified with their conflict partner. Becoming better at conflict resolution helps develop other skills that are useful in other areas.
- iii. **Enhances Commitment** - Another benefit of conflict resolution is that it enhances the commitment between conflict partners. Working through the conflict with others unites the conflict partners as they face problems and deal with challenges together. It gets those involved in the conflict thinking in terms of “us” versus “me”. This enhances the commitment of the parties to the conflict resolution process.
- iv. **Generates New Insight** - Conflict resolution can also lead to new insights. If everyone agreed all the time, there would be no reason to consider different perspectives or look for new ways to handle situations. But when people share their own unique opinions and ideas, they offer others an opportunity to look at situations in different ways. This enables everyone to consider other perspectives and practice being open minded and flexible. Often times, the best ideas are those that combine different points of view. These ideas often arise from conflict, as well as the creative problem-solving that conflict resolution requires to reach a resolution.

Sometimes your citizens may get discouraged with the conflict resolution process. They may refuse to see the need or desirability of resolving conflicts effectively. After all, it takes a lot of time and energy to resolve a conflict or find a solution. When this happens, remind them of these key benefits to effective conflict resolution

Conflict Management and Resolution Strategies

Research shows that no single strategy will achieve peace or resolve conflict in any society (Fisher, 2000). Although those who thrive on conflicts will always try to stir the ember of hatred during disputes, but if the society properly educates the youth and the citizens in general, she will create awareness of peace, reduce intolerance and ignorance, and thus, increase social interaction among the many groups in the society. With that, the society or community can manage, control and resolve conflict through collective efforts and with a combination of strategies or actions that will make a real difference (Fisher, 2000).

Some scholars, including Dudley Weeks (Weeks, 1992) have noted three approaches for dealing with conflicts in any social situation: a) Conflict prevention-a process by which individuals and groups select from a wide range of actions, interventions, programs, activities, mechanisms and procedures that can be used to prevent destructive and potentially violent conflict; b) Conflict transformation-a process by which a conflict is changed in a creative way to become a constructive and functional process; and c) Conflict resolution-a process of finding a lasting solution to a conflict by addressing the interest of each party to the extent that both sides are satisfied with the outcome (Weeks, 1992).

It has also been observed in Conflict Management in Nigeria (Imobighe, 1997) that conflict management model, which sees conflict management as a process, calls for embracing the three levels of activities mentioned above, namely, “conflict prevention, conflict control and abatement and conflict resolution” (Imobighe, 1997). Meanwhile, those who are involved in conflict resolution should at the onset of the process, create an atmosphere or supportive environment where the parties in conflict are really partners in solving the problem (Weeks, 1992). It is most likely that a mutual agreement will be reached when participants in a dispute have given careful consideration to creating such an alluring atmosphere. Some of the major conflict resolution strategies discussed in this article include the following:

Arbitration: This is an action by a third party with authority to decide and enforce settlement. The decision of the arbitrator is binding on the conflicting parties (Fisher, 2000).

Advocacy: This is giving a public support to an idea, a course of action or belief (Hornby, 2006). It means to defend how one feels about an issue by presenting a different point of view. Advocacy may assume different forms such as self-advocacy, which means a person standing by his/her opinion; peer advocacy that takes place when the individual providing the differing view point is going through or has gone through similar experience; and statutory advocacy, which is when a person has legal responsibility (such as a legal practitioner) to represent another person (Hornby, 2006).

Mediation: This is an intervention of a third party in resolving a conflict between two parties (Miller, 2003). It is also “a process guided by a third party that can enable the conflicting parties to find their own agreed settlement” (Fisher, 2000). Mediation is a major collaborative technique (Sacramento, 2013).

Conflict resolution strategies in develop countries like Nigeria do not appear to have gone beyond the traditional or customary methods of resolving crisis. At best, the society uses some rudimentary modern conflict management or conflict resolution strategies. Generally, in Nigeria when aggrieved parties (individuals and communities) are trying to resolve conflicts/disputes and feel that negotiation would not resolve their problem there is the tendency for them to become agitated and aggrieved. They could at this point resort to violence and strategies that would not move the process forward. When individuals or groups feel that their rights are being violated by powerful political forces they will either resort to violence or engage in an all-or-nothing contest to reclaim their entitlements when their customary strategies fail to yield positive result (FRN, 2001). The prevailing approach to conflict resolution in Nigeria is rooted in the culture. For instance, conflict management strategies in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where the communities and oil corporations operating in the area have engaged in an unending dispute/conflict, seem to reflect the conflict management strategies prevalent in the society (FRN, 2001). The conflict management strategies espoused by the participants in conflicts (the communities, the oil corporations and the government) demonstrates how seriously they have identified the issues in dispute. They perceive the conflicts in the region as abuse, rights violation, and injustice against the natives. The communities in the region (and individuals elsewhere in Nigeria)

that feel that they have been marginalized or that their properties have been taken away from them, will be fighting by any means to reclaim their rights. The collapse of „civic institutions (because of corruption, poor leadership and governance) have contributed to the delay in the settlement of conflict or resort to traditional strategies. Under intense pressure, the communities through their representatives would take some rash decisions and adopt reactionary strategies and policies that are combative in nature (Onosode, 2003).

For instance, the aggrieved communities in the Niger-Delta region have a list of demands for the government and oil corporations: they include political empowerment (they claim that their voices have been drowned); increase in monetary allocation from the oil revenue; or outright control of the oil resources to enable them develop the region (Osaghae, 1998). Some of the strategies adopted to resolve the conflicts in the Niger Delta region (and in other conflict situations such as in labour disputes) include “unorganized and organized verbal threats or agitation; community meetings; sit-ins and vigils, and written petitions to the oil companies and the government” (Onosode, 2003). Others include media interviews and newspaper publications, delegations to oil companies and government, announcements, mass rallies and demonstrations and temporary occupation of oil installations and premises of oil corporations.

Yet, other strategies comprise “abduction of oil corporations workers, obstructions and disruptions of company operations, legal suits, sabotage, and hostilities between the contending communities and political action” (Onosode, 2003). These strategies appear to have only succeeded in causing more violence, and thus, intensify the “tension, insecurity and conflicts in the region” (Okoh, 2005). The ‘win-lose’ stance is not conducive to resolving lingering conflict (Coleman, 2003). Alternative strategies such as conflict prevention, conflict control, conflict management and dialogue and other modern conflict resolution strategies with inbuilt participatory approach to conflict management are imperative. This is because they are more likely to produce desired outcome, which is peaceful co-existence and ‘win-win’ solution (Okoh, 2005; Uwazie *et al.*, 2008).

Although change, as we know it, is constant, it is not easy for people to change from the ingrained belief system. As a result, in communities where they are sceptical about change, the people will

more often than not, praise the past and thus prefer to keep the status quo. Thus, during community crisis they could resort to the customary system of conflict resolution where the chiefs and elders in the community would step in to resolve conflicts between aggrieved individuals and groups in the communities. Nigerians are, thus, advised to “seek dialogue” when they are confronted with conflicts/disputes, instead of “confrontation” to avoid conflicts from escalating into violence (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2003; UNDP, 2005).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Any work worth publishable is to a certain degree like an iceberg, because what is visible is only a small portion of the whole. This paper has discussed conflict resolution and social development for a better understanding of issues surrounding social development and conflict resolution strategies in Nigeria at individual, group and national settings. It has also discussed their intervention and evaluation strategies and explored some connections with different disciplines in building plausible theoretical and practical perspectives and procedures to enable readers and policy makers assess and evaluate the efficacy of social development programs and conflict resolution strategies. After a thorough review and analysis of pertinent literature and given the findings from their own research on the issues in discourse, the authors of this article have concluded that it is imperative for the political leaders and policy makers to address the myriad pressing needs of the development in Nigeria. This paper has therefore offered the following recommendations, which are by no means exhaustive:

- i. To include social development and conflict resolution strategies as integral part of peace building education in Nigeria’s institutions of higher learning to enable the youth learn the importance of peaceful coexistence, cooperation with their peers and cultural tolerance;
- ii. To establish social development centers in all the local government areas as part of the youth development initiative to empower the youth and drive development in communities where such resources are lacking or not properly managed.
- iii. To embrace peace building process through proven social development programs and conflict resolution strategies;

- iv. To periodically organize social development seminars, workshops and conferences in peace building and conflict resolution to enable the people recognize, control and better manage conflict situations;
- v. To create a supportive environment that will empower the youth to thrive, develop their skills, broaden their scope for action, and to empower them with knowledge and skills to become successful and productive adults;
- vi. To empower the youth with technical and vocational skills to enhance their entrepreneurial skills to enable them improve their living conditions and, thus, reduce youth-related unrests and conflicts;

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