

GUIDING PRINCIPLES TOWARD THE RESOLUTION OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

Gaiya Kagarko

*Department of Christian Religious Studies,
Federal College of Education,
Eha-Amufu, Enugu State,
Nigeria.*

Abstract

Conflict is a permanent feature of international politics. It takes many forms and graduates into many phases or stages of strains and stresses within states and between states. Conflict is as old as humanity. It is not necessarily an evil. It can lead to progress and development. It can also lead to the destruction of lives and property. All depends on how it is handled. The paper guiding principles toward the Resolution of Ethno-religious conflicts is generally concerned with intergroup conflicts within which ethnic conflicts fall. The paper suggested certain principles as mechanisms for conflict resolution in intergroup conflict. Three principles were discussed namely principle of Analysis, principles of Confrontation and principles of Resolution. The principles of Analysis are about the steps to be taken in analyzing a conflict with a view to unearthing the causes and identifying the actors. The principles of confrontation focus on the quality of intergroup interaction and the nature of the problem solving and negotiating processes as necessary to addressing the conflicts successfully. The principle of resolution engages the transformation process of a conflict toward a mutually acceptance state that is self supporting and self correcting. Finally, the paper suggested that in the resolution of conflicts, the parties involved or the intervener should focus on interests rather than on positions. For certain, these mechanisms are overlapping or interrelated. However, each has its own unique description and place in the whole concept of building peace by cooperation.

The modern world is witnessing an increase in conflicts between groups of all kinds. These conflicts could be over resources, power, values or cultural shock. Intergroup conflicts, especially ethnic ones, have become too common especially in what is considered the third world. This has stunted the development of the Third world and reduced its people to a life of object poverty. The fire-brigade approach by government in the resolution of such conflicts has not helped matters. As such conflicts keep re-emerging. A sustained and almost painful approach to a near permanent resolution of intergroup conflicts is what the Third world needs if there must be any meaningful development. Therefore, this paper offers some proposals towards this.

Conflict management as in the view of Aja (2007) stated that,

It is logical to assume that conflict management is the application or operational phase of conflict resolution. It represents the enforcement mechanism, strategic responses for the achievement of the ideals and goals of conflict resolution as a peace agenda.

Added to this, Bauna (2011) confirmed that,

Conflict resolution is the effort to increase co-operation among the parties to a conflict and deepen their relationship by addressing the conditions that led to the dispute, fostering positive attitudes and allaying distrust through reconciliation initiatives, and building or strengthening the institutions and process through which the parties interact and will continue to interact.

Conflict resolution can be used to reduce the chances of violence or to consolidate the cessation of a violent conflict in order to prevent re-escalation.

If there is one thing that saps resources, perpetuates injustice and wrecks horrendous costs on lives and property, it is ethnic conflicts. However, ethnic conflicts fall within the purview of intergroup conflicts. Intergroup conflicts can be between government and labour groups, political parties, associations, organization and so on.

Kwasau (2006) observed that, many conflicts always succeed in re-emerging, with the monotony of the regularity of a broken record, and often times this is because they were poorly managed. Ethnic conflicts, in particular have remained intractable in many places. These poorly managed conflicts appear to be one of the world's most serious and costly problems, particularly in Africa. In line with this Kura (2012) affirmed that, when these conflicts are at their latent or low intensity levels, they express themselves through discrimination, oppression, marginalization, prejudice, nepotism and so on. On the other hand Ugwu (2012) stated that, when these conflicts

are at manifest or at high-intensity levels, the result is the destruction of lives and property.

Generally, conflicts at low or high intensity levels are injurious to human development and need to be managed in a sustained and scientific manner. The fire-brigade approach to conflict resolution by governments especially in Nigeria has been that of cutting the branches of a tree and leaving the roots untouched. It is no wonder that the branches eventually develop, waiting to be cut again.

It must be clear that the causes of intergroup conflicts are nearly always, if not always, rooted in history. Bauna (2011) posited that, some of these causes might have been there even before the birth of those engaged in the conflicts. Deep-seated cleavages, formed over many years cannot be destroyed easily. To resolve and transform such conflicts will need an enormous amount of time, patience, dialogue, skills, negotiation and so on.

In an attempt to resolve ethnic conflicts, the principles of conflict analysis should be considered as a first step.

Conflict Analysis

In conflict analysis, the differences that exist between the groups in conflict must be clearly brought out and understood by both parties. Secondly, the sources of the conflicts must be identified by both parties involved in the conflicts. According to Fredrick (2012), this will necessarily include its history and the current expression such a conflict has assumed. The parties should be able to prioritize the essential elements of the conflicts in such a way that the prioritization will lead to shared empathic understanding. The entire process of conflict resolution cannot avoid going through the process of conflict analysis. In conflict analysis, the following principles suggested by Fisher and Ury (1991) become very relevant. Their abandonment may lead to the collapse of the process. Conflict analysis must focus on the sources and types of conflict and processes of interaction and escalation that have brought the conflict to its present state.

Intergroup conflict is rooted in objective and subjective sources. Those involved in such conflicts must have a clear understanding of these determinants. Ibe (2015) mentioned some objective determinants such as, value, economic and power conflicts. The subject elements such as misperception and miscommunication are also to be understood and appreciated by parties in conflicts. Conflict analysis must distinguish needs, values and position in relation to the major issues in question.

When parties in a conflict have taken positions, the analyst should endeavour to find out the driving force(s) behind the positions and create a range of flexible and

interrelated possibilities for meeting them. This is why Burton (1990) and Azar (1990) have all stressed the necessity of understanding the role of basic human needs in conflicts causation and resolution. An effort must be made toward finding out why parties got locked up in the positions they have taken. Unless this is done, it will be extremely difficult to make any progress in the resolution of that conflict. Conflict analysis must focus on the perceptions, cognitions, need, fears and goals of each party and allow for the exchange of clarifications, acknowledgements, assurances, and potential contributions between the parties.

It is always important for parties in conflicts to listen with sincerity and understand the reasons behind each other's behaviour. When this happens, it will lead to an understanding, and clarification of each other's perceptions. Ugwu (2004) affirmed that the process will help in bringing to the open, the fact that human thinking can fall prey to a variety of bias and errors. To further clarify Enem (2013) stated that, this process also helps the parties to articulate their needs, knowing and accepting that their needs are in themselves, legitimate. When this is done a range of satisfiers can be proposed by both sides.

During the process of analysis, fears can be unearthed, with the possibility of realizing that those fears were simply and possibly, just hyperbolic – the hyperboles can then be assuaged by the other side in the conflict. Iyidobi (1998) stated that both parties in the conflicts can articulate their goals and variety of modalities toward meeting such goals could be explored in a dialogical way by both parties. Conflict analysis required clear and honest communication in which parties remains sensitive to common errors in perception and cognition and develop emphatic understanding of each other.

It is necessary for parties in conflict to be open and sincere to each other. Bauna (1991) stated that both parties should be frank and accurate in communicating to the other. In line with this Gaiya (2009) added that, the parties must actively listen to each other and be free to ask for a clarification of terms used by the other which may be ambiguous. Thus, the presence of a mutual emphatic understanding should be one of the major goals of the process of analyzing a conflict. Conflict analysis can be facilitated by a skilled and impartial third-party consultant(s) who enhances motivation, improves communication, regulates the interaction and aids diagnosis by drawing on relevant social science concepts.

It is certainly extremely difficult for those who have engaged themselves in conflict to engage themselves in the process of analyzing that same conflict. This is certainly due to a myriad of perceptual and cognitive biases, which can make it extremely difficult for the parties to engage in a mutual analysis that moves towards the direction of shared objectivity. Okwoeze (1996) stated that to get around the

issues, the services of a third party, sometimes called a mediator or intervener, should be employed. Abanuka (1999) clearly stated that, the third party should be someone or a group of persons acceptable to both sides in the conflicts. It is the role of the third party to build up a relationship between the parties engaged in the conflict. The relationship should be toward bringing the parties in the conflicts to the process of an objective analysis of the issues.

Conflict Confrontation Stage

Conflict confrontation builds on conflict analysis. It is the stage whereby the parties in conflict are made to engage themselves indirectly focusing on the most contentious issue in the conflicts. Enem (2013) posited that it is an orientation toward collaborative problem-solving in which the parties search for mutually acceptable mechanisms to de-escalate the conflict and improve their relationship.

In conflict confrontation as in conflict analysis, certain principles must be taken into consideration for it to be effective. Blake and Mouton (1964) agreed that confrontation involves direct interaction in which the parties engage each other, focus on the conflict between them, and work toward mutually acceptable solution through the process of collaboration and joint problem solving.

Ugwu (2004) had it that, the success of the principles of confrontation depends on certain norms, conditions and qualities of integration. Here, the strategies of collaboration and the techniques of integrative bargaining come into play with a view to moving the parties towards a process in which they will mutually create the alternatives needed in the resolution of the conflict. In conflict confrontation then, the following principles should be adhered to: The parties must engage in face to face interaction under norms of mutual respect, shared exploration, and commitment to resolution without a fixed agenda but with a progression of topics.

An interaction of this nature helps the parties to understand the psychological elements of the other and paves the way for the possibility of a change in approaching each other. Stephen (1985) was of the opinion that, the atmosphere for the effectiveness of this principle must be motivational, sincere, open and in congruence with the problem-solving orientation. Furthermore, Fisher and Ury (1991) stated that in conflict confrontation, parties should be moved toward the direction of not only respecting their own interests, but that of the other too. The exploration here should be that of shared flexibility, leading to the exploration of options that will needs of both parties. Conflict confrontation must take place under the facilitative conditions of intergroup contact, including equal status, high acquaintance potential, positive institutional supports, a cooperative task and reward structure, and the involvement of competent and well-adjusted individuals.

The conditions that increase understanding and respect for each other should be fostered in conflict confrontation. Okwueze (2003) observed that, the facilitator should always ensure that the parties see themselves as of equal status in the process of resolving the conflict. For that, the interaction between the parties should be such that they get to know one another better. This will create an avenue for the gradual dismantling of the stereotypes that had existed over the years.

Onah (2004) was of the opinion that highly prejudiced individuals in the conflict should be carefully guided to free them of their prejudices. In the same regard Stephen (1985) opined that the facilitative conditions should aim at countering the common elements of inequality, formality, competition, tension, and antagonism that are endemic to intergroup conflict and which can help reduce intergroup anxieties to productive levels. The interaction must incorporate the qualities of productive intergroup confrontation, including open and accurate representation, recognition of intergroup diversity and gender equality, integration of both parties' knowledge and skills, sensitivity to cultural differences and power imbalances and persistence and discipline to attain mutually acceptable outcomes.

Uka (2012) on qualities of productive confrontation stated that in confrontation, the parties involved must be represented by an array of individuals who reflect the diversity of the groups within the group. This is important so that no group will feel shortchanged, and more so, they can protect their group interest. Added to this Duniya (1993) admitted that, attention must be given to historical power imbalances between and even within the group. Furthermore Kuka (1993) added that, discipline and persistence are essential elements in confrontation because some individuals may deliberately want to stall the negotiation process through behaviours that are frustrating, insulting and escalatory to the other side. The researcher urges that, when this happens, the offended side should not reciprocate but be urged to remain friendly because for the power to be calm and level headed can and does resist the power of any noxious behaviour. Confrontation must follow the strategies of collaboration including seeing the conflict as a mutual problem to be solved and working to maximize the gains of both parties.

Blake, and Mouton (1964) distinguished this approach to resolving conflicts from that of bargaining which looks for ways to accommodate differences rather than solving the problem. The collaborative approach is one in which the parties have high concern in which behavior is directed toward a common goal. This is one of the most effective ways of conflict resolution. Gray (1989) emphasizes how collaboration can induce the parties to go beyond their own limited visions and to transform adversarial interactions into a richer appreciation of the problem with a search for solutions that will represent and satisfy multiple interests. Confrontation must follow the stages and meet the criteria of effective intergroup problem solving and integrative Bargaining.

Stages and criteria to be followed must be laid out. It is what the researcher has referred to above, as ground rules. A mixing of people from the opposite groups in conflicts to form discussion groups and define an issue for presentation at the plenary can bring out agreeable definitions of the conflicts and make the resolution of the conflict more collaborative. This process is better than the power bargaining process or the legal justice mechanism which has characterized much of the management of conflicts.

Conflict Resolution Stage

The principle enumerates the requirement and outcome that are necessary for intergroup conflict to be transformed to a mutually acceptable stage which should be self supporting and correcting. Kura (2012) posits that it emphasizes the need for decision-making procedures, social policies and structures that are necessary for the transformation of the conflict within the context of a renewed relationship. And Ibe (2015) has it that it determines the mechanisms by which mutually acceptable process for managing difference can become an integral part of democratic and humanistic social system. The following principles of this stage of conflict should be taken into consideration: Conflict resolution must transform conflict in an enduring manner, rather than settling disputes or suppressing differences.

It is quite possible and it has been so in some cases that conflicts can be resolved, de-escalated or even terminated in a mutually satisfactory way. Many people have become the best of friends thanks to some conflicts. As pointed out earlier, collaborative analysis and problem-solving based on humanistic and democratic values is the key to conflict resolution. Burton (1990) suggests that the resolution of complex, multi-issue conflict, which are hinged on human needs, should be distinguished from the settlement of disputes over tangible negotiable interests. Conflicts resolution requires a range of complementary methods; appreciate to the issues and state of conflict escalation.

Different methods of conflict management are appropriate for different issues and at different levels or points of the escalation. Though, conflict analysis which we have seen, a range of methods could be built into the fabric of the on-going dialogue to facilitate the resolution of tangible and negotiable interests. Third party intervention methods (conciliation, consultation, or problem solving, pure mediation, power mediation, arbitration and peace keeping) can all be related to different stages of conflicts escalation. The researcher observed that, it is possible that each stage of the escalation can be addressed using a particular method or a range of materials. Conflict resolution must address basic human needs and must build the qualities of sustainable relationship between groups.

Protracted social conflicts are usually caused by the suppression of basic human needs between identify groups. Ugwu (2004) identified that some of the needs are physiological (food, water, shelter and so on); safety needs (security); love and belongingness needs and need for esteem (expressed in the desire for respect and recognition); self actualization needs and aesthetic needs (love of beauty, order, perfection and so on). Need must be identified in a conflict and methods adopted toward the provision of satisfiers. To make the point clearer, Muhammad (2010) stated that using the United states of America as an example, maintains that true integration between Blacks and whites will come only when Black American have sufficient autonomy and power that will enable them to enter meaningfully into institutional integration and cross-group friendships with white American. Conflict resolution must be infused into decision making and policy making processes so as to prevent the causation and escalation of unnecessary conflicts.

The fostering of equality and participation of both parties in a conflict has the potential of eliminating or reducing the possibility of the emergence of a conflict between the parties. This does not mean that every day disputes will completely be eliminated. There are day to day issues that may border on ideas, preference and decisions that are normal and in fact are constructive aspects of social life and may not necessarily qualify as focus of conflict resolution. Alternative Dispute Resolution Centers (ADRCs) are developing, especially in the United States and now in Nigeria, to deal with these everyday issues. Conflict resolution focuses on deeper issues. Any decision making that is interactive, proactive and participative is congruent with planned social changed and with democratic political structures. Conflict resolution must create societal structures involving equality among identity groups, multiculturalism and federalism as appropriate to each situation.

To transformed intergroup conflicts to healthy relationships, conflicts resolution must aim at, and go beyond, mere changes in perceptions and attitude to the creation of structures that institutionalize equality, autonomy and respect among different groups. Structural mechanisms to promote multicultural in multi-ethnic societies are useful in the building of self respect and confidence within groups should be emphasized.

Gaiya (2009) observed that there are ethnic groups that are segregated by geography but that are historically placed within one state. A wised range of models for situations or states, with the goal of providing the different identity groups with the power and resources needed to protect their identity and determine their future. Having discussed the basic stages of a sustained conflicts resolution strategy, the researcher now turns to the final section of this paper.

Shifting from Positions to Interests

In any giving conflict, many people take positions. Positions are statements of demands which are often presented as the solution to the problem. There are times that the statements contain some hidden agenda. Conflicts are difficult to resolve when the bargain at the level of positions because holding on to positions stifles creativity.

Interests, on the other hand are people's feelings about what is basically desirable. Abba (2013) stated that interest can be expressed over resources such as territory, energy resources, food, money and how they should be distributed. Furthermore Ugwu (2004) added that interest can be over power and on how control and participation in political decision making are allocated. Therefore, there could be interest expressed over identity where people believe that they and their traditions should be treated with some modicum of respect and dignity. Interest could also be over values and so on.

The best way to resolve conflicts is to focus on the interest because it is interests that lead to positions. In an attempt to identify the interest(s) behind a position, the question why becomes very relevant. The question will trigger an answer that may lead to the identification and understanding of the needs, hopes, fears and desires of the other. When these are identified the resolution of the conflict is made easier.

Conclusions

Conflict is as old as humanity and is a reality of life. Many conflicts that sometimes lead to full blown violence have their causes rooted in history. The resolution of conflicts is not an exercise that should be rushed as this will only create the possibility of its reemergence. There is a range of strategies, models and mechanisms available for the resolution of conflicts. Depending on its stage, different models could be applied to different situation. The lack of expertise, patience, time and money for the exercise that will lead to sustained and desirable conflict resolution is responsible for the re-occurrence of conflicts to which we have been witnesses. The researcher has discussed three main phases of conflict resolution, namely, conflict analysis, confrontation, and resolution. In conflict resolution, each of these phases is relevant and should not be ignored. Collaborative and problem-solving approaches to conflict resolution have been discovered to be more effective than the legalistic approach. The former ends with a win-win solution while the later ends with a win-lose solution. In Gowon's (1970) words, the former ends with no victor no vanquished.

The researcher has also indicated that all attempts at conflict resolution should focus on interests over positions. It is the interests that are the driving force of the position taken.

Conflicts that have historical roots for examples ethnic conflicts cannot be resolved overnight. Some conflicts may take years of negotiation before they are amicably resolved.

References

- Abanuka, B. (1999). *Myth and the African Universe*. Onisha: Spiritan Publications.
- Abba, R. (2013). Early Childhood Care Development and Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects. Calabar: *Association of Nigeria Teachers (ASSONT)*.
- Aja, A.A. (2007). *Basic Concepts, Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Resolution: Nigerian-African Conflict Case Studies*. Enugu: Keny and Brothers Ent. (Nig)
- Azar, E.C. (1990). *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict*. U.K.: Dartmouth. Abuja: Tonem Publicity and Publications Ltd
- Bauna, P.T. (1991). *The Christian Association of Nigeria and the Challenges of the Ecumenical Imperative*. Vatican City: Francis card. Arinze Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.
- Bauna, P.T. (2011). JORDS: Journal of Religion and Society. Kaduna: Goodshepherd Major Seminary.
- Blake, R.R. and Mouton J.S. (1964). *Managing Intergroup Conflict in Industry*. Houston: TX Gulf.
- Burton, J.U. (1990). *Human Needs Theory*. New York: St Martin's Press Deutsch
- Duniya, H. (1993). *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention*. New York: St. Martin's Press
- Enem, F.O. (2013). *Introduction to Principles and Methods of Teaching*. Abuja: Tonem Publicity and Publications Ltd.
- Fisher, R. and Ury, W (1991). *Getting to Yes Negotiation Agreement Without Giving in*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

- Fredrick O.I. (2012). *Ethnic and Religious Riot in Nigeria: A Challenge to National Development. A Ph.D Proposal Submitted to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka. Unpublished materials*
- Gaiya, K. (2009). *The Study of Missionary Activities in West Africa: An Introductory Approach*. Nsukka: Lawnet Communication Nig.
- Gray, B. (1989). *Collaboration Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problem*. San Francisco: C.A. Jossey-Bass
- Ibe, U.O. (2015). *Impact of Ethnicity, Faith and Governance on Mutual Co-Existence in Nigeria: A Religious Perspective Thesis Proposal Presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka. Unpublished Materials*
- Iyidobi, G. (1998). *The Church: A Threat to our Culture? Conflict Between the Church and Our Culture: The way out*. Enugu: Bigard Memorial Seminary
- Kuka, M.H.. (1993). *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Kura, J.G. (2012). *Basic Hints on the Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Kaduna State*. Abuja: Covirak Resources
- Kwasau, J.N. (2006). *Peace Building in Nigeria: The Role of the Christian*. Zaria: Royal Press
- Muhammad, H. (2010). *The Impact of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad on the Emancipation/Education of Women in the North*. Abuja: Ya-Byangs Publishers.
- Okwoeze, J.O. (1996). *Mahatma Gandhi: A Profile in Love, Peace and Nonviolence*. Enugu: Snaap Press Limited
- Okwoeze, M.T. (2003). *Ethics, Religion and Society Biblical Traditional and Contemporary Perspectives*. Nsukka: Prize Publishers
- Onah, R.C.. (2004). *Experiences of Traditional, Custom and Religion: An Igbo Example*. Nsukka: Chuka Educational Publishers
- Pettigrew, T.F. (1971). *Racially Separate or Together?* New York: McGraw Hill

Stephen, W.G and Stephen, C.W. (1985). Intergroup Anxiety. *Journal of Social Issues*. 41(3) 157-175

Ugwu, C.O.T. (2004). *African Rational Religion: A Prolegomenon*. Lagos: Merit International Publication

Ugwu, C.O.T. (2012). *Corruption in Nigeria: Critical Perspectives*. Nsukka: Chuka educational Publishers

Uka, E.M. (2012). Ethnic, Religious and Communal Conflict in Nigeria: Implications for Security in *Journal of Theology*. Vol. 7.