Management of Conflicts and Crises in Nigeria: Educational Planner’s View

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Abstract: This study examines the concepts of conflicts and crises and their antecedents in Nigeria. It makes a clarification of the causes of crises in Nigeria due mainly to poverty and unjust allocation of the available resources. An attempt is made to identify strategies adopted by Nigerian government on crises resolution and their shortcomings. The study finally presents ways forward towards a better management and resolution of conflicts and crises in Nigeria by embracing the culture of peace and harmony that would move the nation forward to attain a greater height.

Key words: Conflicts and crises management strategies, conflicts, improved management of crises and conflicts, violence

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts and crises are found at every stage of life. Individuals, groups, associations, clubs, societies, local, national and even world community continue to experience conflicts and crises in one way or the other. Conflicts and crises are features of life and they have been since the beginning of creation-conflicts between darkness and light and even between and among the first set of human beings created on earth. So, conflicts and crises are permanent features of life which we have come to live and cope with and resolve from time to time. Their existence cannot be terminated in life unless we want to terminate life itself. However, a poorly handled conflict or crisis could become violent or destructive which could hinder national peace and security. Thus, effective strategies that can help to nib conflict in the bud and to prevent it from escalating if it erupts, as well as to sustain peace to avert future occurrence of crises and their attendant large scale effects should be developed and sustained by any nation that seeks peace, growth and development. The objective of this article was to review the antecedent, causes and management of conflicts and crises in Nigeria with a view to propose a better strategies for conflicts and crises management in Nigeria since the strategies being employed to date have not been proactive, problem-solving and solution-oriented.

Concepts of conflicts and crises: These two words do not imply peace rather they are anti-peace. As a matter of fact they stand for or symbolize problem in human society. The World Book Encyclopedia (2004) sees crisis as “a turning point in the course of anything, uncertain time or state of affairs, moment of great danger or difficulty”. Conflict, on the other hand, is seen as “to be in opposition to another or each other; disagree. Crises are sudden eruptions of unexpected events caused by previous conflicts.

Kesterner and Ray (2002) see conflict as a social factual situation in which at least two parties (individuals, groups, states) are involved and strive for goals which can only be reached by one party, and or want to employ incompatible means to achieve a certain goal. It thus implies struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the groups or individuals involved are not only to obtain the desired values but to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals. The two words: crisis and conflict, as earlier stated are “foreign bodies” in human society or relationship. The two situations are disturbance to peaceful co-existence in human society and they cause a dent to harmonious relationship within and without a group. Harks (2000) throws more lights into these words as he gives synonyms of crises as “catastrophe, calamity, emergency, disaster” and that of conflict as “quarrel, squabble, disagreement, difference of opinion, desertion, discord, friction”. Thus, a conflict refers to a disagreement or differences in opinion as to how certain objectives could be achieved. There is actually nothing wrong with conflict; no society that seeks to develop can absolutely do without it. What is often questioned is how man responds to conflict. A poorly handled conflict could become violent or destructive. It could become a crisis. A crisis is said to exist when a conflict persists for too long a period of time and seems to defy easy solution. A typical example is the Niger Delta crisis which has been raging for over three decades with a little chance of abatement until recently when the regime of late President Umaru Yar’Adua initiated an amnesty programme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Antecedents of conflicts and crises in Nigeria: Since independence, Nigeria has never escaped a season that was free of crises both at community level and beyond. The crises, each time they occurred used to bring
calamities of monumental effects that often shook the country to its foundations. In 1962, there was Action Group (AG) crises in the Western part of Nigeria, this culminated in January 15, 1966 coup d’etat which led to the killings of some prominent Nigerians such as Chief S.L. Akintola, the Premier of Western region; Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa- Prime Minister, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Sadauna of Sokoto, and others. Consequent upon this was the counter coup of July 27, 1967 where General Aguyi Ironsi, the then Head of State, Brigadier General Adekunle Fajuyi, the military administrator of Western region, and many others were killed. This climaxced in Nigerian civil war which was fought between 1967-1970. The effects were unprecedented in the history of political crises in Nigeria. There was wanton destruction of lives and property, and since then Nigeria was never the same. The ‘June 12’ crisis is yet another political crisis that rocked Nigeria to its foundation. This crisis was orchestrated by the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election believed to be won by Chief M.K.O Abiola of Social Democratic Party (SDP). This crisis also left bitter pill in the mouth of the Nigerian nation.

Apart from political crises, Nigeria also faces socio-religious crises. Among such crises was Kafanchan crisis of 1978. This crisis was caused by a provocation from a religious leader. A preacher, according to the panel’s report, came to preach to the Christian Students at Advanced Teachers’ College, now College of Education, Kafanchan, and in the course of his preaching the Muslim students who were close became provoked. This led to a violent clash between the two religious bodies. This encounter led to the death of many Muslim students and burning of virtually all mosques in the school. The riots extended to Kafanchan town resulting in many casualties. This crisis had a horizontal effect on neighbouring towns like Katsina, Funtua and Zaria. When the information of the incidence filtered to such towns, selective retaliatory attacks were launched on all available Kataf people, Igbo traders and the others (Albert, 2001). One will not also forget the socio-religious crisis in Jos that broke up in early hour of March 7, 2010. The crisis was between the native Birom people who are predominantly Christians, and the Hausa, Fulani who are migrants and belong majorly to the Islamic religion.

As a matter of fact, religious crises are the most recurring crises in Nigeria today. There was hardly any year of rest from religious crisis in the country since 1977. At times, two or three crises happened within some years. Nigeria therefore can count up to fifty (50) religious crises from 1977 till date (Alabi, 2010). Presently, religious crisis in Jos is yet to be settled, prominent among religious crises in Nigeria are: crises between Muslims and Christians, Muslims and Muslims, Muslims and Traditional Worshippers and Traditional Worshippers and Christians. The communal clashes in Nigeria are also innumerable. One cannot forget in a haste the 1997 Ife-Modakeke crises, the Arogbo Ijaw-Ugbo Ilaje crises of 1999, Aguleri-Umuleri communal crises of 1999-2000.

The contact with the forces of Western imperialism not only distorted, disarticulated and underdeveloped the Nigerian nation, it also ensured its structured incorporation into a system inconsistent with her culture, which according to Alabi (2010) has led to:

- The creation of unstable and hegemonic state
- Dependence on the production and exportation of a narrow range of cash crops for foreign exchange earnings
- Vulnerability to price fluctuations, largely the precipitate of the manipulative tactics and actions of multinational corporations and their home governments
- Scientific and technological backwardness
- Dependence on foreign aid to sponsor development projects and reliance on foreign ‘export’
- Domination of the various economies by profit seeking trans-national corporations;
- A deepening process of rural-urban migration, rural decay and urban dislocation
- An overextended, ineffective and inefficient bureaucracy
- Cultural alienation and the use of coercion to reproduce the domination of society by the local ruling class (in most cases acting as agent of the international bourgeoisie)
- Near total irrelevance in world politics
- These conditions taken together with others have conveniently pitched Nigeria nation in the valley of multi-various conflicts and hydra-headed crises

Causes of conflicts and crises in Nigeria: The major causes of conflicts and crises in Nigeria according to Albert (2010) is competition for resources. Resources as a cause of conflict refers to all forms of human possessions such as land, money, power and influence that are often in limited supply. This cause conflicts in three major ways:

- when it is not enough to go round everybody/people fight for the little that is available
- people fight over resources when what is available is unjustly distributed or allocated
- it is believed that excessive lack (poverty) makes people to become pliable instruments in the hands of conflict entrepreneurs

Poverty probably explains why unemployed youths are the cannon fodders of violent conflicts in different parts of Nigeria. People pay them to fight their cause. The
Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria can be excellently used to illustrate the different aspects of resource-based conflict.

Another cause of conflicts, most especially religious and ethnic altercations, is differences in our value systems. Values refer to our inherited modes of behaviour or belief systems: what a person considers to be important or does not consider to be important. It refers to one’s philosophy of life; preferences or dislikes. Pundits often blame religious conflicts on this factor and the argument here is that people are engaged in religious conflict because of religious differences: one person is a Muslim and the other is a Christian. However, the point must be made here that values do not create conflict automatically. It becomes an issue in conflict when people try to force their value systems on others or when values are politicized.

Psychological needs constitute another important cause of conflict. This refers to all forms of human sentiments by which or without which a gulf could be created between individuals or groups. For example, everybody desires to be loved and respected. The absence of these could make a person to become agitated and troublesome. Such other human expressions such as arrogance, greed, lack of respect, lack of self control could also lead to and in fact are believed to have caused several conflicts and crises in Nigeria.

The last major cause of conflict is communication, that is, how man exchange information. This has to do with what is said and what is not said. In other words, how we exchange information matters a lot in the determination of whether a society will be peaceful or not. Our consideration of communication styles requires that we call special attention to how the media report could cause disagrement between individuals or groups. Several minor conflicts in Nigeria have escalated to violent situations as a result of how they were reported by the media.

Conflicts and crises management strategies: Major conflicts and crises response mechanisms according to Albert (2010) are:

Avoidance/denial: This has to do with doing nothing about the problem with the hope that, with time, it would go away. Institutions and individuals resort to these conflict response mechanisms for three main reasons: fear of direct intervention, deliberate impunity, and bystander syndrome.

Strategic withdrawal: This response mechanism looks like avoidance/denial on the surface; but it is not. It has to do with not taking any immediate action on the problem or taking a mild action but seizing the opportunity to buy quality time and space to plan and take a more decisive action.

Third party decision making: This has to do with having to refer the conflict to a higher body with decision making power for settlement. In most cases, this approach involves judicial settlement: a legal mode of pacific dispute termination.

Confrontation: This has to do with the use of the police or military to reverse an objectionable situation as we recently witnessed in Maiduguri during the Boko Haram crisis and in Jos during the Jos crisis.

Joint problem solving: This has to do with the conflict parties working together to find mutually satisfying solutions to the problem. It also involves a neutral third party (usually a mediator) working with the disputants to deal with the problem. This is where negotiation and mediation find relevance.

Management of conflicts and crises in Nigeria: The wanton destruction of lives and properties occasioned by incessant crises that Nigerian nation experiences call for the need to look into the issue of conflicts and crises management, a strategy that can help to nib conflict in the bud and to prevent it from escalation if it erupts, as well as to sustain peace to avert future occurrence of crises and their attendant large scale effects. Suffice to state that though we do not have the option of staying out of conflicts as human beings, unless we stay out of relationship, family, work and community, all we need to do is to imbibe conflict management strategies and sharpen our crises management skills so that we can interact meaningfully with one another.

In the words of Schmid (2000), conflict management is interference in an ongoing conflict process in such a way as to contain and, if possible:

- Reduce the level of violence and destruction
- Prevent the vertical escalation towards the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)
- Prevent the horizontal expansion into other areas

Crisis management according to him refers to the coordinated and timely application of political, economic, military, and or security measures taken in response to a situation threatening peace, with the aim of defusing the tensed situation, preventing escalation, or achieving a peaceful settlement of a dispute.

Successive Nigerian governments have managed Nigerian crises and conflicts in different but coercive and unconstructive ways. For instance, Abacha’s administration used police and military to resolve Ife-Modakeke crises in 1997, but all to no avail until peaceful intervention of United States Agency for International Development/Office of International Initiatives (USAID/OTI). Soldiers were also drafted in 1999 to quell
the Arogbo Ijaw-Ugbo Ilaje crises by Obasanjo’s administration. The same administration, in its bids to settle and resolve Niger-Delta crises sent Military Joint Task Force (JTF) to the area with ideological slogan - ‘Operation Restore Hope’, in order to win legitimacy. Also, in most of the religious and tribal clashes, soldiers had been drifted to such areas in order to quench crises and restore ‘peace’, little or no attention was paid to restore permanent peace between and among the concerned groups after temporary peace was restored (Albert, 2003).

All the coercive interventionist strategies employed to solve the myriad socio-political religious crises in Nigeria have yielded next to no achievements. It was only the administration of late Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar-Adua-the former President of Nigeria- that looked the other way and employed alternative dispute resolution spectrum to resolve Niger-Delta crises, the crises that have become phenomenal albatross round the neck of Nigeria. He took determined and strategic steps to resolve the problem once and for all. He created Niger Delta Ministry and granted amnesty to the Niger Delta Militants. This has greatly yielded a lot of results, and peace is gradually returning into the region.

CONCLUSION

Towards improved management of crises and conflicts in Nigeria: As earlier stated, crises and conflicts are inevitable societal phenomenon. Management of conflicts and crises can stem down the tide of these evils or worsen them. Often, the usual way of using force to stop crises or conflict is only necessary as an emergent measure. The government should go beyond the use of force to bring lasting solution and peace to a society in conflict or crises. For better resolution of crises and conflict in Nigeria, the following should be adhered to:

Legitimate representation of the parties involved is crucial. There is the need to allow for good representation of the communities, groups or societies involved in a conflict for a better resolution. This according to Ahtisaari (2009) will allow for first hand information of the problems involved as well as giving recognition to the groups concerned.

Secondly, mediators must equally have a good focus. Mediators are not there to apportion blames or worsen the situation. They are peace makers and should see their mission so. Their mission is to see to the prevention of the re-occurrence of the problem that caused the crisis and conflict and lay good foundation for reconciliation.

Furthermore, the parties concerned must show commitment to resolving issues by their willingness to find a peaceful solution. There must be compromises and concessions from the parties concerned. It should be give and take affair. No side is usually completely right in conflicts or crises. As such, each of the parties still need more sacrifice(s) to make.

The parties concerned must give full support to the resolutions reached at the round table meeting. No one can force them to embrace and implement the resolutions than they themselves. And once they are able to do this, the job of local regional and international communities in supporting the resolutions becomes very easy. They become umpire to monitor the levels of implementation of the resolutions by the concerned parties.

Every Nigerian should be educated, as it helps an individual to be cultured, refined, widen his horizon to understand life better and be able to contribute meaningfully to life and society. Individual then becomes an agent of life and creativity rather than agent of destruction.

Individuals should imbibe respect for worth of life. If God who created life put His virtue/honour on it, it is expected that no individual should take that life just any how on the platform of crises and conflicts. Every Nigerian regardless of tribe, culture, language or creed should see another Nigerian as his brother and himself as his brother’s keeper. Such will help us all to protect and defend ourselves and as such no one will work towards harming the other. Nigerians should learn to respect other tribe’s culture, religion, values and beliefs. If an individual learns and values his own culture, it behooves him also to do the same for other people’s culture rather than casting aspersions on such.

The Nigerian government should provide basic necessities of life for her citizens. Once survival needs of life are met, people will become less provocative at the sight of knotty issues. As an hungry man is an angry man, a person who is unable to meet the basic necessities of life is most likely to become furious to the point of destructive actions since life has little or no meaning to him.

Nigerian government should also be fair to all groups, tribes, societies and states in the distribution of social amenities and opportunities available. Even in the treatment of crises and conflicts justice should be followed and maintained. Nigerian government should develop an acceptable procedure for conflicts and crises resolution and management. This will help us to follow the path of fairness and justice in the resolution of conflicts.

Let every Nigerian, community, religious groups, ethnic nationality and governments at every level control and manage its excesses, and also inculcate the culture of tolerance, forbearance, love and fear of God to better the lots of other people. Also, every Nigerian should determine to be peaceful and be an agent of peace at all times. Through this culture of peace, we will be united, develop ourselves and the country will move forward to attain a greater height.

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