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CONFLICT RESOLUTION: UNDERSTANDING CONCEPTS AND ISSUES IN CONFLICT PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION

Adeola Adams *, Chux Gervase Iwu **

Abstract

Conflicts are inevitable. They can be prevented on some occasions, managed on others, but resolved only if the term conflict is taken to mean the satisfaction of apparent demands rather than the total eradication of underlying sentiments. Within the context of South Africa and Nigeria, two nations characterised by a mix of reputations, the understanding of the concepts of conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict transformation is pertinent to courting peace and harmony among the different groups of people. For one, conflict resolution opportunities restore our humanness and avowed commitment to the larger society. This is premised against the backdrop that conflict is both an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence involving the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by parties. This paper attempts the development of a general framework for understanding the different concepts of conflict. The paper concludes by admitting that conflict resolution has less to do with removing conflict per se, but evolving an appropriate option for nipping it in the bud before it degenerates into a crisis. Conflict resolution therefore becomes the harbinger of our social reconstruction and the criterion for measuring the sanity and conformity of social systems.

Key words: Boko Haram, Conflict Management, Conflict Prevention, COSATU, Niger-Delta Crisis, Nigeria, South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Xenophobia

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1 Introduction

This paper is an attempt to develop a general framework for understanding the concepts of conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict transformation as important aspects of conflict resolution in this age of provocative encounters. In many parts of the world, skirmishes, tensions, social strives and, in extreme cases, violent behaviours have assumed complex and worrisome trends. Since the end of the Second World War in 1945, efforts have shifted from the use of physical force as a means of settling scores to diplomatic instruments deployed along social, political and economic frontiers. The cold war politics that precipitated two sharp ideological rivalries led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in a bid to avert the dangerous consequences of post-world war crises for third world nations. In Africa, the oppressive stance of dictatorial regimes in the 60's to the latter part of the 90's was also mediated by the activities of civil society groups in order to secure a stable democratic future for the continent. It is clear therefore that different strategies of conflict resolution would definitely be adapted into different contexts in order to aid effective outcomes. Just as Zartman (1991:299) owned up that 'conflict can be prevented on some occasions and managed on

others, but resolved only if the term is taken to mean the satisfaction of apparent demands rather than the total eradication of underlying sentiments, memories and interest', efforts must be geared towards adopting the right approach to mediate a particular issue at hand.

The complex interactions that emerge in our day-to-day involvement with others, as individuals and corporate entities often lead to fierce conflicts. These conflicts can cause devastating effects to our families, organisations and the society at large if they are not properly handled. The family is perhaps the worst hit. Family ties that guarantee social security and continuity of communal life for members have been completely impaired by excessive violence. Workplace conflicts continually sap human resources in organisations due to the obvious fact that the ability to tolerate or accommodate others as well as the capacity to intervene constructively in dispute situations has diminished considerably. At the macro level, the state is under the constant threat of forces within and outside of it. The youth restiveness in the oil rich Niger Delta and Boko-Haram insurgencies in the northern part of Nigeria are instructive.

In view of the above, a wide range of conflict resolution methods exists for dealing with all manner of conflicts depending on the actors, contexts and the

issues at stake. These methods are applicable to family, communal, organisational, national and international disputes. This article intends to introduce and discuss these methods in an attempt to create a broader template for understanding the processes of conflict resolution. The discussion will primarily focus on three concepts namely conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict transformation. We will also establish their link (the concepts of conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict transformation) with the overall objective of conflict resolution in the collective search for peace and harmony in Nigeria and South Africa. Both countries have a mix of reputations globally. Recently Nigeria was classified as the biggest economy in Africa surpassing South Africa. Nigeria is also regarded as an oil rich nation whose citizens live below the poverty lines. In fact Anatusi and Nnabuko (2013) believe that corruption is the primary reason why the country is having difficulty in developing as expected. South Africa, on the other hand is regarded as the beacon of democracy with the most admired constitution in the world. However, it is also characterised as one of the most unequal societies in the world (World Bank, 2012). There is little doubt that these two supposedly 'economic' and 'democracy' giants in Africa will constantly face different kinds of challenges within their homelands. An understanding of the ways to prevent and manage conflicts within the context of these two nations justifies the position of this paper. But first, we present two case examples. The essence of this is to substantiate the understanding of conflicts using noteworthy issues in these two countries.

Thereafter, the definition and nature of conflict as a central theme of this paper are presented.

1.1 Xenophobia in South Africa

A relatively young democracy with the trappings of modernity, South Africa held a carrot of substantial attraction to many especially those from other parts of Africa. Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh, and Singh (2005) reported that those from other parts of Africa who sought greener pastures were better educated and displayed the zeal to work unlike black South Africans who, on the pervasiveness of the negativity that surrounds Affirmative Action, are characterised as lazy (Reuben & Bobat, 2014). In fact, The Solidarity Research Institute (2008) reported a Deloitte & Touche's study which indicated that 81% of South African companies struggled to find appropriate staff from among employment equity candidates hence they were more likely to hire immigrant Africans because they were more qualified.

It is noteworthy that South Africans express their frustrations through protest marches. According to Dlanga (2011), black South Africans use protest marches to fight inequality; thus suggesting that they feel marginalized and '*when they are tired of being unequal, they will march and will destroy anyone's house in Sandton; it won't matter if it's a white or a black person's house.....*' And so, what seemed like a considerate South African welcome to all immigrant Africans suddenly turned into extreme hatred of those who had come to South Africa for the proverbial greener pastures. These African immigrants were precipitously labelled 'job thieves'.

Figure 1. Displaced African immigrants sheltered at the Chatsworth football grounds south of Durban on April 10, 2015. Picture: Courtesy of eNCA.com



On 11 May 2008, local black South Africans violently attacked immigrant Africans. Those who were most affected were the ones who resided in mainly black dominated communities. Many writers and political thought leaders have characterised these attacks as xenophobic. Fayomi, Chidozie and Ayo (2015) added 'South Africa's long track-record of violence as a means of protest and the targeting of foreigners in particular; and, the documented tensions over migration policy and the scale of repatriation serve a very good explanation for its xenophobia'. Several competing explanations have been put forward, with debate gaining urgency and polarization (Dodson, 2010). The scope of this paper does not extend to unravelling the connotations of xenophobia neither does the paper engage in the legitimacy (or lack of it) of the interventions of the government of South Africa. This paper takes support from Belinda Dodson (2010) who stressed that xenophobia is caused by a complex of economic, political, social and cultural factors. This characterization of the likely causes of xenophobia lies next door to our conceptualisation of conflicts.

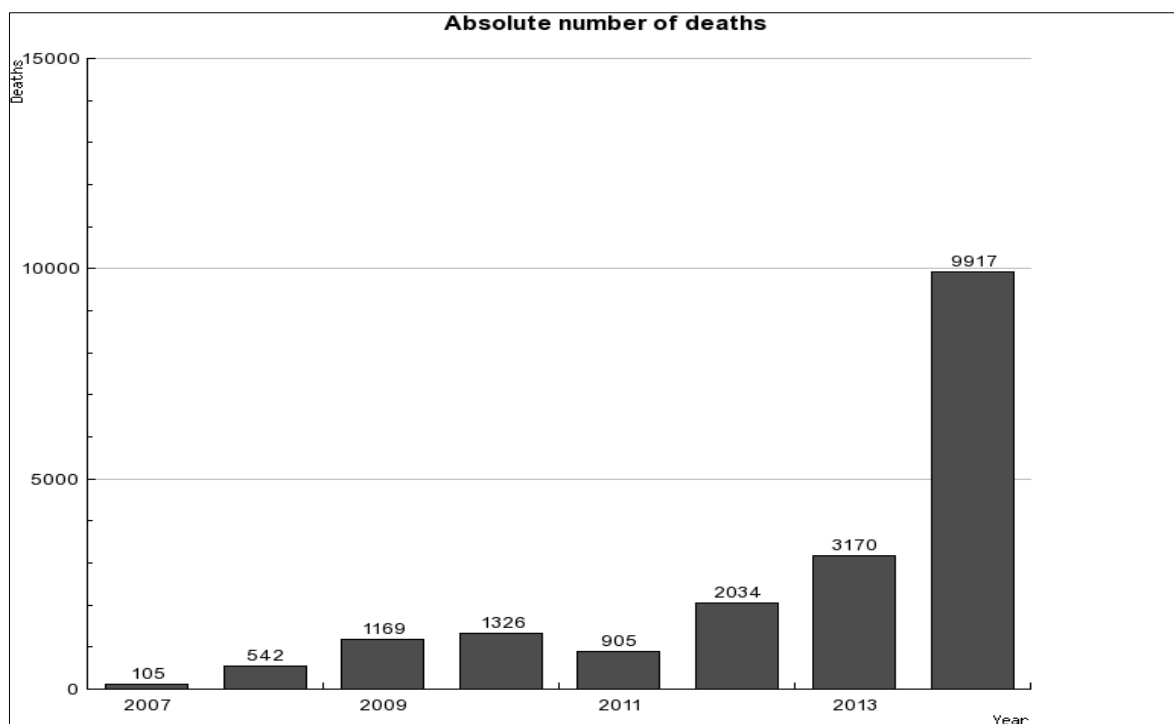
1.2 Boko Haram's ethno-religious stance

Unlike in South Africa where the xenophobic attacks are couched in socioeconomic inequality, the Nigerian Boko Haram discourse largely centres on ethnicity and

religion, although Adesoji (2012) articulates 'whereas the religious sensitivity of Nigerians provided fertile ground for the breeding of the Boko Haram sect, the sect's blossoming was also aided by the prevailing economic dislocation in Nigerian society, the advent of party politics (and the associated desperation of politicians for political power), and the ambivalence of some vocal Islamic leaders, who, though they did not actively embark on insurrection, either did nothing to stop it from fomenting, or only feebly condemned it'. This therefore suggests that while there are claims to ethno-religious struggles, there is also a substantial link to economic inequality in Boko Haram's activities.

There are several accounts of the meaning of Boko Haram. According to Adesoji (2011), Boko Haram is a derivation from Hausa and Arabic. Boko, the Hausa word stands for 'book', while the Arabic word Haram stands for 'something forbidden, ungodly, and sinful'. Onuoha (2012) reported that a one-time leader of the sect, Mallam Sanni Umaru abhorred the idea that they were against Western education, but rather Western civilisation. As far as Umaru was concerned, Boko Haram is about the supremacy of Islamic culture. 'The philosophy of the sect is rooted in the practice of orthodox Islam' concludes Onuoha (2012).

Figure 2. Fatality trend of Boko-Haram insurgency in Nigeria, 2007-2014'



Source: Nigeria Watch Database, www.nigeriawatch.org

There are conflicting reports regarding the first Boko Haram attack in Nigeria. While some reports

suggest that the first attacks occurred as early as 2007, there are also reports that suggest 2009. What is

critical is that Boko Haram uprising has claimed several lives. However, before Boko Haram, there was the Maitatsine riot of the 1980s. Essentially, one can conclude that Nigeria has a long history of religious conflicts even though Nigerians seem to be highly religious. The question that begs for an answer therefore is why a highly religious country would experience so much religious conflict. Again, this paper's intention is not dwell on the merits or otherwise of a religious sect wishing to Islamize Nigeria. The paper attempts the development of a general framework for understanding the different concepts of conflict.

2 Conflict: definition, nature and causes

It is important to reflect on a working definition of conflict before engaging the complex concepts of conflict prevention, management and transformation. In any case, the latter is a derivative of the former. The term 'conflict' has been used and defined from various perspectives by scholars, depending on their scholarship thrust and research orientations. However, what seems consistent in their submissions is that conflict is an inevitable process of human life. For instance, Francis (2006:20) submitted that conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence, which involves the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by parties. In fact, as far back as 1956, Coser presented it as the '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'. Conflict, in this context, is evidently a product of irreconcilable differences, which can escalate or tow a progressive path of destructive circumstance if drastic measures are not taken to avert it. Although conflict can have a negative impact on the social environment, it can also be a useful element of co-operation and progress. The nature and defining characteristics of conflict can be summarised below:

- Conflict can be constructive or destructive;
- Conflict emerges through an interactive process;
- Conflict is a natural phenomenon, thus inevitable;
- Conflict occurs at every level of human endeavour;
- Conflict occurs when parties pursue goals that are incompatible;
- Although conflict cannot be prevented, it can be managed and resolved to achieve a win-win outcome.

In order to deepen our understanding of conflict, Greenberg and Baron (1997:285) listed the following benefits of conflicts to organisations:

- Conflict serves to bring to the open, problems that are previously ignored.

- Conflict motivates people on both sides of an issue to know and understand each others' positions better.
- Conflict often encourages the consideration of new ideas and approaches thus facilitating innovation and change.
- Conflict can lead to better decision making. For example when decision makers receive information which is incompatible with their views which is often the case when conflict exists, they tend to make better decisions than when controversy does not exist.
- Conflict enhances group loyalty, increasing motivation and performance within the groups or units involved.
- Conflict, especially cognitive conflict, in which opposing views are brought out into the open and fully discussed, can enhance organisational commitment.

It is important to note from the above features that conflict has little to do with disagreements, crises or violence but has more meaning with peace, harmony and progress. This perhaps explains Nnoli's (2001:1) observation that 'human history is a succession of conflict and conflict resolution'. This simply informs that the primary intent of generating a conflict is to induce the search or explore the possible avenues for a resolution. Munroe (2009) puts it in a better perspective thus:

Crisis always forces development. It creates the opportunity for creativity. It provides a powerful motivation for change. You have to invent new ways to deal with old problems. If you are a national leader, you have to collaborate with others to develop new economic system. (P.24)

In a rather poignant submission, Akpuru-Ata (2009) adds:

The common sense understanding of conflict is in the negative. It is a setback. It is disintegrative. Truly, conflict assumes this form, but not always. The other social reality is that conflict can symbolise, as much as lead to positive developments for the individuals, groups and the society as a whole. So conflict can be a corrective signal or warning. It can be an integrative process. Conflict can be development driven...Change is the real subject of conflict (P. 13)

In other words, conflict can be instrumental to social change if the actors have the capacity to transmute it into positive uses. The American Revolution, French Revolution or Chinese Revolution that are often referred to, are not incidences of open wars or serious crises, but moments of constructive engagement of social economic forces that gave practical expressions to the developmental yearnings and ideals of those nations. In the same vein, individuals, families and societies that intend to take a leap into next level of their corporate existence must learn how to constructively engage conflicts. Unfortunately, most people lack the basic understanding of the functional use of conflict in their

quest for peace and development. Due to the poor management of conflicts, families have been plunged into turmoil and nations into violent recklessness. The incidence of conflict is often allowed to snowball or escalate to the point of crisis or violence, which has the tendency to wreak havoc on its unsuspecting victims and its immediate environment. A latter part of this work will be devoted to strategies of conflict management and transformation.

2.1 Categorising conflicts

Conflict typologies can be viewed from different perspectives. For instance, it is possible to classify conflict on the basis of its social colouration: political, ethnic, class, religious or social character. It can also be viewed from a geographical perspective: state conflict, national conflict, regional conflict, continental or global conflict. In fact, Williams (2005:13) preferred to categorize conflicts as psychological, political, social and anthropological, which he said cut across human existence. But for the purpose of this paper, five basic types of conflicts namely intra-personal conflict, inter-personal conflict, intra-group conflict, inter-group conflict and international conflict are identified and briefly discussed.

Intra-personal conflict: This is the basic form of conflict. Intra-personal conflict has to do with the conflict that arises within an individual. At the individual level, people do a lot of introspection or meditation about their private circumstances. Certain decisions are taken without necessarily conferring with the other party. Issues relating to ones choice of career, clothing, marriage or business partner, food types, life styles and so forth are generated under intra-personal conflicts. Interestingly, every other form of conflict is dependent on intra-personal conflict.

a) *Inter-personal conflict:* This type of conflict involves two or more individuals trying to sort out one issue or the other. Most often, it is a product or a carryover effect of our inability to manage our intra-personal conflicts. Highly temperamental persons or people who are intolerable can easily provoke inter-personal conflicts. In fact, such people are usually described as having inter-personal problems or lacking in team spirit. Examples of inter-personal conflicts include issues that involve a husband and his wife, a bus conductor and his passenger, a boss and his subordinate and so on.

b) *Intra-group conflict:* An Intra-group conflict is often associated with issues emanating from a group. Again, these are products of mismanaged individual idiosyncrasies that constitute the group. Examples of intra-group conflicts abound. They include internal party wrangling as in the case of the South Africa's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party, or the Nigeria's People's Democratic Party (PDP); in-house labour movement crisis such as

Congress of South Africa's Trade Unions' (COSATU) leadership squabbles; a family crisis; a religious body's conflict as in a church or a mosque and so on. In fact, a national problem such as the Niger Delta crisis or the Boko-Haram menace can be classified as an intra-group conflict, depending on the context one chooses to use it.

c) *Inter-group conflict.* This type of conflict involves at least two groups of persons in a contest over something. In Nigeria for instance, there have been incidences of ethnic or communal conflicts. A community can take on another on issues relating to land, chieftaincy or mineral resources. The xenophobic attacks in South Africa present a good example of inter-group conflict. The recent deportation of some Ibo indigenes to Onitsha by the Lagos State government almost resulted into ethnic war between the Yorubas and the Ibos. A family can also engage another family in chieftaincy matters. In most cases, however, an Inter-group conflict always starts as an inter-personal conflict.

d) *International conflict:* This is described as a conflict situation that involves two or more sovereign states. Issues involving two or more states may bother on boundary issue as in the case of Nigeria and Cameroun over the disputed oil rich Bakassi Peninsula. It can also be precipitated by a breakdown of diplomacy or diplomatic channel between two or more states. The imposition of a compulsory £3000 visa bond on Nigerians travelling to the United Kingdom by the British Government has recently provoked diplomatic rows between Nigeria and Britain. Nigeria and South Africa also had a similar experience recently when South African government denied some Nigerians entry into their country despite their possession of valid travel visas. Furthermore, there are other instances where some seemingly internal or national conflicts have international dimension. For instance, the Boko-Haram insurgencies and the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria have since been internationalised. In the two instances, there has been evidence of foreign interests, especially with respect to arms importation and in the cases of perpetration of genocide against civilian population. And of course, many foreign nationals have either been kidnapped or killed in those crises.

2.2 Sources of conflict

Conflicts emanate from various sources, depending on the actors and the contexts in which they occur. In any case, human interactions breed conflicts at various levels. This paper discusses three sources of conflicts namely resource-based conflicts, conflicts based on psychological needs and value-based conflicts. These classifications provide the analytical framework for deepening the understanding of the processes of conflict generation and escalation. These sources are briefly discussed below.

a) *Resource-based conflict*: This type of conflict is associated with resources that are inadequate or not evenly distributed. In other words, people often quarrel over limited shortage of resources. In such cases, one might see the parties attacking the resources (the bone of contention) because the heat that is being generated from the conflict usually undermines it when the parties fail to agree on the parameters for resolution. This type of conflict can be resolved by increasing the resources and working out a credible process of distribution to ensure that the resource is benefited by everyone who has a stake in it.

b) *Conflicts over psychological needs*: People are emotional beings that desire to meet certain psychological requirements to function as fulfilled beings. These needs include love, security, sense of belonging, friendship, etc. When these needs are not met, they can affect the psyche of the individuals and their productive capacity.

c) *Value-based conflicts*: Value-based conflicts emanate from the norms and cultural life of people. These conflicts are often based on belief systems, which are often considered difficult to negotiate. Religious and ethnic values also fall within this category. This is why ethno-religious matters are one of the most volatile problems in Nigeria. The only way to resolve this form of conflict is for parties to understand and respect one another's value system.

3 Conflict prevention

The term 'conflict prevention' evokes some thoughts on the nature and the evolutionary process of conflict itself. First, conflict by its unique characteristic is a natural and an inevitable process of human endeavour. In this context, conflict is a natural phenomenon that cannot be prevented under any guise or circumstance. Secondly, the energies that conflict releases to its environment are capable of serving two asymmetrical purposes depending on the perception and understanding of its actors at any point in time. On the one hand, an emerging conflict can aid understanding, accommodation, tolerance, peace and development if its actors provide the template for activating its positive attributes through effective management strategies. On the other hand, conflict can also precipitate uncontrollable crises or violence if parties mishandle or mismanage the process. It is in this latter context that conflict prevention is often used to debar conflict from degenerating into violence. In essence, conflict prevention is primarily concerned with preventing crises and violence. It may also be conceived as a process of controlling escalation in order to provide a suitable atmosphere of dialogue and constructive engagement for conflict parties.

In retrospect, the concept of conflict management emerged from the need to reduce the intensity and escalation of conflict. Conflict prevention has, therefore, occupied an important place on the agendas of international, regional and sub-

regional organisations. Article 1 of the United Nations (UN) Charter for instance states that the purposes of the UN are to 'maintain international peace and security and to adopt measures for the prevention and removal of threat to world peace and security' (cited in Akpuru-Aja, 2009:16). The African Union (AU) Charter also provides for the setting up of a Continental Early Warning System 'to anticipate and prevent conflicts through collation of data and information on emerging conflicts in Africa (Adams, 2013:165). The application of conflict prevention measures is not limited to international spheres alone, national, sub-national, community and indeed, families also have a stake in deploying the strategies of conflict management in order to transmit the spirit of peaceful coexistence of everyone.

3.1 Strategies of conflict prevention

Conflict generation is a continuous process of human life. This presupposes that conflict is endemic to every aspect of human endeavour. But due to the destructive tendencies of conflict, the question remains; how do we prevent conflict from snowballing into violence or destructive outcomes? There are various strategies of conflict prevention. Boutros Ghali's Agenda for Peace (1992) provides the compass for understanding strategies of conflict prevention. In the UN report, Ghali dwelled extensively on what he referred to as 'preventive diplomacy' which he described as 'action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur'. The report further identified measures to build confidence namely fact-finding, early warning, preventive deployment and demilitarised zones as critical elements of preventive diplomacy. Under a more general theme, the basic features of conflict prevention as they relate to the discourse of this paper can further be identified and discussed under the following sub-titles:

Conflict anticipation: The purpose of developing early warning designs has a lot to do with anticipating conflicts and forecasting likely violent eruptions. Since conflict is inevitable, it becomes necessary to gain insight into forces that convert latent conflicts into virulent ones. This understanding constitutes a critical aspect of conflict prevention, which helps to counter violent outcomes and provides the templates for dispute settlement.

Intelligence data gathering: This is a proactive means of collating data or information that can easily precipitate crisis if urgent measures are not taken to avert it. This is often carried out within the province of early warning system that is designed to detect and respond to early signs of violence. The security sector, organisations and communities find intelligence gathering processes useful as means of proactively responding to pre-emptive attacks to preserve existing harmony and peaceful co-existence.

Communication channels: Another very critical aspect of conflict prevention is the opening up of a process of communication. Communication is the key to helping conflict parties diffuse pent-up feelings. There must be a medium of articulating grievances and demands, otherwise parties may resort to violent approach or self-help for dealing with their issues. There are many channels of communication which may be helpful in the prevention of hostilities or violence. These may include negotiation, mediation, counselling, conciliation and arbitration among others. The uniqueness of these options lies in their capacity to allow parties to freely express themselves, thereby preventing unnecessary outbursts that often characterise or trail most conflict scenarios.

Peace education: This is another important strategy of conflict prevention in the sense that it is the process of creating the awareness or enlightenment on the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge about conflict prevention and management schemes. Peace education is an important instrument for changing the perception of people about their fellow human beings, while inculcating the spirit of tolerance and accommodation for the prevention of conflicts that may arise in our day to day relationships. To this end, peace education is now being introduced to the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools as a way of teaching learners to leave harmoniously with their neighbours. It has also been incorporated into the General Studies Programme of many tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Building infrastructures of peace: This focuses on building structures that support peace. The only way to sustain peace and limit the intensity of violent conflicts in the society is for stakeholders to consistently devote adequate energies and resources to expanding the infrastructures of peace. For instance, in this era of population explosion, governments should be committed to building institutions that will address pressures that are likely to be provoked. These may come in the form of judicial reforms, construction better network of roads, medical facilities, and employment opportunities among others that address the basic needs of the people.

4 Conflict management

The concepts conflict management and conflict prevention are often used interchangeably. This is because the two terms share, more or less, the same etiological origin in the sense that both concepts are often used to describe efforts embarked upon to bring the intensity of destructive conflicts under control. Best (2006:95) describes conflict management thus:

Conflict management is the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict...It covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively

at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict, by being proactive.

By and large, conflict management serves the dual purposes of preventing and controlling conflicts from escalating. It principally connotes a direct intervention into an on-going conflict, not necessarily for the purpose of resolving it but to ensure that it is kept within the control of conflict parties. The concept of conflict management is an admission of the fact among peace practitioners that all conflicts cannot be resolved, what is, therefore, needed is to evolve mechanisms for managing them. In general, there are three main mechanisms for conflict management. They can also be referred to as conflict handling styles. Each of these mechanisms has its own merits and weaknesses.

a) *Avoidance:* The natural instincts of men often drive them to want to avoid conflicts at any given time. Avoidance is a conflict management style that revolves around the philosophy of withdrawing from conflict in all its ramifications. People are usually admonished to avoid conflicts in order to stay out of trouble. Thus, people who avoid conflicts are seen as being godly or virtuous due to the Bible verses that admonish Christians to always forgive their offenders under whatever circumstances. Parents, guardians and elders are also in the practice of telling their wards or children to always keep out of or avoid trouble. However, avoidance as a strategy of conflict management can be useful when parties do not have existing or anticipate further relationships. When parties avoid conflict, it is logically true that all the underlying issues would have been left unaddressed or swept under the carpet and parties would have lost all the benefits that are associated with it.

b) *Confrontation:* This is a strategy of conflict management that involves the use of force to achieve result in conflict situations. There are people who believe in imposing their will or decision on others because of their powerful status or resource advantage. People who are in privileged positions often prefer to lord it over the rest of the people rather than engage them in dialogue to resolve issues. This is commonly used by law enforcement agents to enforce certain decisions of the state. Bullies and arrogant individuals are rarely willing to shift ground and always resort to confrontation in their relationships. Although confrontation strategy can achieve a minimal result in the short run, its long term outcome is usually devastating as it leaves casualties on both sides of the contending parties. Thus, it is often said that confrontation strategy can strain the relationship of parties and lead to either a win/lose or a lose/lose outcome.

c) *Joint problem-solving approach:* The joint problem-solving approach to conflict management views conflict as a natural way of life and further attempts to tap the collective input of parties to resolve conflicts for mutual gain. The utility of this approach is that parties can adopt strategies such as negotiation,

mediation, conciliation, facilitation, and so on depending on the nature and the intensity of the conflict. Parties show understanding and respect for each other and jointly work out mutually benefitting outcomes. Where negotiation fails, mediation or conciliation can offer a third party alternative mechanism for resolution. Although the process of engaging the problem solving option for conflict management may be tedious and time consuming, it remains the most appropriate mechanism for effective dispute settlement. According to Albert (2003:7), joint problem-solving approach 'is done in a manner that enables the conflict parties to work together towards generating a lasting solution to the problem'. It is not surprising, therefore, that this approach is favourably disposed towards a win/win outcome.

5 Conflict transformation

Conflict transformation encompasses all the post-conflict activities geared towards sustaining the successes of conflict management and resolution efforts. Lederach (1995) is one of the leading proponents of the concept of conflict transformation, which he succinctly described as the changes that usually follow or take place after an intervention has been successfully carried out by third parties through any of the joint problem-solving strategies. Conflict transformation stage is so critical that it is tied to the three cardinal issues of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation (the 3Rs). The myriad of central questions that often arise in conflict transformation processes include, how do we manage the scars of the past violence? What are the modalities for implementing agreements reached by the conflict parties? How do we ensure that the post-conflict stage does not relapse to fierce conflict? In essence 'conflict transformation is a crucial process for handling the outcome of joint problem solving in a manner that prevents the conflict from regressing to its formative stage' (IDASA, 2004: 25).

As earlier stated, conflict transformation has three important elements. These elements cover a wide range of issues that will facilitate the recovery of the conflict situation. They are examined briefly below:

a) *Rehabilitation*: The process of rehabilitation focuses on restoring the victims back to a normal life. This may include resettlement of displaced persons, providing immediate relief (needs/materials) and facilitating the socio- economic recovery and stability of the victims to help them start a new life. Depending on the availability of resources, victims may also be taken through vocational training programs to offer them a long term or permanent source of income.

b) *Reconstruction*: This is a process that involves the rebuilding of destroyed infrastructure in the course of the conflict. Such an exercise must be comprehensive enough to include social, economic and physical reconstruction. Reconstruction can also

take a political dimension by introducing transition processes that can enhance the political participation of the people to enable them have a say in governance. To this end, organising credible elections and building of institutions that can support democracy are imperative.

c) *Reconciliation*: In the event of a misadventure, animosity would further polarise parties. There is, therefore, the need to set in motion a process that will change the negative attitudes, misperceptions and misrepresentations for effective healing to take place. Compensatory reconciliation is also an important aspect of the total package. Those who have been traumatised should be compensated to fast-track their integration into the society. IDASA (2004:26) further identifies four phases namely truth, justice, mercy and forgiveness as crucial for effective reconciliation to take place.

6 Conclusion

It is evident from the discussions that conflict is an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions. Its instigating and aggravating factors are multidimensional and are inherent in our families, organisations and the society at large. The problem of conflict resolution has less to do with removing conflict per se, but evolving an appropriate option for nipping it in the bud before it degenerates into a crisis. Conflict prevention, management and transformation have been discussed in this paper as processes in a continuum and as credible platforms for performing the rituals of conflict resolution. For one, conflict resolution restores our humanness and avowed commitment to the family, organisation and the larger society. For another, it reconnects our dangerous instincts to the natural order of creation. Conflict resolution then becomes the harbinger of our social reconstruction and the criterion for measuring the sanity and conformity of social systems to the divine order. Therefore, for every system (family, corporate organisations and larger society) to function in the realm of divine acceptance and social relevance, it should continue to reflect on alternative dispute resolution processes, consistently devoting time and resources to building the capacities and skills of their members to conflict resolution strategies. It is only through these efforts that peace and harmony may prevail. Finally, we consider both Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and the xenophobic attacks in South Africa as products of mismanaged internal conflict situations. This paper advocates multi-track strategies to proactively transform these crises for the good of future generations.

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