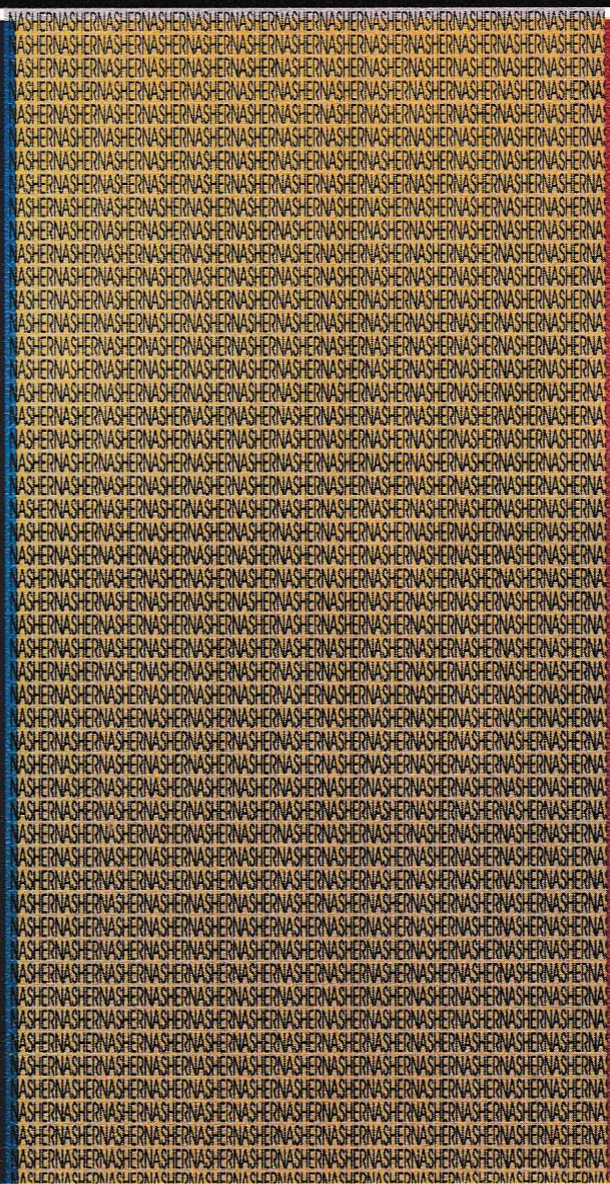


# NASHER

## JOURNAL

VOL. 8, NO. 3 DEC., 2010



Journal of the  
National Association for Science, Humanities and Education Research

<sup>1</sup>Abiodun J. Oluwabamide, PhD & <sup>2</sup>Peter A. Essoh, PhD

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State. <sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology/Anthropology, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

---

---

### Abstract

The menace of social problems rather than natural disasters has been the bane of development in Nigeria. Hence, the country remains underdeveloped. That notwithstanding, the government and people of Nigeria are constantly making frantic efforts aimed at achieving some reasonable level of development. However, this has been an arduous task because of a number of anti-development factors, prominent among which is conflict. The country has witnessed several violent conflicts in which many lives and properties were lost. Consequently, the concern at different quarters is how to evolve an effective means of preventing conflicts in the country. This paper therefore, appraises and/or assesses the role of leadership in conflict prevention in Nigeria. It is recommended that leaders should be enlightened on the need to use their positions positively to maintain constant peace rather than creating conflicts in the society.

### Introduction

There is an African adage that says, "Prevention is better than cure". This is often said with respect to health care; nevertheless, it is equally applicable to other social problems that often put the society in disarray. Among them is conflict, which is the focus of this paper. When conflict degenerates to a seriously violent state, it costs the society not only the loss of lives but also the loss of properties and displacement of persons (Oluwabamide, 2006; Alubo, 2006). The most worrisome of all, is that it hinders development.

Because of the serious consequences of conflicts, most nations of the world have been concerned about its prevention. Therefore, they lay emphasis on prevention rather than waiting for the consequences of conflicts to manage. Conflict prevention is therefore, foremost in the agenda of every nation. Nigeria as a country is sensitively concerned about the menace of conflict because of her bitter experiences since her Independence in 1960. The country had witnessed many conflicts, the consequences of which had cost succeeding governments so much that their wish would have been that conflicts never occur again.

The heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian society is a major factor in the incessant conflicts in the country. Nigeria is indeed a plural society (Akpan & Oluwabamide, 2008). That is, the country is made up of heterogeneous cultures and societies (Oluwabamide, 2008). It is multilingual with over 513 languages (Bamgbose, 1978). This implies that there are certainly more than 513 cultural forms in the country. British colonialists identified 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria but recent studies (e.g. Otite, 1990; Crozier & Blanch, 1992; Grimes, 2000) put the figure at between 370 and 400. It is therefore crystal clear that Nigeria is a plural society. However, it has been observed that plural societies are often characterized by high rate of conflicts (Otite, 1990; Oluwabamide, 2006).

It is no gainsaying that in Nigeria, the government is highly interested in reasonable suggestions that would enhance conflict prevention in the country. This is because the occurrence of violent conflicts often create serious nightmare for both government and the people since any threat to peace is indeed, a threat to the government. The question may be asked: If the governed are killed and their properties destroyed, who would the government govern and/or rule? Therefore, for the government to always have people to govern, she should do all her best to prevent those phenomena (e.g. conflict) that could lead to mass destruction of lives. This paper therefore, assesses the role and/or relevance of leadership in conflict prevention in Nigeria. The essence is to identify the extent to which patriotic, transparent and sincere leadership can enhance peace in the Nigerian society.

### **The Need for Conflict Prevention**

The concern for conflict prevention in Nigeria is very obvious considering the serious havoc that conflicts have wreaked on the nation and their negative effects on the nation's development. It is necessary at this juncture to examine some of these conflicts.

Several ethnic and religious conflicts have been recorded in Kano, the most populated and industrialized city in Northern Nigeria. These conflicts have been traced to modern migrations into Kano (Albert, 1999). That is the 20<sup>th</sup> century migrations of the Christian dominated Southern Nigeria traders and public servants into the city. Religious conflicts have also been recorded in Kano. These conflicts range from intra-religious to inter-religious. The former is between the fundamental and orthodox Muslims, while the latter is between the Muslims and Christians. These conflicts often result in loss of many lives and properties. Intra-religious conflicts include the Maitatsine riot of 1980, the Shiite attacks of 1996 and 1997. The inter-religious conflicts on the other hand, include the 1982 Faggo violence, Reinhard Bonke riot of 1991, the Akaluka incident of 1994, etc.

The Tiv-Jukun communal conflict is another case in point. The Tiv and Jukun communities in Taraba State had a prolonged dispute over land, traditional rulership, political authority and fears of domination and marginalization (Best, Idyorough & Shehu, 1999). The conflict, which began in 1990, persisted for more than two years. Large number of people were killed while properties worth so many millions of Naira were lost. According to Best et al (1999:83), "the carnage associated with the conflict was probably unprecedented in the history of communal conflicts in Nigeria"

The Zangon-Kataf conflict is another major conflict that has recorded serious losses to the country in terms of lives and properties. It was a riot, which occurred in Zangon Kataf area of Kaduna State in 1992. The riot spread to Kaduna city and some other parts of the state, leading to loss of lives and much properties. According to Akinleye, Wuye and Shafia (1999), the riot broke out as a result of an order to relocate a market. The order given by the then Kachia Local Government Council was not executed until 1992 under the Zangon-Kataf Local Government. This attempt to execute the decision sparked off the riots, which claimed thousands of lives and valuable properties.

Another case is the Ife-Modakeke conflict which was an intra-ethnic (Yoruba) conflict. It was one of the oldest conflicts in Nigeria. It persisted for more than one century and claimed many lives (Albert, 1999). Warlords of the warring communities continued to maintain their conflicting positions. While the Ifes sought to drive the Modakekes away from what the Ifes claimed as their land; the Modakekes regarded where they are as their ancestral home. Both sides were prepared to fight to the last in maintaining their stands.

Yet another case is the Niger Delta conflicts. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has witnessed several conflicts which were perpetuated by the youths or youth vigilante groups in the area (Akpan, 2005). The conflicts emanated from the injustices of succeeding governments in Nigeria to the people of the Niger Delta region. This dates back to the colonial era. After the Nigerian Independence in 1960 indigenes of the Niger Delta region began to show their displeasure at the injustices.

Youths, women, children and elders from the region frequently protested against the government's injustices. But in recent times, the youths' protests and agitations have been very violent. Having traveled to some major cities especially Abuja and saw the capital projects that monies generated from oil were used for, the youths back home got infuriated considering the poor infrastructural conditions of their communities. Consequently, they resorted to violent mode of agitating for more of government's presence in their communities. Most recently, they took to arms struggle killing quite a number of persons. Nevertheless, the government has recently created some positive impact in the area through the establishment of the Niger Delta Commission, the Ministry of Niger Delta and granting asylum to youths from the area who engaged in arms struggle.

The most recent devastating conflicts in Nigeria is the Jos crisis of January 2010 (Daily Trust, January, 18, 2010), which involved persistent violent killings and counter-killings for about six months. The causes of this crisis are not quite clear. However, they are believed to range from ethnic, religious to political factors. Another very recent conflict is the Wukari sectarian violence

of July, 2010 (Daily Trust, July 14, 2010). Though this crisis was very mild compared to the terribly devastating Jos violence, it is also a very recent occurrence. It was a purely religious crisis. However, it was quickly stopped unlike the difficult and very complex Jos crisis.

### **Assessment of the Roles of Leadership**

In virtually all the conflicts discussed in this paper, leadership has played both negative and positive roles. At the level of the conflicts, some leaders with bad leadership traits such as greed, inconsistency, insincerity and lack of patriotism etc, have played negative roles as key parties to each of the conflicts. But at the level of managing the conflicts and their consequences, the roles of leadership have been positive especially with respect to the reconciliation of parties involved in the conflicts.

A closer look at all the conflicts has revealed that the final decisions to engage in violent attack of opponents in conflicts were taken by the leaders of opposing groups. In the Nigerian Civil War for example, the war finally commenced when the leaders of the opposing groups (the Nigerian government and Biafra) decided to confront each other in war. Similarly, in both the Tiv-Jukun and Ife-Modakeke communal conflicts, leaders of the opposing groups in each case decided to take the option of violence. Even in the Niger Delta, crisis which involved the youths, certain leaders are there at the background sponsoring the youths in the act of violent killings. Definitely, the youths cannot take to arms and fight without the backing and sponsorship of certain leaders who may not be known to the public.

The positive roles of leadership in managing the conflicts and their consequences have been impressive. In virtually all the conflicts that Nigeria has witnessed (some of which are discussed above), reconciliatory efforts were made by the government (leadership). Oftentimes, the government sets up Commissions of Inquiry to investigate the remote and immediate causes of each conflict and advise her appropriately on how to prevent future reoccurrence. Members of these commissions of inquiry are usually leaders. For example, the Federal Government set up a panel headed by elder statesman, Chief Solomon Lar to investigate the causes of the recent Jos crisis.

Where necessary, the parties to any conflict (e.g. the Tiv-Jukun and Ife-Modakeke conflicts) were engaged in dialogue with the aim of reconciling them. In this case charismatic religious and community leaders were invited to initiate the dialogue. These efforts have yielded some positive results.

In those conflicts which involved specific demands from the government (e.g. the Niger Delta conflicts) the government usually go into dialogue with any group that made certain demands from her. In the Niger Delta conflict for example, the government always engaged the youths in reconciliatory talks so that they could stop violence and shelve any future plan for it. The recent positive initiatives of the nation's leadership (government) have brought some calm to the area. These include the establishment of the NDDC, the Ministry of Niger Delta and the amnesty recently granted the warring Niger Delta youths by the country's leadership.

With respect to religious conflicts, recent efforts by the leadership of the two major religions in the country (Islam and Christianity) are commendable. The collaborative efforts of the supreme head of Islam in Nigeria, the Sultan of Sokoto and the president of Christian Association of Nigeria through the joint collaborative council – the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIRFC) - have no doubt been yielding some tangible positive results.

### **Conclusion**

In as much as the society desires that her people live constantly in peace, the leadership should demonstrate a high sense of responsibility. This is because in all human societies, leaders' voices as well as their actions and inactions are usually taken seriously by their followers who could as follow-up take very provocative actions that could mar the peace of the community.

It is no gainsaying that if leaders are sincere, selfless and have the love of their followers or communities at heart, they would always seek for peace and discourage issues that could bring about conflict. Truly responsible, sincere, transparent and accountable leaders are those that can really ensure that the society live constantly in peace and unity. If such leaders are scarce the nation should take quick actions to transform the present leaders or pray to God to produce good

ones so that the menace of violent conflicts and their consequences can be brought to a very minimal level. It is only thereafter that the nation can develop meaningfully.

### Recommendations

Leadership plays a very important role not only in conflict management but also in its prevention. Since in every human society peace is needed for any reasonable level of development to be achieved, any effort made to stop anything that could threaten the society's peace, is a good step in the right direction. Based on the above assessment of the roles of leadership in conflict prevention and/or management, the following are being suggested:

Leadership at various segments of the society should be enlightened on the need to use their positions positively for maintaining peace in the society. To this end, the government should, as a matter of urgency, commence an enlightenment campaign using the mass media. Leaders should be made to understand that they are major contributors to peace.

Leaders who have instigated violent conflicts in the past should be brought to book. Similarly, leaders who instigated youths in violent conflicts should be severely punished. This would serve as deterrent to others.

Furthermore, leaders should be made to be accountable to their followers. They should not engage in actions or activities which they cannot account for. They should properly brief their followers or the people in general of the efforts being made to cater for their welfare. This is more applicable to the Niger Delta region where some leaders collaborate with the government and multinational oil companies to hinder the development of the oil producing areas. Sometimes, funds meant for the development of the area are misappropriated by leaders who are sometimes indigenes of the areas concerned.

Also, leaders of the two major religions in the country should speak to adherents of their religions on the need to live in peace with adherents of other religions. It is indeed no gainsaying that people yield easily and quickly to the voice of their religious leaders who are seen as the mouthpiece of God. Government should ensure that Christians and Islamic priests preach on issues that would encourage peaceful co-existence among the people.

In addition, the President and State Governors should hold regular meetings with traditional rulers in their domains while existing security meetings should be strengthened. The President should meet with selected traditional rulers who control very large domains, while the State Governors should meet with all the traditional rulers in their respective States. In such meetings, traditional rulers should be told to be very sensitive to issues that could threaten the peace of their communities. They should be educated on the need to collaborate with government's security agents in maintaining peace in their domains.

Also, leadership of the various segments of the society should be sincere to their followers. A situation where a community leader collects some money from either government or a multinational company for the purpose of community development but failed to execute any project should be seriously discouraged.

Lastly, the government should provide reliable sources of incomes to leaders in the rural areas. This is necessary considering the poor economic status to these leaders. Usually, in their bid to earn a living, some leaders sponsor youth restiveness so that government can call for their attention and give them some money. However, if these leaders are comfortable they would be able to carefully watch to identify issues that could threaten the peace of their various communities and quickly stop them.

### References

- Akinyele, A; Wuyep J.M. & Shafia M.N.A. (1999). Zango Kataf Crisis: A case study. In: O. Otite & I.O. Albert (Eds), *Community conflicts in Nigeria: management, resolution and transformation*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books p. 222-246.
- Akpan, N.S. (2005). Conflicts in Nigeria's Niger Delta: Issues and response and management. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 4:161-175.
- Akpan, N.S. & Oluwabamide A.J. (2008). An assessment of the role of religion in conflict prevention and management in Nigeria" *Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 3(2):59-64

- Albert, I.O. (1999). Ethnic and religious conflicts in Kano. In O. Otite & I.O. Albert (Eds). *Community conflicts in Nigeria: Management, resolution and transformation*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Alubo, O. (2006). *Ethnic conflicts and citizenship crisis in the central region*. Ibadan: Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies (PEFS).
- Bamgbose, A. (1978). Models of communication in multi-lingual states” *West African Journal of Modern Languages*. 3.
- Best, S.B. (2007). *Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Best, S.G; Idyorough, E.A. & Shehu, Z.B. (1999) Communal conflicts and possibilities of conflict resolution in Nigeria: A case study of Tiv-Jukun conflicts in Wukari local government area, Taraba state. In, O. Otite & I.O. Albert (Eds) *Community conflicts in Nigeria: Management, resolution and transformation* Ibadan: Spectrum Books, p.82-177
- Crozier, D.H. & Blench R.M. (1992). *An index of Nigerian languages* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Abuja: Language Development Center and the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin
- Daily Trust (2010) Many killed in Jos violence” January, 18, 2010, p.1.
- Daily Trust (2010) Four killed in Taraba sectarian violence” Wednesday, July 14, 2010, p.2
- Grimes, P. (2000) *Ethnologue (Vol. 1). Languages of the World* (14<sup>th</sup> Edition) Dallas, Texas: SIL International
- Mwanasali, M. (2007). African conflict prevention strategies. In: Shedrack Gaya Best (Ed). *Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited p. 184.
- Nwedo, A.G. (1990). *Christianity among us: Its continued survival*. Aba: Nigerian Printer.
- Oluwabamide, A.J. (2006). Managing the consequences of communal conflicts in Nigeria In V.O. Modo, A. J. Oluwabamide, O. Akpan & A. Ekpa (Eds.). *Issues in peace and conflict resolution*. Lagos, Uyo: Lisjohnson Resources Publishers, P. 145-166.
- Oluwabamide, A.J. (2007). *Peoples of Nigeria and their cultural heritage*. Lagos; Lisjohnson Resources Publishers
- Udoidem, S.I. (1997). Religion in the political life of Nigeria: A survey of religious-related crises in Nigeria since independence, In F.U. Okafor (Ed). *New strategies for curbing ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd. P. 152-183.
- United Nations (1992). *Agenda for peace: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping*. New York: The United Nations.
- Zartman, I.W. (2000). *Preventive negotiation*. London, MD: Rowman and Littlefed.