

Sustainable Conflict Management Mechanism in Africa: Issues and Challenges for Development

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Abstract

Our major concern in this paper is to examine the causes of conflicts in Africa, their impacts on Africa's development and mechanisms for resolving these conflicts. Some literatures on the subject matter were reviewed while secondary sources were used to embellish the issues therein. The structural conflict theory was adopted as our theoretical framework due to its relevance in enunciating the issues in focus. The paper contends that the continued existence of poverty cum economic crisis, corruption, ethno-religious factors, bad leadership, non-adherence to the tenets of democracy, boundary disputes and natural resource controls, are among the debilitating factors that breed conflicts in the continent. As a corollary, peace and stability have been negatively impacted upon resulting in stultified growth in development in most countries of Africa. It is therefore our further contention that to overcome these impediments, the capacity prevention, management and resolution should be strengthened through proper training and professionalization of diplomats adapt in negotiation, mediation, arbitration and implementing peace agreements as well as the establishment of early warning information and documentation centers that will facilitate data gathering and analysis and ultimately nipping in the bud incipient conflicts. The paper concludes by asserting that if all these recommendations are considered and implemented, sustainable conflict management in Africa will be enhanced.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, Development, Africa, Sustainability

Introduction

Human conflict is a fact of modern social life and is likely to remain so far the unforeseeable future wherever people, groups, societies and states find themselves together, some friction or conflict is likely.

This view remains persuasive in spite of the reports of anthropologist who claim to have found conflict-free primitive societies in far flung corners of the modern world (Grievess, 1977:92). Conflict to some scholars is in fact healthy, both as an emotional outlet and as a way of keeping human interactions vigorous while other writers insist on the need to follow some course designed to eliminate conflict. It has indeed been noted that social conflict is one of the most ubiquitous events and encompasses a broad range of phenomena including class race, religious and community conflicts such as riots, rebellions, revolutions, strikes, marches, demonstrations and protest rallies to mention but few. A cardinal point should be stressed that while conflict may be unavoidable, human rationality must intervene to keep that conflict within acceptable bounds.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to unravel the factors that account for the perennial conflict in the continent.

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In doing this the paper is divided into seven (7) sections in such a way that we first undertake the introduction, considers definition of terms, examined the theoretical framework of the paper, considered the causes of conflict in Africa and how it affects African development, considered the mechanism for resolving these conflicts, neat the work with the way forward and finally conclusion

Conflict, Conflict Management, and Development; Towards a Conceptualization

At this juncture, we offer definitional illumination of some concepts such as conflict, conflict management and development which we hope will further objectify this study.

Conflict

Why do people, communities and states fight? Sadly, academicians are not sure what the causes of conflict and ultimately war are. Human life is so complex and the social sciences so young that definitive answer eludes us. Accordingly, conflict like all social concepts cannot be boxed into a unilateral acceptable definition, as attempt to mono-conceptualized; it seems to generate a lot of controversy. For the purpose of this paper, we proffer some definitions thus: Dougherty and Flatgraff (1971) defines conflict as a condition in which one, identifiable group of human beings (whether tribal, ethnic, socio-economic, political , amongst others) is engaged in conscious identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing goals. Similarly, Miall et al (2003) posits that conflict entails an expression of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs that arise as new formations generated by social change come up against inherent constraints.

Conflict is therefore an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change that can also be seen as the pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups. (Bakut, 2012).

The above definitions when coalescent, lends themselves to the fact that conflict is intrinsic and avoidable in all human and enamors, essentially due to the struggle over values , claims to status, power, resources and prestige in which the aims of the combatants are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.

The recent conflict in South Sudan, Mali, Syria and Ukraine emblemizes this scenario. Conflict can thus be considered as a social necessity and a normal, functional and indeed inevitable aspect of the healthy functioning of all societies (Alli, 2012). However, the concept of conflict has also been considered an obstacle to progress, political stability, economic prosperity and overall socio-economic development because of its destructive nature. Beyond those explanations the spate of conflicts ravaging African states can be attributed to a constellation of factors which will be espoused in another segment of this paper.

Conflict Management

Conflict management according to John Burton(1990) connote containment of conflict through steps introduced to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control the behavior of conflicting parties, in other words, conflict prevention. To Best(2012) conflict management is a 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 is sometimes used synonymously with conflict regulation and covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at differently stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive. It also involves negotiation, mediation, arbitration and reconciliation. For instance, the boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroun, especially over the Bakassi Peninsula went through various stages of conflict management, including the judicial pronouncement by the international court of justice in 2002 and the process still ongoing.

Generally, conflict management involves a process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of it. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in a given situation. The term is perhaps an admission of the reality that conflict is a sine qua non to human affairs, but that not all conflict can always be resolved, therefore, what practitioners can do is to manage and regulate them.

Development

As a concept in the social sciences, there is no clear all inclusive definition of development. To Rodney (1972), development is considered to be a many sided process. At the level of individual. It implies increasing in skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and well-being. Rodney further asserts that development thus transcends economic indicators.

Aligning with Rodney but with a different perspective, Todaro (1980) opines that development is a multi-dimensional and co-orientation of the entire economic and social system. On another plane, David Simon (2004) contends that development means an improvement in the quality of life (not just material standard of living) in both quantitative and qualitative terms. More progressively, it is seen as culturally and temporally relative, needing to be appropriate to time, space, society and culture. In a similar vein, Abduraheem (2002) also considers development as the improvement in the general standard of living of the people of the society. This means that development does not only involve economic growth, but also a condition of people in a given country.

With many views on what development is Seers (1969) in Todaro and Smith (2005:50) poses the basic question absent development:

“What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all these three have indiment from high to low levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development of the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if the entire three have, it would be strange to call these “development” even if per capital income doubled”.

Collapsing all the above views it is our considered opinion that development involves a process in which a system or institution is transformed into stronger more organized more efficient band more effective form and proviso be more satisfying in terms of human wants and aspirations as well as the total transformation of political, economic, social and cultural spheres of a society through conscious efforts resulting into enhanced productivity with a corresponding improvement in the lives of citizens.

Suffice it to state here that in a continent where ethno-religious crisis, political struggle, contests for resources, struggle over identity, poverty, bad leadership, corruption, amongst others are rife, the developmental strides of such a continent will be significantly circumscribed.

Theoretical Framework

A good number of experts have extensively written about the nature and causes of conflicts. Depending on the school of thought which they represent such explanations have tended to place a lot of emphasis on one particular or set of related approaches , while diminishing the importance or explanatory relevance of other contending theories. This paper has however attempted to make a belief review of some of these theories with a view to situating the framework for ease of understanding of conflict especially the causes of conflicts and the conditions in which they are managed.

Ademola (2006) in Apam (2011) has identified the following theories of conflict thus:

- a) Biological theories
- b) Frustration aggression theory
- c) Psychological theory
- d) Realist theory
- e) Structural conflict theory
- f) Innate theory
- g) Economic theories
- h) Physiological theories etc.

This paper will however employ the structural conflict theory in espousing and illuminating on the nature of conflicts and their management in Africa.

The structural conflict theory has two sub-variants. The first strand is the radical approach as propounded by the Marxist dialectical school with exponents like Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, V.I. Levim etc. The second doxy, is the liberal structuralism ably represented by scholars like Ross (1993), Scarbo (1998) and Johan Galting (1990) on structural violence. It is also sometimes similar to transformative theory which addresses the reactions of individuals, groups, cultures, institutions and societies to change. It further sees incompatible interest based on competition for resources which in most cases are assumed to be scarce as being responsible for social conflicts (Collier, 2000:2). The main argument of the structural conflict theory is that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured and organized. The theory looks at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequality etc. as sources of conflict.

For instance, during the Apartheid system in South Africa all the above features manifested until majority rule was enthronement in 1994. The emphasis of this theory is based on how the competing interest of groups ties conflict directly into social, economic and political organizations. Thus, when the social, political and cultural processes are monopolized by a group (Class) it creates the condition that makes people to adopt adversarial approach to conflict. Reflecting on this penchant, Mark .A. May (1943:20) posited that:

“Man’s biological nature is neither good nor bad, aggressive nor submissive, warlike nor peaceful but natural in these respects. He is capable of developing in either direction depending upon what; he is compelled to learn by his environment and by his culture. It is a mistake to assume that he can learn war (conflict) more easily than peace.

His learning machinery is not prejudice as is sometimes thought toward the acquirement of bad habits. The bias is in his social environment ...far more strongly predisposed to settle disputes both domestic and foreign, by peaceful means.

The structural conflict theory is therefore germane in explaining conflict situations in Africa and also in highlighting some of the factors such as poverty, corruption ethno-religious upheavals, political can instability, boundary disputes, and bad leadership, to mention but a few that encourages and execrates conflicts in the continent.

Challenges That Breeds Conflict in Africa

There is no denying the fact that Africa as a continent is plangent by a plethora of challenges that breeds conflicts and constricts its development. We will identify and explain each of these challenges though not mutually exclusive, they nevertheless grounds this paper.

Corruption

Most of the conflicts in Africa have their links to corruption. Corruption is a worldwide phenomenon though endemic in the continent especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The monster has been responsible for the instability in the continent as most of the countries, especially Nigeria, Kenya; Congo DR, Egypt etc. have prominently been on the lowest rating of international corruption index. Corruption is not only absent stealing funds. In Nigeria especially corruption has become an endemic problem threatening the country’s socio – economic and political development Ikyase (2014).

It is also about putting bad people in prime position. These are people who have neither the passion (sincerity) nor the qualification (skills) to do the job. This form of corruption is crippling Africa’s development. In some cases, corruption has attained levels of gross and egregious theft for which no possible moral or historical justification can be advanced and which has inevitably played a major role both in the impoverishment of the continent and specifically in the alienation of its people from their rulers. As the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo (2000) noted:

“Corruption has been responsible for the instability of successive governments in Africa. Every coup that happened in Africa since then has been in the name of stamping out the disease called corruption. Unfortunately, the cure often turned to be worse than the disease. And most of the African countries including Nigeria has been the worst for it”.

Corruption is worse than murder. It kills more than warfare; it takes land and money to build a hospital and buys a private jet, condemning thousands of people over multiple generations to die of curable diseases. (Ukaogo, 2013). Thus, the menace of corruption has to a large extent been responsible for the vicious cycle of failed political leadership, political instability, economic mismanagement and underdevelopment as well as social class in Africa.

Bad Governance

There is a congruence of views amongst some scholars that endemic conflicts in Africa arose as a result of bad governance. As opposed to good governance. It is exercised through poor leadership. Most countries in Africa such as Zimbabwe, Somalia, and Guinea Bissau etc. are afflicted by this cankerworm of bad governance which invariably has negatively impacted on their developmental efforts.

In the words of Dike (1999), there are many complaints about waste and inefficiency in performing public services in Africa.

There is lack of respect for fundamental human rights of citizens, lack of judicious use of natural resources , inshort it has been said that most African countries especially South Africa, Nigeria , Zimbabwe and many others have no respect for accountability and transparency .

According to Kofi Annan (cited in UNDP, 1997:20) without good governance without the rule of law, predictable and ministration, legitimate power and responsive regulation –no amount of funding, no amount of charity will set us on the path of prosperity.

For development therefore, to take place in any society, there must be serious transformation of the quality of governance and this will go a long way in minimizing the various surrounding the continent.

Ethno-Religious Conflict

Another challenge responsible for conflicts in Africa is the resurgence of ethno-religious crisis. The efforts at reforming inter-ethnic relations in the continent have had very limited success. The structural reforms like federalism in most countries in Africa and the associated state creation exercise or even division into two countries, have transformed the countries concerned such as Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya , Ivory Coast etc. without directly solving the problem of ethnic mobilization and conflicts. Apam (2011) infers that the community of conflicts in Africa is indeed remarkable.

The pertinent question to be asked therefore is what extent can ethnic and religious violence be said to be expressions of primordial cleavages. In Nigeria for instance, there have been different ethnic conflicts such that between Tivs and Jukuns over land , Fulani's and Idomas, Berom Tiv etc. over grazing and farming resources which have claimed many innocent lives and rendered citizens refugees in their own communities in Rwandan, the hostility between the thus Hutus and Tutsis in 1977, claimed the lives of 800,000 people mainly Tutsi. The genocidal conflict is presently being handled by the international criminal court for all those found guilty in its execution. The Boko Haram insurgency in the North Eastern part of Nigeria is another debilitating conflict that has constricted development not only in Nigeria but the surrounding countries and indeed the whole world.

Economic Crisis and Poverty

It is apt to state that conflicts in Africa have their structural links to the worsening economic conditions and the attendant politics that have been implemented to get the continent out of the wood.

These perennial economic crises have produced intolerable living conditions among the peoples of Africa as evidenced in the rising tide of poverty, unemployment, high debt profile, increased cross border crimes amongst others. Apam(2011) contends that those in dement conditions have led to not only the devaluation of human lives but have also promoted scenario of protest, discontent insurrection and threats of violent changes in which responses from the state have been marked by resilience, repression and authoritarian tendencies. Thus, if the current economic conditions are not reversed, misery, riots, crimes and insecurity will continue to be the order of the 21st century Africa.

Leadership Dilemma

Leadership dilemma or question is one of the primary sources of conflicts in Africa. Achebe (1984) using Nigeria as a frame of reference stated that the trouble with Nigeria, navy Africa

...is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water. Air to anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibilities, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of time leadership.”

Only recently, the sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar (2013) the spiritual leader of all Muslims in Nigeria squarely blamed the elites for all the woes in the country. To him, the elites are the main problems of Nigeria and most of the woes of the nation as they are now, were brought absent by them. The elites are the problems and not the colonial masters nor the teeming masses of the country who are toiling daily, to put food on the table.

Corruption, nepotism, official high-handedness, tribalism, maladministration and all manners of misdemeanor dominate the Africa landscape, thus the prevail dilemma. For instance, several African states had or still have leaders that are richer than the states they govern but this in itself is an invitation to disaster. On this Maafa (2013) reflected thus,

“A leader should not be the richest man in the country where he can use his leadership to get even more wealth. In Kenya members of parliament have awarded themselves an annual salary of 100k\$ in a country with a per capital of 1.7k\$. This is equivalent to US representatives awarding themselves salaries of 2.9m\$. Yet this is a democracy the west celebrates as the “way of the world” while it bombs Mali for choosing another.

It is therefore imperative that for Africa to overcome this challenge it needs leaders that will be accountable to the people, leaders that will be accountable to the people, leaders that are embed with honesty, courage and above all the fear of God in them.

Lack of Democratic Tenets

There is no gain saying the fact that most of the conflicts in Africa emanates from the absence of true democratic practices by the practitioners. Successive government in some parts of the continent come to power through illegal means which provoke most of the citizens to take up arms, thereby causing a lot of harm to societal stability. Democracy, which is a form of government in which citizens in a state have political investments of political participation and trust have been subverted by most countries in Africa. The uprising of conflicts in Nigeria (2011), ivory coast (2010), Kenya (2007-2008), Libya (2012), Egypt(2013) etc., are clear manifestations of non-adherence to democratic tenets. Consequently African democracy is characterized by lack of free and fair elections, abridgement of the rule of law, lack of credible electoral commission, arson, Thuggery, rigging , kidnapping, assassination of parents and other vices intended to achieve an advantage. For development to take place in Africa there is need to adhere strictly to the tenets of democracy as enshrined in each nation’s constitution.

Boundary Disputes

The boundaries of all the African states were arbitrarily drawn by the colonial masters (at the Berlin conference of 1885. This development bifurcated same ethnic groups who two different countries such as the Hitus and Tutsis in Burundi and Rwanda, the Ewes in Ghana and Togo, to mention but few. Some of the conflicts in Africa are traceable to the boundaries bequeathed by the colonialist. For instance, the land disputes between Nigeria and Cameroun, especially over the Bakassi Peninsula .Morocco’s claim over the Western Sahara (SADR), Libya’s claim of Aonzu strip with Chad and Ethiopia _Eritrea boarder conflict, all arose from this historical fact. It is therefore incumbent on African leaders to evolve disputes peacefully as did Nigeria and Cameroun than resort war, which will deny it the resources that would have been channeled for development.

Conflict Management and Resolution Mechanism in Africa

Africa as a continent is represented by a diversity of cultural and religious practices as is also applicable to other continents of the world. The diversity affects the approaches to disputes and conflict management. Conflict management as earlier stated is the process of planning to avoid conflict where possible and organizing to resolve conflicts where it does happen as rapidly and smoothly as possible. In Africa, the management of inter and intra-state conflicts has often taken one or a combination of the following strategies through, not exhaustive, they include:

- a) Negotiation
- b) Conciliation
- c) Arbitration and
- d) Peace-keeping.

Below we highlight each of those mechanisms.

Negotiation

The management of conflicts in Africa is most times resolved through negotiation. Negotiations are simply defined as the process whereby the parties within a conflict seek to settle or resolve their differences. Fisher et al (2000:115) defined negotiation as a structured process of dialogue between conflicting parties about issues in which their opinions differ. To Best (2006), negotiation is a direct process of dialogue and discussion taking place between at least two parties who are faced with a conflict situation or dispute. The whole task of negotiation generally is to reach an agreement through joint decision between the conflicting parties.

Conflict management in Africa through negotiation abounds, this is evident in the boundary conflict between Nigeria and Cameroun where the AU and the UN through the I.C.J played major roles in rescuing the despite without war and its concomitant effects. Similar conflicts rescued through. Negotiation includes Nigeria and Benin repulsive, Sudan and south Sudan, Libya and chad etc.

Conciliation

Another conflict management tool used by Africa to settle its conflict is conciliation. Conciliation generally involves a third party activity aimed at persuading then a peaceful end of their difference this strategy always has a conciliator who communicate separately with the parties and pandas the assistance needed from a neutral third party. The fundamental position of the conciliation method of conflict management is to reduced tension among the conflicting parties in African strong, conciliation were used and still being used to quell the conflicts in mali Nigeria Guinea-Bissau, Egypt, Kenya, south Sudan, Ivory, coast and others.

Arbitration

Arbitration is also one of the effecting strategies of conflict management in African. It involves the used and assistance of a neutral third party in conflicts who he are the evidence from both parties and there after renders, a decision, usually called an award, which is expected to be building on the parties. This strategy of conflict management and resolution was expressly used again, between Nigeria and Cameroon in a boundary conflict where the international court of justice at the Hague, Netherlands guide judgment on the land border of both countries from lack chat to the at tactic coast but crucially awarded. The Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon in 2002, this judgment clearly nipped in the but the nicely conflict that world here arisen hand the two countries not acceded to the I.C.J;s ruling.

Peace-Keeping

Peace-keeping is yet another of the eclectic strategies employed to resolve conflict in Africa. The concept has its origin from the chanter of the united nation expressly enshrined under chapter with its role held by department of peace-keeping operations as a unique and dynamic instrument developed by the organization as a way to help resolve conflict in rotatile areas. Peace-keeping entails activities that tend to create condition that favour lasting peace. For the United Nations, it is the stationing of neutral, lightly armed hoops, as an interposition force following a ceasefire to separate combatants and promote an environment suitable for conflict resolution ... (Furley and may, 1998:4).

This involves monitoring and observance of peace processes. The major aim of peace keeping is to create security environment within which the conflict under dispute can be negotiated. As Apam (2011) rightly observed peacekeeping is a confidence building mechanism meant to ensure the contending parties in dispute that the ceasefire agreement would not be violated. African as a continent has been benefitting from the peace keeping mechanism of continental bodies such as the AU, ECOWAS, SADC etc. and international organizations like the UN, and AFRICOM. For example, countries like Liberia, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Guinea Bussau, Sierra Leon, Congo DR, Tanzania, Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan, to mention but a few have at various times benefitted from peacekeeping that eventually resolved the conflicts in their domains.

Joint /Bilateral Commissions

Some countries in Africa have used the mechanism of joint or bilateral commissions in solving conflicts or potentially explosive situations. For instance, the Chad Basin Commission which incorporates Nigeria, Cameroun, Chad and Nigeria is one of such. The Bilateral Commissions, between Nigeria and Niger on the management of the River Niger and that between Nigeria and Cameroun on the control of River Benue offer ample opportunities for conflict mitigation in Africa.

Conclusion/Recommendations

In this paper, we have attempted to explain sustainable conflict management mechanism in Africa, clarified some concepts, adopted the structural conflict theory as theoretical framework, examined the causes of conflicts in the continent and on the basis of our findings assert that Africa remains the most conflict plagued continent on planet earth. Its present and future are filled with uncertainties. Yet, the hope for reconfiguring the continent lies in promoting the logic and principles of constitutionalism or upholding the rule of law through which democratic practices and values may be engineered and good governance enthroned.

This assertion may be necessarily conduce to speedy economic development or lead to the emergence of good leadership, however what it would do is ensure predictable ways of life, orderly process of leadership selection and change laid down organization and procedure in public interactions, a reform of the state and its institutions and protection of fundamental human rights and strengthening of AU and UN conflict resolution organs. It is our ardent hope that if these recommendations are assiduously implemented. Africa reduction of conflicts within its domain.

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