

# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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## **Abstract**

Nigeria is usually characterised as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously – some would say violently – contested along the lines of the complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in the country. This paper focuses attention on ethnicity and religion as some of the main challenges to the development of democracy, nation building and national development. The study reveals that the nature and composition of the State is very important and central to the nature of the relationship that exists within it. If it is an unstable, hegemonic and illegitimate contraption, there is often the tendency of instability and chaos arising from the unhealthy rivalry that will always be built up within it. On the other hand, if it evolved on the platform of consensus and fair play, there is the tendency for it to have a serene domestic politics. The study thus suggests that the state must become credible, accountable and transparent. The people individually and in groups must be the center of developmental programmes. It must be appreciated that power belongs to the people and they must be given a free hand to elect the government of their choice at every general election. Government must be sincere and carry the people along in its developmental programmes. Above all, government must sincerely ensure an equitable distribution of the product of our collective labour.

## **Introduction**

Conflict is very often the result of the interaction of political, economic and social instability, frequently stemming from bad governance, failed economic policies and inappropriate development programmes which have exacerbated ethnic or religious difference (Celestine, 2007)

As the capabilities of modern weapons increase

and as the possible destructive potential of modern weapons increase the destruction of the world as we know it becomes a possibility. It is therefore imperative for all persons to be sensitised as to the desirability of conflict avoidance, conflict management, conflict resolution and peace-building. Ideally, as many as possible should be aware about these alternative procedures and also the need to first attempt to seek peaceful means of resolution of any conflicts that may arise (Agbede, 2004). The fact is that major armed conflicts have often had their genesis in misunderstanding between two or more individuals and groups. It is clear that these conflicts would have been averted if the disputes that gave rise to them were resolved through peaceful means (Agbede, 2004).

## **Statement of Problem**

Nigeria is presently undergoing upheavals in various parts of the country. There are varied reasons for these situations such as ethnic clashes, religious intolerance and border disputes to mention a few. Irrespective of the category, it should be admitted that all the disputes could have been avoided if the conflict situations had been resolved before escalating.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The importance of peace has led to the serious study of this very important topic worldwide. We presently concern ourselves with an analysis of the changing patterns of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. To do this meaningfully we will discuss these conflicts against a background of their historical antecedent, present the various dimensions of ethno-religious conflict, attempt to unravel specific influencing factors of these conflicts their extensity and intensity and proffer briefly a general recipe for their resolution.

### **Defining the Concept of Conflict**

The word or concept conflict has its roots or draws its original meaning from the Latin word "confingere" which means, "to strike together". This suggests that conflict has to do with clashing or jamming of one or more things. These two things can be physical, but in the context of this paper, it refers more to non-physical or non-tangible things (e.g. ideas, feelings, interests, events, cultural intangibles, goals, objective etc.), reduced or projected to the level of human behaviour, relationships or interactions within a society, family, organization, nation or the world. Conflict can be defined as "behaviour between parties whose interests are, or appear to be incompatible or clashing (Action Aid, 1994). Conflict has also been defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "a fight, struggle, disagreement between people with different ideas or beliefs: to be in opposition or disagreement over a matter or issues." It can also be defined as a perceived incompatibility of actions or goals (Myers, 1993:5) or as "the process that results when one person (or group of people) perceives that another person or group is frustrating or about to frustrate an important concern" (Vecchio, 1991:410).

Note that we have intentionally highlighted the words perceive or appear to be, to draw attention to the fact that most of the time a major driving force in any conflict situation is perception. And perception, as we all know, is a psychology-based concept that refers to the way we see something, a situation, event, action, idea, organization etc, but which is not necessarily the way it is or is meant to be seen. Perception is therefore a picture of reality. Yet, its important in the behavioral management and communication sciences lay in the fact that most of the time, people take decisions, actions or positions based on their perceptions, as opposed to the reality or the absolute truth or intention of the action or expressed view (Erukara, 2005).

### **Conceptual Perspectives on Conflict**

From the above discussion, it would appear that there are indeed only two dominant conceptual perspectives on conflict. There are the negative or bad perspectives and the positive or good perspectives. But an in-depth review of the literature on conflict management or conflict and peace literature will show there is indeed a third perspective: the interactionist perspective. The first and the earliest perspective that conflict is always evil which prevailed in the 1930s and 1940s and which known as the Traditional view of

conflict, has generally been abandoned. It was based on early research efforts and conclusions like the ones by Hawthorn in which most conflicts among individuals and groups were seen as resulting mainly from poor or inadequate communication, lack of openness and trust among people and the failure of managers to respond positively to the needs, wants and expectations of their staff or employees. The crisis-can-be-positive perspective is also known as the Behavioral view of conflict. It portrays conflict as inevitable, rationalize the existence of conflict among human groups, holds that conflict can have positive influence on performance and groups survival and so should not only be expected and accepted but sometimes even induced. This perspective on conflict held sway from the 1940s to the mid 1970s.

The interactionist perspective of conflict which is also known as the contemporary perspectives and which emerged in the mid-1970s hold that conflict can have both positive and negative impacts depending on its nature and intensity, and so while excessive conflicts should be discouraged, moderate degrees of focused conflict which can stimulate positive change, new ideas, promote healthy competition and behaviours, should be encouraged (Moorhead and Griffin, 1995; Robbins, 1988; and Vecchio, 1991). Leaders are actually encouraged by this perspective to generate and sustain minimal conflict levels that are enough to keep their groups alive, self critical, creative and change-oriented (Robbins 1988:154).

The minimal conflict level generation and sustenance line of thought under the interactionist school or perspective is usually given support in the conflict management literature by the following points:

- (a) That minimal conflict tends to bring problems out into the open
- (b) That minimal conflict tends to increase our understanding of the views, feeling, interests and expectations of the other side.
- (c) That minimal conflict tends to facilitate change
- (d) That some level of conflict tends to bring about better decision.
- (e) That minimal conflict tends to enhance group loyalty.
- (f) That minimal conflict tends to increase group commitment.

It could be interesting and useful for the above viewpoints to be scientifically tested in well designed studies of conflict management that are conducted at various levels—family, community, state, nation, organization, international and other such groups. Comparative studies of these groups on the above points or view points will also be very useful and interesting. The key research question here should still be: what appropriate types and levels (minimal levels) of conflict can spark off critical abilities in people towards improved performance, commitment and other positive actions and feelings in various group contexts (e.g. economic, global politics etc.) And if this perspective or currently dominant viewpoint is found to be generally and comparatively correct or acceptable, how do we generate and sustain the right levels of conflicts in such conflicts, or should we use stimulated or programmed conflicts which refer to these conflicts that raise different opinions regardless of the personal feelings of the leaders or the managers? And since we are talking about feelings and opinions, such conflict management studies must also ask and generate data to answer the question: what roles do communication and the mass media play in all these?

#### **Resolution of Conflict**

Conflict resolution is more about solving problems right from the earliest stages of any disagreement. It is concerned with the maintenance of a peaceful atmosphere in a peaceful society. The most important ingredient for a peaceful society is the existence of government that believes in conflict resolution. Ideally, this is what every democratic government should aspire towards. A conflict resolving government has been described as a government that:

*"Focuses on issues, using resources to meet the real needs of the constituency, gives value for money, utilising taxes to meet the needs of the people, keeps its promises and, while speaking of vision, does not promise what it cannot deliver. It is courteous, caring and addresses issues in a common-sense way".* Utilising the words of the Conflict Resolution Network, *"it is a government of reconciliation that facilitates the healing of past division"*. (Conflict Resolution Network based in New South Wales, Australia. [www.crnhq.org](http://www.crnhq.org)).

Conflict resolution is not innate. Human beings often tend to be aggressive and also desire to be proved right. Conflict resolution is about

promoting peace, collaboration, and harmony amongst parties. It is a process and a way of life that has to be learned. For the good of the society and of the country I believe that all political operators, all government officials and members of the civil society should be introduced to principles underlying conflict resolution.

#### **Historical Background of Conflicts in Nigeria**

Although our main concern is a discussion of ethno-religious conflict nonetheless it will be relevant to point out that ethnic and religious identities have positive aspects. They have proved helpful in mobilizing local resources and self-reliant developments such as the establishment of religious educational institutions, the activities of hometown associations and unions in executing various development projects. It is for this reason that ethnicity has been defined as *"the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situation of competition, conflict or co-operation"* (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Ethnicity and religious bigotry constitute historical cumulative phenomena. That is, no matter how new they may appear, current patterns cannot be adequately grasped if they are considered in isolation of the past. Ethnic-religious conflicts and violence in Nigeria date back to pre-colonial era. The establishment of kingdoms (such as Oyo and Bini) and emirate (as the Kano Emirate) involved subjugation of neighbouring communities or ethnic groups. The Islamisation of most parts of Northern Nigeria and some parts of the south areas involved the waging of holy war on the communities or ethnic groups to be converted to Islamic faith. Besides, boundary disputes between adjacent communities or ethnic groups are as old as the history of man. Again intra-communal and inter-ethnic/religious tension and conflicts were intensified by the introduction of slave trade by European merchants.

The Establishment of British Administration brought an end to the slave trade but introduced its own problems. By its policy of "divide and rule" it deliberately set one ethnic group against the other under the guise of securing the right of each ethnic group to maintain its identity, individuality nationality and chosen form of government. Under the policy of indirect rule, minority ethnic groups, particularly in the northern areas, were subjected to the rule of the powerful emirs, and to a large extent, to their religions with unavoidable

resultant resentment. In an effort to douse the agitation of southern elites against colonial rule the imperialists considered it necessary to tilt the power equation in favour of the more accommodating northern political operators. Different system of electoral laws operated as between the North and the Southern sectors. It is also contended by reputable scholars that the population figures they employed for each sector were manipulated.

With the establishment of the federal form of government in 1954 and with the three major groups dominant in each of the three regions, a new phase of ethno-religious conflict emerged. To undo the other major ethnic groups in the power equation each regional political operators support (if not incite) minority agitation against the majority groups while blissfully ignoring the same agitation within its own region. The support of the government in power in the erstwhile Western Region for the creation of Midwest state in 1964 has been categorized by some writers as an act of practical political manoeuvre. Besides, there was intense rivalry between the three major groups to capture power in the center.

The period of the first Republic witnessed intensified rivalry among the three major ethnic groups and an escalating agitation of the minority groups against domination by the majority groups. It was becoming clear by the day that the northern power elites were not willing to surrender power even where that involved a brazen rigging of the general election of 1964.

The period of the first military era 1966-79 witnessed a devastating and destabilizing civil war with untold suffering and loss of human lives and property and great deal of dislocation of the civil society. It was all in an attempt to prevent the Igbo ethnic group, in particular, from quitting the federal arrangement. The corruption and blatant rigging of the 1983 general election terminated the Second Republic. Unfortunately the succeeding Military regimes particularly from mid-1980s was characterized by grinding poverty inflicted on the populace, oppression, corruption of unprecedented scale and consequential loss of faith in the Nigerian agenda by various ethnic and religious groups and individuals who were not within the orbit of power.

The transfer of power from the military to civilian in 1999 witnessed a rising spate of ethnic,

religious and communal conflicts with devastating consequences on lives and property. "It seems as if decades of bottled up anger under military rule have suddenly exploded and found expression in violent ethnic, religious and communal conflicts... no fewer than 40 violent ethno-religious and communal conflicts were reported within the first three years of the return to civil rule in 1999 (Jega, 2002).

The sorry picture is the emergence of ethnic militia (OPC, Egbusu, Bakassi Boys etc) of a scale unknown in the past. Again, the frequency of religious riots fueled by the introduction of sharia law in a number of northern states cumulatively a picture of a present country on flame. The repressive and heavy-handed response of government to these conflicts has not helped the situation. Recent developments however reveal that government is having a change of heart in the handling of these conflicts.

#### **Causes of Conflict:**

For our purpose in this paper, we shall identify and tightly discuss three classes of factors that cause conflict, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive or exhaustive, but will aid us in understanding conflict and conflict management process from various perspectives and at various levels. These are the intrapersonal factors, the interpersonal factors and the structural-functional factors (at the organization and other group levels.)

At the **INTRAPERSONAL LEVEL** of conflict occurrence, which takes place within an individual, several factors usually gang up or have independent impacts on the individual to make him face a conflictual situation. Managing the level or cause of conflict or at least understanding it, is very important because one cannot be at peace with others or the group, if he is not at peace with himself. These interpersonal conflicts usually have their roots in the psychological make-up (e.g. personality of the individual concerned. They include the individual perception of situations, other people or events; individual interests, wants needs or expectations, especially when these are at conflict with those of other people, or are seen by individual to be so; conflicting emotions and actions of the individual concerned. These usually manifest in form of *Approach-Approach conflict* which requires the individual to choose or make decision between two positive or attractive alternatives; the

*Avoidance-Avoidance conflict* which occurs in the individual when he or she has to make a choice or decision between two equally unattractive options (i.e. being between the devil and the deep blue sea.) and the *Approach-Avoidance conflict* in which the individual faces a single goal that has both positive and negative or unattractive valences. Unresolved or suppressed conflicts usually lead to individual must find a way of resolving literature is replete with many techniques hinge upon effective communication (i.e. interpersonal communication and other forms of communication).

**Interpersonal Conflicts** are caused by such factors as lingering grudges, faulty attributions (i.e. attributing someone's action against a person to a wrong action or motive), faulty interpersonal communication (e.g. unclear instruction or messages), inappropriate criticism (wrongly-timed criticism or criticism of a subordinate in the public, undeserved criticism, or frequent criticisms) all of which are related to proper or improper communication and personal behavior traits (e.g. being too autocratic, argumentative or conflict-prone) (Vecchio, 1991 and Greenberg and Robert, 1993).

**The Structural-Functional** causes of conflicts have their roots in interactions between organizational or group structures. But interactions or relationship within groups or organizations can also cause intra-group conflicts. They arise from the structures and functions of groups. They are usually generated by such factors as scarce resources, ambiguity over responsibilities or jurisdictions, interdependence of faulty or inadequately applied reward systems, power structure conflicting interests or expectations, overlapping or unclear job boundaries, more or inadequate intra-group and extra-group communication; unreasonable or unclear policies, standards and rules unreasonable deadlines or extreme time pressure, poor decision making system or approach, unsatisfied group expectations and other such factors (Kretnier and Kinick, 1995; Moorhead and Gredten 1995, Flippo, and Greenberg and Baron 1993).

#### **Phases of Ethnicity and Religious Identities**

Ethnicity and religious identity may be manifested at individual intra ethnic/religious, inter ethnic/religious and ethnic and state levels with diverse consequences. Individual actors may invoke their ethnic or religious connection to

pursue personal ends such as securing lucrative government contracts or jobs, promotion and other undeserved favours. This situation shifts loyalty to the ethnic group or religious affiliation at the expense of loyalty to the state.

#### ***Intra-Ethnic/Religious Level***

Conflict may arise within the same ethnic group or religious affiliates for various reasons. Inter communal conflicts frequently arise in respect of chieftaincy supremacy, demarcation of land areas, location of local government headquarters, sharing political power and on differences in matters of cultural, social and ritual practices among others. On occasion these conflicts assume major proportion with consequential massive destruction of property and loss of lives. Again, Islamic fundamentalists have wrought untold havoc on other co-believers in respect of doctrinal differences. Catholics and protestants (of the Christian faith) have been at war in Northern Ireland for decades.

#### ***Inter-Ethnic/Religious Level***

Within the context of ethnic conflict it may take the form of majority versus majority, majority versus minority and minority versus minority and ethnic versus the state. Instances include Ife/Modakeke, Agulari/Umulari, Iju/Itaogbolu, Ketu/Idamori, and Ikede/Aahe conflicts among others.

#### ***Majority versus Majority***

The majority versus majority aspects relates to the incessant conflicts amongst the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. This aspect of conflict is perhaps the most threatening as it often combines religion and regionalism. Each ethnic group has, at one time or the other threatened to secede from the federation. Indeed the civil war was the direct consequence of the attempt by the Igbos to secede from the federation. The greatest contention is the sharing of political power. The Igbos and the Yorubas have been clamoring for a restructuring of the federal system on the basis of what they perceive as inequitable power equation. The shift of power to the South West has somehow assuaged these feelings though the Igbos are now agitating for an Igbo President in 2007 to balance the equation. Clashes have occurred severally in all parts of the federation among these majority groups.

#### ***Majority and minority Conflicts***

These can be traced back to the old regional

arrangement where minority ethnic groups struggled to overcome domination, discrimination and assimilation by the majority groups. The creation of more states has minimized this pattern of conflict. Their desire to have a share in the power equation has been given expression in the delimitation of the country to six zones for power sharing purposes. The middle belt had been the hotbed of this pattern of conflicts. In the East the brutality suffered by the minority groups in the hands of the Igbos during the civil war still adversely affects their relationship. Somehow the South West is almost exclusively populated by the Yorubas.

#### ***Minority versus Majority Conflict***

The minority states have produced within itself "new majority" ethnic groups against which the "new minorities" struggle to liberate themselves. It provoked a clamour for further creation of states at the tail end of the military era. The present constitutional arrangement makes it very difficult (if not impossible) to realize such a hope. The "new majorities" include Binis in Edo state, Tivs in Benue state, Igalas in Kogi state, Efik in Cross River, Ijaws in Bayelsa and Urhobos in Delta states. The bases of conflict are similar to those obtaining in intra ethnic situation.

#### ***Inter-Religious Conflict***

These are mostly between Christians and Muslims and they are particularly frequent in the Northern states especially with the introduction of sharia laws in recent years.

#### ***Ethnic Group and the State***

These conflict arise from disillusionment, frustration and oppressive and unjust treatment of particular ethnic group or religious bodies as perceived by them as to warrant stiff opposition to the state by way of non-cooperation or outright anti-state mobilization resulting in vandalisation of public utilities, murderous assault on government officials particularly policemen and hostage taking as has been witnessed in Niger Delta area and in parts of the North by Islamic Fundamentalists purely for religious reasons.

It should be stressed that ethno-religious conflicts are normally rooted in genuine apprehension of infringement of groups' rights, by way of deprivation, oppression discrimination and marginalisation among others causes. On the religious side, it is often mixed up with other secular interests short of act that are considered

offensive to religious sensibility.

However, ethnic and religious mobilization resulting in conflict is often brought about by political opportunists and religious bigots to gain political relevance in most cases. This kind of behaviour is by any standard anti-social, inimical and unacceptable. Nonetheless, ethnicity is not prohibited or criminalised. Religious bigots go about spreading their despicable message unmolested.

#### **Conflict Influencing Factors**

No claim is being made to identifying cause or causes of ethno-religious conflicts whether proximate, direct or remote but we can at least itemise conflict influencing factors as follow:

##### **(a) Political Factor**

Perhaps, the most insidious of the conflict influencing factors is the role of political operators who invoke ethnicity and religious mobilization to gain political relevance. Indeed most of the ethno-religious conflicts can be traced to this cause. Unless something is done to check this anti-social practice the Nigeria agenda may end up in failure as this category of evil men will stop at nothing until they have achieved their nefarious aim.

##### **(b) Economic Factors**

Diverse claims over ownership or use of land, water and other resources and other tangible or intangible interests will continue to provoke conflicts between communities and ethnic groups.

##### **(c) Social Factors**

As we have seen disagreement over cultural, ritual and other social practices may provoke violent conflicts. Also relevant are chieftaincy matters.

##### **(d) Defective Legal Frame Work**

In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like Nigeria it should not have been permitted to invoke religious advancement as a political manifesto to contest election as we have sadly witnessed in some northern states.

It is a signal error that Nigerian citizenship is not inclusive. A citizen who is not an indigene of his state of abode is left out in the cold in terms of political benefits and favours. We need to evolve a credible criterion for membership of a state or local government.

The military-imposed constitution conferred enormous powers on the President including control over the Police and the Electoral

Commission and yet he is permitted to preside over his own election. It is any surprise therefore that several Elections in the country were characterised by anomalies. For ethnic groups who are out of the orbit of power this situation portend grave consequences.

The "federal character" clause should have been a temporary measure. It was inserted to protect minority interest but has now become a qualification for members of the majority groups to get appointed to positions to which they have neither the requisite qualification nor the experience.

With so much concentration of the nation's resources in the center members of the minority groups or indeed of majority group left out of the orbit of power are denied opportunity for self-expression, self-actualization and self-development. The deprivation and frustration will inevitably lead to agitation and conflicts.

(e) **Clumsy, blunt and near paralyzed Investigatory and Law enforcement Machinery**

The pervasive corruption, indiscipline and lawlessness on the part of law enforcement and investigatory agency have bastardized the dignity of law. Such a situation can only lead to loss of confidence in the government with consequential recourse to ethnic or class protective measures. It should be added that it is particularly baffling that the assassins of the Federal Chief legal officer could not be apprehended even on the face of compelling evidence.

In a situation where state religion is prohibited by the constitution some state Governors blatantly introduced religious law as the general *lex loci* in their states. Indeed sharia law is only applicable under the constitution in relation to muslim personal law. While the constitution proscribe discrimination on basis of religious affiliation only muslims can be sentenced to death for adultery in some states.

**Failure of Leadership**

Nigeria has so far not produced a charismatic leader with ability to bring together the various ethnic and regions groups. No leader has demonstrated outstanding ability to lead and the capacity to inspire confidence. Indeed

it seems that our leads during the first Republic are the best we have ever had.

(f) **Failure on the Part of Government**

High levels of poverty and unemployment from mid 1980s did no credit to the successive regimes. The conspicuous extravagant life style of political operators can only evoke resentment and agitation on the part of the various ethnic groups at the other side of the fence.

Insincerity on the part of government. Reports of Panels set up to investigate various wrong doings continue to gather dust while government looks the other way.

Government often fails to pay adequate attention to early warning signals of crises and conflicts.

Failure of government to effectively check corrupt practices on the part of officials and ensure equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation can only produce disruptive and disintegrating consequences.

Government's neglect or failure to mobilize the civil society towards achieving ethnic and religious harmony as a political programme is undoubtedly unhelpful.

**Extensivity and Intensity of Ethno-Religious Conflict**

"It's today safer for a Hausa man to live in Bamako, Mali than Okigwe; safer for an Igbo man to live in Brazzaville than Kano; safer for the Yoruba man to live in Bole Djalosso than Sabagari. All these resulting from the fear and uncertainty that is now a common feature in our cities" (Shahu Sanni 2002).

We have observed that ethno-religious conflicts have occurred in every part of the federation with devastating and disruptive consequences. Indeed as Shahn Sanni has observed, a citizen of Nigerian may feel more secured in a foreign country than in some parts of Nigeria. It is the case, though sad, that non-citizens are preferred to "citizens alien" in certain parts of the country. Ethno-religious conflicts as Osaghae (2005) put it "is the root cause of deadly conflict, political unrest, the greatest threat to peace, security, stability and integration". It is estimated that there have been over 250 ethno-religious conflicts between 1980 and 1999. As previously observed, estimates place

the number of violent ethno-religious clashes throughout the country at more than 40 within the first three years of the civil rule in 1999. Specifically there were about eight religious clashes and fourteen ethnic clashes between July 1999 and July 2002.

The militant youths in the Niger Delta areas are now up in arms against the state. It is hoped that the dialogue between their representatives and the President will produce lasting peace.

### **Strategies for Managing Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

The various events of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria as reviewed and discuss in the earlier section of this paper show that ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria are many and continue to increase in number. The frequency of these ethno-religious conflicts and their impacts on the socio-economic life of the Nigerian people have always challenged the government and have thus demanded for one form of management strategy or the other to put them under control. Therefore, ever since, the Nigerian governments (past and present) have been responding to the challenges posed by the various ethno religious conflicts in the country. However, the various governments responses to these ethno-religious conflicts have been ad-hoc and were not organized. According to Omorogbe and Omohan (2005) for instance, only two major strategies of conflict management are often employed by governments in Nigeria to tackle the problem of ethno-religious conflicts each time they occur. The two strategies as mentioned by them are the coercive and the judicial methods.

The coercive method as the name suggests has to do with the deployment of troops to the areas of conflict with the objective of controlling the crises. In Nigeria, this method of managing the ethno religious conflicts has taken many forms depending on the magnitude of the crises in question. In a light ethno-religious crises for instance, the conventional policemen are the first to be drafted to the crisis point and to be assisted by the mobile police-men in case the conventional corps cannot cope. But in a very serious ethno-religious conflict, government may be forced to make use of combined military force made up of the army, navy and the air-force. Because of the military nature of this kind of intervention however, the coercive method is usually associated with many vices such as rape, beating

and in some cases shooting of innocent citizens (Omorogbe and Omohan, 2005). Consequently, this method of intervention in ethno-religious conflicts has not been successful as a mechanism. While commenting on the problem with the deployment of security forces (troops) to conflict areas to quell the crisis, Oromareghake and Akpator (2005) have this to say.

*...the problem with the deployment of security forces that are not backed by intensive mediation effort is that it unnecessarily prolongs the stay of such security forces deployed in different parts of Nigeria. This is because the units of mobile police or armies frequently deployed to quell disturbances in Nigeria have neither the mandate nor the training to act as conflict resolution facilitator (p. 601).*

What the above quoted passage means is that the deployment of troops to crisis sports is never a competent method of dealing with this phenomenon of ethno-religious conflict. Because such troops lack adequate training in conflict management, they always cause more problems than the ones they are expected to solve. In other words, they become part of the problem they have been invited to curb.

The establishment of judicial commission or panel remains the second major management strategy used by government in Nigeria to intervene in ethno-religious crises. The method involves the selection of people from varied backgrounds to investigate the problems and submit report to the government based on the terms of reference given to the panel to work with. Such commission often operates by calling for memoranda, organizing public hearing and paying visits to the areas of crises. The objective of such visits is to get first-hand assessment of the extent of the crises. The judicial method of conflict management in Nigeria has failed to resolve the problem. According to Oromareghake and Akpator (2005), such method has created more bitterness than bringing relief. Commenting on the reasons for the utter failure of these two methods of resolving or managing ethno-religious conflicts in the Nigerian case, Omorogbe and Omohan (2005) said:

*...the main reasons for the poor performance of the often used conflict management mechanisms are poor logistics, delay in deployment of troops to the crises areas, lack of cooperation by parties to the conflicts, non-implementation of whitepaper or recommendations submitted to the government by the panel of inquiry etc (P.577).*

Due to all the reasons given above, the two conflict management strategies which have been used constantly at different crisis points in Nigeria have not yielded much positive results in terms of effective resolution of ethno-religious conflicts that have characterized the Nigerian political system.

In view of the aforementioned facts, there is a need for more integrated and more articulated programmes of conflict resolution and conflict prevention. Such programmes should be able to effectively resolve and prevent ethno-religious conflict as the case may be. Hence, the paper suggests the following conflict management proposals that will help to resolve or prevent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

As a first step towards solving the problem of ethno-religious conflict, the government at all levels should jointly move from conflict resolution to the stage of conflict prevention. To effectively succeed in this new process, the government should be more committed to the provision of adequate and effective security in each state that should be able to respond promptly to any insurgence of ethno-religious crisis anywhere at any time. It is important to point out here that the security outfit that will serve this purpose effectively should be the type that will have adequate and modern security facilities and training that will enhance their quick response to ethno-religious conflicts.

Another step towards managing ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is that government at all levels must encourage, in their domains, effective and functional platforms for ethno-religious leaders so that through them it would be possible to establish a network for conflict prevention and management. This proposal is necessary because in Nigeria, the various political, religious, traditional and ethnic leaders in most areas of conflict hardly sit together to discuss the causes of ethno-religious violence and how to prevent future conflicts. What this means is that in Nigeria, with a bad history of ethno-religious conflicts, leaders hardly met to build bridges of understanding that could lead to the establishment of mutual confidence that could sustain a multi-ethnic society. Thus, rather than being part or initiators of the solution, they (leaders) often become part of the conflicts, which they suppose to resolve.

The civil society also has important roles to play in

the management of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Imobighe (2003) and Ikelegbe (2003) have stressed the need for the civil society to intervene in ethno-religious conflict. "The civil society can effectively intervene by focusing attention on the social organization and structural patterns of interaction; the modes of violence employed, the values of the parties in conflict; the genesis of conflict, and the degree of incompatibility of goals among others" (Omorogbe and Omohan, 2005:557-558).

Just like the civil society, the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have special roles to play in conflict management in Nigeria. Therefore, governmental organizations or institutions at all levels should encourage the NGOs to embark on research and programmes of, environment, civic, religious, and peace education for neighbourhood communities (Enukara, 2005). In particular, the NGOs should be organized in such a way that they will serve as facilitators of dialogues between, conflicting groups.

In addition to all the above mentioned mechanisms, the government in Nigeria should strengthen the institution of Public Complaint Bureau which already exists in each state of the Federation through appropriate legislations. With this establishment, the parties in dispute will be able to lay - bare their grievances for on-ward transmission to appropriate government agencies for necessary action. There should also be a deliberate programme of political and social reorientation of the entire citizenry. Such political and social orientation will go a long way in changing the negative stereotypes and negative values that have characterized the Nigerian peoples. In particular, the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Political Parties and National Associations like National Youth Council, Nigeria Council of Women Society (NCWS) should be strengthened in the various assignments as bridge builders that will discourage the spirit of division among Nigerians and foster oneness which is necessary for building one nation with one destiny as contained in the Nigerian constitution.

Above all, in order to solve the problem of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, the government should be pluralistic, representative, and just in their treatment of the Nigerian citizens. It should discourage all forms of discrimination, neglect

and marginalization in dealing with development and religious issues. The government should also target to reduce poverty among Nigerians so that the reservoir of recruits for ethno-religious conflicts will be punctured.

### Conclusion

The foregoing account reveals the relevance and urgency of establishing appropriate machinery for conflict avoidance, conflict management conflict resolution and peace-building. The state must become credible, accountable and transparent. The people individually and in groups must be the center of developmental programmes. It must be appreciated that power belongs to the people and they must be given a free hand to elect the government of their choice at every general election. Government must be sincere and carry the people along in its developmental programmes. Above all, government must sincerely ensure an equitable distribution of the product of our collective labour. The Federal character formula should be replaced with equal opportunity clause.

In spite of the widespread of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria and their long history, the paper has shown that the Nigerian governments (past and present) have failed to tackle this problem through articulated and well organized policy actions. The country record in conflict management has been poor as the government continues to rely on coercive method and always resorts to the use of whitepaper emanating from them are often not implemented. Since ethno-religious conflicts are inevitable in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria, the paper has suggested the following mechanisms of conflict management: government should move from conflict resolution to the stage of conflict prevention; provision of adequate and effective security in each state that will respond promptly to any ethno-religious insurgence; establishment of functional and effective platform for ethno-religious leaders where grievances can be discussed before they escalate into ethno-religious crises; involvement of the civil society which will intervene in some critical areas of ethno-religious conflict; strengthening of some conflict resolution institutions through appropriate legislations; government should resolve to be pluralistic, representative, and just in dealing with ethno-religious issues.

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