CIVIL SOCIETY AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS.

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with diverse ethnic, political, communal, religious groups and socio-economic conflicts with dire consequences. Governmental efforts to arrest and combat these conflicts have not achieved effective results, necessitating the civil society groups efforts to check these conflicts threatening Nigeria stability, governance and peaceful co-existence. Accordingly, some objectives were stated which includes to examine the role and effectiveness of civil society in conflict management, to evaluate civil society successes in conflict management, and to access their challenges and prospects in conflict management. The research utilized secondary data such as books, journals, magazines, articles, newspapers and the internet etc. The integrated conflict management circle was used as the theoretical analysis. It was the findings of this paper that, civil society plays effective roles in conflict management as agents of stability, education mobilization, culture of civility, dialogue, conflict prevention and peace building. The civil society groups have their own peculiar challenges such as weak structures, finances, logistics, lack of proper co-ordination, and poor organization. It was recommended, amongst others that civil society, should be strengthened and empowered to effectively handle and manage conflicts. There should be peace building mechanism, collaboration, proper funding, partnership, effective mobilization and holistic approach to conflict management by the civil society with the active support and co-operation of the government/state.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a plural society with diverse ethnic communal, political and religious conflicts of great magnitude, usually erupting into dire consequences. These recurrent conflicts are grave danger to national stability, security and good governance. The greatest challenge to the Nigerian nation and its democratic process .is the harmonious and efficient management of the diverse conflicts, as well as the preservation of Nigeria as one indivisible geographical entity.

All purposeful efforts by the several levels of government to resolve conflicts have proved abortive, as the measures failed to yield the much desired result[1].

Civil society has existed since pre-colonial period whether as segmented or centralized society, as associational formations between the people and the state. The advent of nationalist agitation increased social, communal and political consciousness which became a platform to relate to colonial policies and practices.

In Nigeria, the flourishing of civil society groups weakened the legitimacy of the successive military government from the mid 1980's to the Babaginda and Abacha regimes. Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in May 29, 1999, the focus of the civil society groups is the country has changed from a pre-occupation with democratization, to issues of deprivation, marginalisation and resource control etc.

Civil society organizations by their inherent nature, structure and activities are major stakeholders in the promotion of peace, maintenance

and facilitator of peaceful co-existence. Though conflicts are part of every human community, their nature and management are determined by their impact on the society. Civil society always redirect their efforts to conflicts that threaten the fabrics and foundation of the society. The paper examines and recasts in a very realistic manner the concept, characteristics, roles, effectiveness, challenges and prospects of civil society organizations in conflict management.

In spite of several pitfalls, civil society remains one of the credible and viable options in managing conflicts in Nigeria[2]. Expectedly, this paper is terminated with an abridged synopsis/conclusion, as well as far reaching recommendations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since, the advent of Nigeria's fourth Republic in May 1999, various conflicts of different dimensions has become recurrent features in Nigeria. The persistence of these conflicts and the unprecedented level of destruction to property and life, clearly shows that the formal mechanisms to their effective management have proved to be inadequate.

Till now, over reliance on official methods in the management of these conflicts have been futile. The painful result has be unsuccessful nipping of the conflicts in the bud and preventing the escalation of violence. Little wonder that these conflicts keep on recurring.

It is in this regards, that civil society groups have been advocated as a more credible, creative rewarding and result – oriented approach to the proper management of these endless conflicts.

In the light of the above, the problem this study seeks to examine is the civil society intervention in the management of societal conflicts.

However, the most fundamental research questions that need to be properly articulated and addressed in this paper are as follows:

1. What role do civil society play in conflict management?
2. How effective are they in conflict management?
3. How successful have they been in conflict management?
4. What are their challenges and prospects in conflict management?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the role of civil society in conflict management.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of civil society in conflict management.
3. To appraise their successes in conflict management.
4. To assess their challenges and prospects in conflict management.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

CIVIL SOCIETY: Civil society refers to associations and institutions that enhance the prospect for the individual and collective liberties by operating outside the state's control. Civil society includes professional organizations, labour movements, youth, peasant, socio-cultural, civil

rights, religious and communal groups around which the civil populace build various identities for the promotion of their various interests. Civil societies are good platforms for popular agitations, against injustice, bad government and societal ills. Traditionally, civil society exists in the form of town or village unions, community and religious organizations, age based and sex based groups. In modern parlance, there are women organizations, trade union, chambers of commerce and farmers associations and co-operatives, universities and human rights movements[3].

Groups that have been very active in the civil society includes Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Campaign for Democracy (CD), Nigeria Labour Congress etc. Civil society consists of associations which serve as the independent eye of the society and which check and/or regulate the state in the overall interest of the society[4].

CONFLICT: Is a state of tension which exists when a party's perceived goals, needs, desires or expectations are being blocked by another party. Conflict relates to a condition in which an identifiable group of human beings whether tribal, ethnic – linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, political and a host of others is engaged in conscious opposition with one or more identifiable human groups, because these groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals, exploitation, marginalization and authoritarian leadership and may be violent or non violent in terms of physical forces, dominant or recessive,

controllable or uncontrollable, resolvable or irresolvable under various sets of circumstances[5].

Similarly T.A. Imobighe defines conflict as a condition of disharmony in an interational process. He explained that conflict is the direct result of clash of interest by the parties in an interactional process and it arises usually as a result of the pursuit of incompatible ends or the use of incompatible means to pursue desired goals by the parties involved in an interactional processes[6]. I hereby accept and adopt the above definition as my own definition with regard to this paper.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict management, is simply the constructive handling of difference. It assumes that not all conflicts can necessarily be resolved. Contending or manipulating the conflict in a way that it does not result into irreparable damage is the focus of conflict management.

Conflict management involves the acquiring of skills related to conflict resolution, self awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills and positioning of structure for management of conflict in one's environment. Conflict management refers to strategies.[7] aimed at preventing or controlling the factors militating against a peaceful environment or society.

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS/LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several theories relevant to Civil society and conflict management such as the integrated conflict management circle, the framework of contentious politics, social movement theory, structural

functionalist theory etc. However in this study, the integrated conflict management by Imobighe will be adopted as the theoretical framework of analysis.

This work found it imperative to use integrated conflict management system and problem solving approach. The essence of the concept of an integrated conflict management system according to T.A. Imobighe is geared towards eliminating the conditions that create an environment for conflict. Conflict management in the integrated sense applied by the researcher in this work represents a process comprising of three types of activity: Conflict Prevention or peace promotion, and consolidation; conflict control/abatement and conflict Resolution. The condition that created environment for conflict between two or more diverse interest groups in the society may be as a result of implementation of an obnoxious policy by the government in the society. Such a policy can result in an unprecedented conflict that is almost difficult to resolve such as deregulation of the petroleum sector.

Pursuant to this theory is problem solving approach, which is important to the success of an integrated conflict management system.

Problem solving approach to conflict management seeks to get at the root of conflict through an analytical approach. Some basic assumptions of problem – solving approach are:

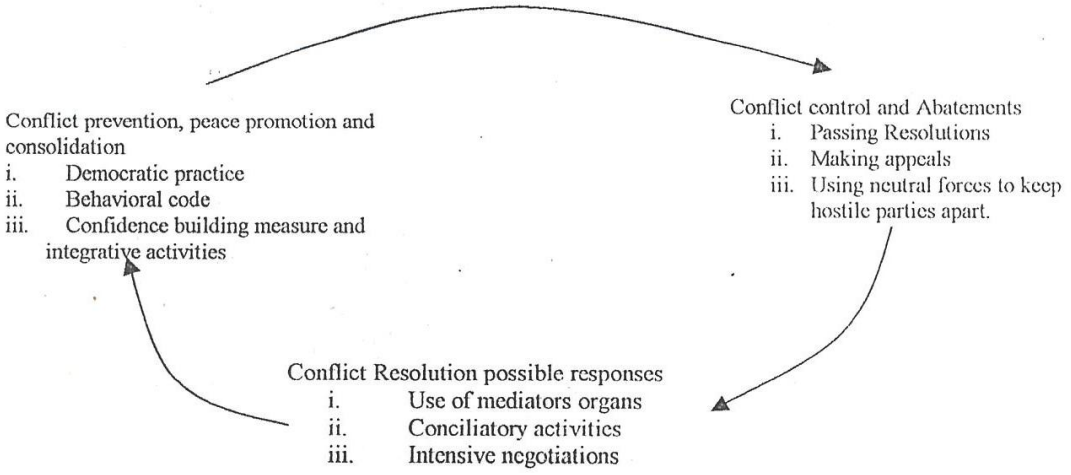
1. That conflict is generally a response to frustrated needs.
2. To solve the conflict one must first seek to identify the frustrated needs to be satisfied and work out the different

options available for their satisfaction so as to arrive at some mutual level of interest of "win-win" outcome.

In the application of this approach one finds that the Nigeria populace saw the deregulation of the petroleum sector as a plan to frustrate them by hiking the prices of petroleum products beyond the reach of the ordinary Nigerian. As a result, frustration and anger were shown through nation—wide protests, demonstrations and riots. The civil society under the auspices of the Nigeria labour congress (N.L.C.) used this intergrated conflict management circle to effectively resolved the disagreement with the federal government, by achieving a successive reduction in prices of Petroleum products over time. This truce now stabilized the country. The conflict between the populace, civil society and the government was mutually settled at a level of "win-win" outcome. Hence, the civil society can strengthen a political community, and ensure its stability by helping to resolving the conflict.

Imobighe developed a model tagged integrated conflict management system concerned with the ways and means of controlling and harmonizing conflict relationship within an interaction process... if the conflict relationship in human interaction is to be effectively controlled, it must be tackled at the roots. He gave three types of activity in conflict management. Which are (1) conflict prevention/peace promotion and consolidation (2) conflict control/abatement (3) conflict resolution[8]

INTEGRATED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT CIRCLE



According to Imobighe, the initial point of conflict management is conflict prevention/peace promotion and consolidation through the elimination of the causes of friction and the creation of a good atmosphere for harmonious relationship. At this stage, the responses include democratic practice, the creation of behavioral codes, the establishment of confidence building measures and the development of integrative activities. During the second stage, conflict management directs their efforts towards trying to control the conflict, to remove tension so as to create a suitable climate for negotiations. Here, the parties in conflict are appealed to exercise restraint, passing resolutions on general principles for settlement and using neutral forces to keep the hostile parties apart. The last stage involves the eventual resolution of the conflict through negotiations to settle all the important issues related to the conflict. The likely responses at the third stage, should embrace

the use of mediatory institutions. This is when the affected issues are settled before one can assert that conflict management has gone its full circle, with the relationship between warring parties having reached a tolerable level of friction.

THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Civil society groups play significant role in the conflict management process. There are various types of the civil society groups that can be part of peace building and sustenance in Nigeria. These include human rights groups, the press, women association, religious bodies, trade unions, student organizations and the modern non governmental organizations, e.g. The first challenge of a conflict situation especially of war as evident in the most recent Jos crisis is the scarcity of basic human needs for refugees and displaced persons. Civil society in conjunction with their international partners can organize for emergency relief for refugees and displaced persons. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Women groups and Red cross society were involved in immediate conflict relief measures by providing medical needs and relief materials in conflict zones.

Secondly, civil society is helpful in the process of peaceful negotiation in conflict situations. This is because they can promote and popularize peace deals, put pressure on warring parties, and mobilize grassroots support for the peace process. Negotiating peace should no longer be the sole duty of belligerent parties alone, some civil society

groups can also play very indispensable roles in facilitating peace deals and ensuring those agreements are respected. During the recent Jos crisis, civil society organizations played very essential roles in the peace process both at the level of mounting pressure on the different warning parties to accede to peace agreements and also participating though informally in the peace negotiation processes.

Moreso, the civil society in the post conflict situation is extremely relevant in the process of peace building, through the process of demilitarization, demobilization and adaptation to civil life for demobilized and displaced combatants. Furthermore, by undertaking post crisis rehabilitation projects, especially in restoring normalcy, basic social services like primary health care, education etc, civil society have carried out important role in conflict management in Nigeria. Besides is the creation of a new awareness and consciousness through enlightenment about the crisis, futility of war and the supremacy of dialogue in social and political interactions. Without the mobilization of the people, crisis cannot continue[9]. Civil society also help in ensuring the principles of popular participation, rule of law, justice, fairness and equality of the people. The civil society can play key roles in this regard. During the Jos crisis afore said, the crisis spread to Jos and its environs, as well as other parts of Plateau state, with high level of destruction. Many lives and property were destroyed. Starvation, raping of girls and women, and molestation by security agents were widely recorded. With police, soldiers and other security personnel keeping the peace there, it

must be stated that the civil society groups such as religious groups, traditional leaders and women groups were able to quell some violent clashes, promote reconciliation, facilitate dialogue etc, thus establishing a formal effort at managing and resolving the conflicts. The civil society organizations have held several fora to promote peace and reconcile warring parties. This strategy usually aims at appealing to the conscience of the people to take the path of peace and dialogue as well as respect the sanctity of life.

Civil society groups play useful roles in conflict management. Civil society may not be able to bring total peace, but their activities can influence public opinion through the media.

Civil society groups often work with the press to exert pressure on government. They create awareness by organizing journalists to visit scene of conflicts and report on them. Civil society groups can help them to be aware in good time, and the wealth of information, which they have, can help them to anticipate these crises, alert society and the state about them.

Soon after the return of democratic rule, crisis after crisis erupted all over Nigeria, as Nigerians exercises their freedoms" of expression, association, etc and demanded their rights. The most virulent conflict in Nigeria in recent times has been the Jos crises. The issue of Berom and Hausa/Fulani is at the heart of the communal religious violence being experienced in that part of Nigeria. The perceived intentions of the Islamic fundamentalists work against the middle belt, Hausa/Fulani, and

the minority ethnic communities themselves are also causes of the Jos crisis.

The Hausa/Fulani and Berom, conflict has become associated with the Jos crisis or even the larger plateau state. Closely tied to this problem are the federal and national questions. Federalism by its very nature is a compromise mechanism that allows sub-national units to maintain their individual identities within the super-national union. There is no true federalism in Nigeria, what we have is a loose, fraudulent and unfair arrangement, hence crisis all over the country, Jos inclusive, the progress recorded in resolving crises in Nigeria over the past decades are largely due to the concrete efforts of the civil society. In all these cases, civil society moved in to fill in the gaps left by the government. Civil society has also recorded several successes as regards democratic and developmental projects at the grassroots. Civil society was able to intervene providing different degree of immediate humanitarian services and resettlement.

Civil society such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) encourages communal action and reconciliation processes, in which stakeholders like government, community, religious leaders, elders, youth groups, women groups, and community based associations are afforded a non-threatening platform to iron out their differences and settle their perceived injustices as well as wrongs[10]. In the fragile socio – political environment of crisis and conflict, civil society groups such as the NGOs, secular and religious groups organized reconciliation

activities, open community meetings and other activities for free and transparent public exchanges between the parties in conflicts. This, no doubt underscores the role of the civil society in revitalizing a strong, virile and stable foundation for the Nigeria polity. Whenever there are conflicts civil society seeks to understand the perceptions of the actors themselves and what they think needs to be done. Dialogue with the civil society is an important initiative for the peace process, peace strategy and consensus principles provide a more lasting solution than government imposed measures[11].

Civil society also provide alternative conflict management strategies, which are consistent high ranking non–governmental processes in the management of conflicts. Non-governmental organizations, churches, kindred meetings women groups etc always provide assistance to victims of the conflict with financial, food relief, clothings, temporary shelters, tents, medical supplies, and relocation from conflict areas. Consensus peace meetings and traditional approaches to conflict management are also interventions by civil society in conflict situations in Nigeria. Civil society participation in the management of conflicts cover trainings of mediators, youths, community leaders, peace education training of elders and training of government officials in conflict resolution. The chief aim of all these training exercises is to educate all the parties involved in the conflict and emphasize more on things binding them together rather than those things that separate them.

The second area in which this paper shall extensively examine the role of civil society in conflict management is the 2007 general elections. This shall be seen in before, during and after the 2007 elections. Elections represent unique opportunities by the populace to vote and be voted for. It enables them to freely choose those who are to represent them in government. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) released its own time table and guidelines for the various elections, fixing the dates, time, logistics and the various elective offices to be vied for, such as the presidential seat, gubernatorial, national assembly, various houses of assembly and chairmanship positions, as well as their councilors. Laws and policies, were enacted and formulated to guide the successful conduct of the 2007 elections which have been adjudged by Nigerian local and international observers as the worst elections in Nigeria's political history. It was manifestly characterized with widespread irregularities, fraud, malpractices, corruption and violence. The frustrations, anger, and crisis that greeted the elections almost plunged this country into civil war, with raging and escalating conflicts, unending litigations, opposition prevailing everywhere even till date. Prior to the 2007 general elections, the civil seciety played crucial roles in educating the populace and electorate for effective registration, voting and the need to choose good leaders for the country. The civil society also helped to monitor the elections all over the country, in conjunction with the international monitoring observers. The civil society groups like the Campaign for Democracy, Civil Liberties Organization, the

organized labour (Nigerian Labour Congress) also physically resisted even in the polling centers out right glaring cases of irregularities and electoral fraud. The civil society also galvanized international support in condemning the election results, many of the civil society groups armed with various documentary and electronic evidence also aided the successful challenge of some of the disputed elections in various election tribunals. The significant role played by the civil society in managing the resultant crisis and conflict that greeted the elections, undoubtedly made the late President Umaru Yaru' Adua to concede and acknowledge publicly that the (2007 elections that brought him to power was characterized with irregularities and was flawed elections.

The civil society also helps in identifying and analyzing the overall conduct of the elections. Civil society also helps to encourage and strengthen good leadership and governance, thereby striving to eliminate conflicts in the society. Civil society strives to ensure regular, and periodic conduct of widely accepted elections. Civil society activities during the conduct of the 2007 elections covered observation, monitoring, challenging and candid report of their findings during elections. They also viciously contested the results of the elections. The umbrella coalition of civil society organization with the Nigerian bar Association even went ahead to declare nationwide strike and carried out mass protest as a result of the fraudulent manipulation of the 2007 elections. The civil society challenged the government in authority over interference in the free conduct of the elections and over its control of

Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The civil society also condemned the undue pressures on the judiciary by the presidency. The civil society have strengthened democracy, economic and political liberation in Nigeria, thus helping to manage the crisis that erupted in Nigeria after the 2007 elections to a tolerable level. Civil society is now a potent force in Nigeria politics.[12] It balances the state. It is an arena of social relations and communications between the citizens informed by public policy and law. It is a means of influencing the state, engaging in activities or reformation of the state and its policies. Civil society is essential to freedom and democracy, in contrast to the public domain of the state and public agencies. Civil society is a major window of interactions between the state and society in economic, social and political processes for changing political relations.

Civil society groups are performing numerous positive roles especially in different parts of Nigeria, as they are being constituted for different projects, where there is little social and cultural infrastructures to enshrine liberties, respect for laws, spirit of independence and compromise.

Civil society such as the existing professional associations are very active and socially responsive. The economic and gender based groups such as the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) and National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) are very vibrant segment of the society, with active participation in the socio-political process. Civil society have played useful roles in conflict management in Nigeria by

being in the vanguard for the challenge of underdevelopment, the struggle for democracy, good governance, the agitation for equity and justice among the component units of Nigeria. Prominent among them are the Yoruba Council, of Elders, Arewa consultative forum, Ohaneze Ndigbo, South-South Peoples Assembly etc. Civil society also perform vital functions in the economic, political and social sphere[13]. Civil society has constituted the platform for the resistance to the policies of the state that are obnoxious; such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Annulment of June 12 elections in 1993 and the petroleum sector deregulation efforts of the Federal Government.

Though, the government sees civil society groups as enemies, the civil society have also exerted pressure on the government by monitoring governmental practices/polices by fighting corruption, resisting state repression and militarization of conflicts such as the Niger Delta conflicts.

Civil society has been active in making inputs to draft legislations and the review of the 1999 constitution, full implementation of the Uwais electoral reforms, true federalism reforms, etc.

The role of civil society in conflict management in Nigeria rests on three tripods, the government, the organized private sector and civil society organization. The imperativeness of dialogue, consultations and mutually respectful co-operation among these three principal stakeholders in Nigeria is sine-qua-non for an effective civil society participation in conflict management in Nigeria. The role played by civil

society groups through the intervention programmes in broad spheres of conflict management and peace building cannot be relegated.[13] Therefore civil society groups must facilitate their entrance into the national, state and local spheres of policy making thereby strengthening their capacities to understand the policy processes, by creating a civil society advocacy group. Nigeria's nascent democracy has been more accommodating to even civil society groups that are autonomous and could likely challenge the state. The government is now receptive of policy suggestions from civil society. The democratic culture and governance in Nigeria since 1999 has strengthened the capacity of civil society in the resolution of conflicts and conflict management effectively.

Currently, civil society is regarded as the master organizational network with the capacity for resolving many problems bothering on reforms, good governance, development and democracy.

The existence of civil society and effective sharing of the public domain have huge implication for governance especially in the areas of freedom human rights, public welfare and public policy. Civil society has effectively helped to consolidate democracy by building, promoting and strengthening rule of law, citizen awareness, participation and state responsiveness. Civil society since pre colonial period has constituted the avenue for participation, the channel for information and communication, the means for affecting and contending with the public realm, the basis for public opinion, the agent of socio economic

assistance and of control of social existence and the cushion against the adverse.

The intensification of state abuses, pervasive corruption and repression coupled with economic crisis such as SAP during, Babangida, Abacha regimes, the killing of Ken Saro-wiwa provoked the proliferation of Civil Society Groups. While the collapse of social services and infrastructure apart from generating restiveness have further exposed Nigeria to Civil society challenges. The effectiveness of civil society is also clearly manifest in the struggle for democratization by the civil society and pro-democracy groups, such as the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) Association of Democratic Lawyers (ADL) and United Action for Democracy (UAD) etc formed in the 1990s. These, civil society groups have consistently and effectively remained in the orbit of state and democratic initiatives. One can emphatically assert that civil society will continue to be effectively relevant in the socio-political events of Nigeria. Civil society not only complement, but infact constitute an alternative agent and umbrella for social engineering development and the much desired change.

Due to the inherent fire brigade approach of governmental institutions in conflict management, there is need for alternative institutions such as the civil society to effectively resolve and manage conflicts.

Besides, the exercise of state power has been characterized by widespread corruption and mismanagement, politicization, prolonged

exclusion of ethnic, religious, social and political groups from the political process, state repression of ethnic and religious minorities. The result has been the erosion of legitimacy, widespread dissatisfaction and discord over the distribution and uses of state power, public distrust, conflicts and violence.

Civil society will always serve as an effective alternative platform for conflict management in Nigeria. Civil society has always been and remains a vital element of our political economic and social frame work.[14] Its tremendous growth of numbers varieties and objectives make them vital in solving the issues that undermine our nation.

Civil society is a means for opinion molding, public policy generation and social responsibility. Civil society is vital for setting and influencing public opinion, information and awareness. Civil society can mobilize the citizenry in support of dialogue, negotiated settlements and de-emphasis of extra – legal and violent instruments of conducting conflicts. Civil society also monitor governance, identify and bring to the notice of the state issues and cases that cause disaffections and agitate for the inclusiveness of deprived and hitherto excluded groups in the distribution of state resources and actions.

Civil society also play considerable role in the management of conflicts. As a neutral party, it can be a platform for resolving conflicts. Civil society also assist or participate in the management of negotiated settlements of conflicts, intervene to bring warring parties to the

negotiating table, propose solutions, secure deals from the parties and ensure the implementation of agreements.

The media segment of civil society is particularly useful in conflict management. It is a platform through which civil society and other forces discuss, mobilize, educate, communicate and intermingle ideas.

Even in post conflict management, civil society helps in releasing hostages and ameliorating hostilities, implementation of agreements and raising alarms that threaten peace.

CIVIL SOCIETY'S SUCCESSES IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

There is no doubt that civil society have recorded fundamental successes in conflict management in various sector of the society, apart the Jos Crisis and 2007 elections already highlighted above. During the annulment of the June 12th 1993 presidential election which is still widely regarded by Nigerians and the international community as the freest in Nigerian history. The civil Society successfully mobilize the populace against the annulment by organizing demonstrations, protests and strikes against it. They resisted the military government of General Babangida and General Abacha. They also sensitize and help gather international support against the annulment. That subsequently earned Nigeria sanctions from the international community, thus helping to erode the legitimacy of the Abacha Military Junta and the advent of the third Republic in Nigeria.[15]

The civil society organization also successfully killed the ill-fated third term succession bid of former president Olusegun Obasanjo in

Nigeria. The Civil society successfully mobilizes and sensitize the populace, the mass media, and the national Assembly to abort the third term bid. The civil society openly condemned such selfish ambition and mustered international support against such an obnoxious and inordinate crude hunger for power. Thus the civil society killed and defeated the third term miss-adventure before its arrival.

The poor way, the federal government managed the health crisis of late President Umaru Yar Adua, represents another unique opportunity, for the manifestation of the successes recorded by the civil society in conflict management. If not for the effective managerial role of the civil society, Nigeria would have been plunged into a civil war occasioned by vacuum in leadership. The civil society repeatedly stated that Nigerians ought to know the health status of their president, and that the office of the president was not a personal estate or a hereditary title. They condemned the action of the former president for failing to handle over, even when it was obvious that he was incapacitated by ill health to continue to function as the president of Nigeria. The various agitations, and protests by civil society help to galvanize international support against such, reprehensible and illegal conduct. Hence a major disastrous conflict/crisis was averted in Nigeria. The clamour by civil society groups for electoral reforms after the protests, and clamour for good electoral best practices after the infamous 2007 elections, gave birth to the Uwai's electoral panel reforms today. This panel came out with positive far-reaching recommendation to improve the electoral process.

It is the persistent cry, role and effective mobilization, of the Civil society that Professor Attahiru Jega, an acclaimed activist was recently appointment as the new Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) boss.

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC), Federal Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, and federal government of Nigeria Amnesty programmes are overwhelming credit of the civil society and the citizens who drew the International community and the citizens to the plights of the Niger Deltans.

Civil society have also achieved great successes by increasing the standard of living in Nigeria. Today, there is the national poverty eradication programme of the federal government, as well as the various poverty alleviation programmes of the respective state governments/local government. Civil society such as the Idia Renaissance championed by Mrs Eki Igbinedion, has extensively contributed to the abatement of trafficking in persons. Today Nigerian commercial sex workers are consistently deported from Europe.

Therefore, one can safely assert that civil society have recorded a plethora of successes in conflict management over conflicts/crisis that had adversely plagued the nation.

CIVIL SOCIETY'S CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The last limb of the paper shall be centered on the challenges and prospects of civil society in conflict management. As regards the challenges, Civil society is a realm of fragmentation and a source of

tension, conflict and tumult, as it constitutes a site of struggle for the expression of differences, interests and identities.

Civil societies are sometimes weak, underdeveloped, divided by ethnicity, manipulated by foreign donors, suppressed by authoritarian states, unable to influence the state and to play effective roles in democratic sustenance.

They lack the necessary capacity to challenge the state and its custodians. Civil society is not national and united, civil society has been unable to attain broad mobilization of all sections of the society.

Civil society lack autonomous and self sustaining capabilities which makes it fall prey to either the state or become dependent on foreign donors. There are challenges of crippling poverty, corruption, nepotism, parochialism, opportunism, and ethnicism.

Civil society's such as Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) , Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Muslems Society of Nigeria are not effectively united and efficient democratic organizations. Their internal structure lack civility, democratic tenets, such as participation, consensus and competition. Civil society reflect and articulate sectional, class, and ethnic loyalties. Consequently, civil society is becoming an arena of intense conflict between civil groups of organized interest along afore stated line. Primordial passions have undermined the effectiveness of civil society by injecting divisiveness and disagreements that have precluded the formation of broad platforms for national struggles. Civil groups could

be exclusive and intolerant to differences, thus unable to promote peaceful accommodation of pluralism. The fate of civil society became worse during the period of military rule. The military was intolerant of civil society and restricted the space of autonomous action and civil rights. While the harassment and intimidation of civil society leaders designed to weaken and undermine civil society was pervasive during the military era. The intensifications of state abuse, pervasive corruption and repression are also challenges to civil society.[16]

Some civil societies have pursued primordial, specialized interest and agenda, while others have become militant, violent, and uncivil, thus becoming a perversion of the ideals and methods of civil society Civil society groups in Nigeria have been engulfed in numerous challenges. The civil society are filled with proliferation, duplication, frequent squabbles, factionalism, conflicts, arrogance, ambition, manipulation, personal differences, cultural and regional sentiments, squabbles, lack of internal democracy, transparency, poor organization and management.

Thus the challenges of civil society groups are many. Civil society can be an actor or an antagonist in a conflict situation. In the Niger Delta conflict, several civil society groups have been actors and even antagonists. The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) were actors in the Niger Delta conflict. In the Itsekiri/Ijaw conflicts in Warri, many civil groups in both ethnic groups were active participants. Civil society are poorly organized, and they lack resources.

One major challenge is their dependency and being unable to define their agenda, without their donors and supporters, hence they fall prey to either the state or foreign donors. A focus on conflict management would rather depend on the foreign donors than the civil groups themselves. Most of them do not possess the capacity and resources for effective conflict management roles. Hence they are not presently in a position of strength in relation to the management of conflict. There is also the problem of leadership of the civil society network. The absence of leadership creates a vacuum as to the level of activism, social action and the charting of new directions.

Another challenge is that the government may take side with either of the combatants or factions, thereby frustrating civil society opportunity for mediation, dialogue and collaboration, hence the civil society may be intimidated, harassed, repressed and disillusioned. One reason for the violent reaction against the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta is the perception of government support in the case of ethnic and communal conflicts, as in the case of Jos crisis. The increasing solidity of ethnic, religious and cultural identities, coupled with their increasing mobilization and politicization of their identities is a major threat to the role of civil society in the management of conflicts.

Other challenges encountered by Civil society in conflict management are:

1. Language barriers due to vastness of the Nigerian Landscape
2. Illiteracy among the populace

3. Government high – handedness
4. Corruption among civil society offices
5. Siphoning of foreign grants, as well as over reliance on foreign donors
6. Weak structures, lack of planning, co-ordination, and fragmentation of several NGOs
7. Lack of true federalism, Unemployment, insecurity, high crime rates such as armed Robbery, kidnapping which are potential dangers
8. Financial uncertainty
9. Dialogue not fully exploited,
10. Logistic
11. Lack of skilled manpower.
12. Nepotism, religion and ethnicity
13. Uneven development, and distribution of resources
14. The various mass media are still controlled by the state. So information by civil society are heavily censored
15. Different terrains, and vastness of the Nigerian geographical entity.
16. The police, military and other security apparatus are brutal, violent, and harsh to Civil society organizations members.[17]

Civil society also possess visible weak linkages, inadequate civil education programmes and community development programmes. The relationship between civil society and successive government in Nigeria

constitutes an impediment to an effective civil society participation in conflict management. The legal and policy environment for civil society organizations are still ill defined and very unclear. Most civil society groups lack the professionalism required for conflict management. One major challenge of the Nigerian civil society has been their urban base in both organization and mobilization, whereas a significant percentage of Nigeria's conflict are rural based. Civil society also over emphasize civil and political rights in contrast to social and economic ones.

Civil Society groups have immense prospects, if and when their afore-mentioned challenges are effectively tackled. The prospects of Civil Society in Conflict management are underscored below:

(1) Civil society will be able to settle many conflicts bothering on democratic reforms governance and development. In the nearest future, it is reasonably foreseen that civil society will help in setting the parameters for public behaviour, accommodation and mediation of differences.

(2) Civil society's ability to manage conflict of different dimensions has raised their prospects.

(3) With increase partnership with international donor agencies such as USAID, DFID, CIDA etc, civil society are now more relevant in the scheme of things such as poverty alleviation.

(4) With the re-emergence of democracy in Nigeria, coupled with constitutional guaranteed freedom of association, and other Civil

rights civil society are now recognised as alternative network for providing relief materials and conflict management.

(5) Increased funding from government and other international donors have further enhanced their prospects.

(6) Training and professionalism among the Civil Society groups particularly with their ability to identify with the Local populace will earn them more prospects to survive and the ability to stand the test of time.

(7) The United Nations (UN) also recognized the potent capacity of Civil Society organizations as effective partners, this have increased their prospects as well, in health, poverty, capacity building and rural development etc.

(8) Provided that there are poverty, health, environmental, educational issues, the prospect of civil society organization will remain bright since they are adequately involved in the implementation/advocacy of quality health care services, employment generation, capacity building, quality education etc.

(9) The enactment of adequate laws and implementation of good policies by the government will also help sustain the prospects of civil society groups. Civil society still have the prospects of strengthening rule of law, empowerment, positive good of the society. Civil Society still possesses the prospects of awakening cultural passions and patriotism.

(10) Civil society fought the military government tenaciously to return the country to civil rule, thus aiding the exit of Babangida and Abacha after the annulment of June 12 election. Thus civil society have significant prospects, if democratic rule remains.

Civil society is also emergingly heightening awakening of ethnic, cultural, communal passions and patriotism. Civil society can help in mediating between the state – society relations, thereby moderating state excesses. Civil society are channel for information, communication, basis of public opinion, agent of social economic assistance, control of social existence and the cushion against the adverse. Civil society organizations such as the existing professional associations are agents of activism and social responsiveness. Civil society are channel for equity, justice, struggle for good governance and development[18].

Their current involvement in divergent facets of the society and future activism recommend them for leading position in negotiation and resolutions of diverse conflicts threatening Nigeria. Again, civil society is a potentially strong agent of information dissemination, where opinions, policies are traded and molded. This is vital for influencing public opinion and raising public awareness. Civil society play prospective roles in eliminating conflicts, due to its diversity, relationship, and interest, civil society groups can cut across and weaken difference/conflicts. They will mobilize the citizenry in support of dialogue, negotiated settlements and de-emphasize extra-legal and violent instruments of conducting conflicts, If allowed to function under

a peaceful and conducive atmosphere, thereby increasing their prospects.

Civil society is now adopting the promotion of peaceful and non-violent resolution of conflicts as part of its objective. The Center for Peace in Africa (CPA), for instance, is already making general contributions on strategies for managing conflicts

The civil society groups have much prospects particularly in the realm of appeals for peace or condemnation of potentially conflicting situations. The Christian Association of Nigeria and various other ecumenical groups have consistently called on Nigerians to exhibit religious or ethnic tolerance and particularly to allow religious harmony between Christians and Muslims to reign.[19]

Considering the rate of conflicts and violence, they constitute a viable option outside the government, that can effectively prevent, curtail and manage conflicts. There is dire need for the generation of new groups of NGOS in the areas of conflict management. This will bring new skills, prospects, competence and capacity in conflict management. The conflict project would require support by local agencies and foreign donors. This is to meet the challenges of new skills, knowledge, capacity buildings and new orientations, to enhance the prospects of civil society groups. Media personnel needs training and capacity building in the coverage of conflicts. The prospects of civil society groups in conflict intervention and peace building cannot be quantified.[20] Civil society groups must ensure their entrance into

national, state and local policy making mechanism, thereby consolidating their capacities and prospects. They must also be pro-active. Antagonism between the civil society and the NGO section of the civil society must disappear. When they co-operate and tolerate each other, they will be most likely to challenge the state, thereby enhancing their prospects in our nascent democracy.[21] There is no gainsaying that the emergence of the 3rd Republic in Nigeria in 1999 have strengthened the capacity of civil society for greater positioning, prospecting in conflict management in Nigeria. The lack of professionalism alluded to civil society organizations earlier seems now an untenable and a contestable assertion in the 21st century.[22] The number of civil society organizations that have developed expertise in certain definite fields and areas such as HIV/AIDS, Human Rights, peace, reconciliation etc have increased. One clear and unique measure of empowerment of civil society is the extension of civil society tentacle of professionalism into all strata of complex emergencies, such as humanitarian, relief, mediation, conciliation, monitoring of ceasefire, demobilization, refugees, reconciliation and establishment of an embracing local administration etc. The NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) are concertedly mobilizing, for conflict management, having realized the urgent need to harness their potentials and mutually co-operate.[23]

It can therefore be seen that civil society have great prospect in conflict management.

CONCLUSION

Conflict is a product of incompatibility of goals. Conflict management does not only refers to the methods of bringing conflicts to an end, but ability to see an impending conflict and the deployment of measures for its prevention. Nigeria is today faced with multi facet and unabated conflicts. The recurrent nature of these conflicts is obvious inability of the government to successfully manage these conflicts. These conflicts are huge threats to Nigeria's nascent democracy.

The limited successes recorded by conflict management strategies adopted by the government increasingly led to call for alternative means of conflict management. The civil society is a vital advocate of democratic, good governance reforms and development reforms/principles.

The civil society plays significant and tangible roles in conflict management particularly as agents of stability, education, mobilization, culture of civility dialogue, conflict prevention, and peace building, negotiation, humanitarian efforts and promoting rule of law.

As assessment of the contemporary civil society involvement in conflict management shows weak structures, ineffectual efforts, poor funding, ill-leadership, poor organizations and lack of resources, compounded by the government whose style is to considerably weaken civil society as instrument for conflict management.

This paper contends that the functions of civil society in conflict management can be further enhanced. The structural, financial, logistic

and capacity base of civil society need to be strengthened and improved to transform their potentials to potent facilitators of conflict management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The financial capacity of the civil social groups should be further enhanced by the various foreign donors, as well as the various level of donors including the different tiers of government in Nigeria.
2. The manpower, organizational logistical and structural capacities of civil society need to be enhanced and adequately strengthened.
3. The populace should be more educated and sensitized, so as to increase the level of awareness of the general public and the international community of their functions. There should be more collabboration, partnership and engagement between civil society and the Nigerian government.
4. The government should not antagonize, civil society groups. Government should be more tolerant of their criticisms and be more accommodative. Civil society should develop skilled expertise in more areas of human endeavor e.g. HIV/AIDS, human rights etc., engage in humanitarian efforts, mediation and conciliation, monitoring of ceasefire, rehabilitations, reconciliation's, networking, and information sharing.

5. Civil society should be transparent, accountable and well managed. They should reach the grass root (rural areas) and relocate to crisis prone rural areas instead of urban areas for effective conflict management. Civil society should do grass root advocacy and mobilization.

6. Civil society should approach conflict management in a holistic manner. From a complex peace building operation perspective, Traditional and non-formal methods of managing conflicts should be adopted for conflict resolution and management for more efficacy.

7. Civil society groups must be endowed to identify early signs of conflicts that are imminent. Civil society should be pre-disposed to post – conflict peace building maximization e.g. promotion of cross cultural marriages, festivals, open local administrations, developmental projects and sporting activities.

8. The civil society should also use the mass media, such as the press and electronic media to give wider coverage to its activities in the management of conflict situations.

9. Government should avoid the use of autocratic style while implementing decisions and inculcate democratic leadership style, which takes into consideration the wishes and suggestions of the civil society. The resolutions of any conflict should be such that will not leave behind grudges between the

government and the civil society. There should be openness and transparency on the part of the government.

10. For conflict to be managed, to a level of tolerable friction, the government and civil society should try as possible to eliminate any policy that would build an environment for conflicts. Government should enact laws and formulate policies to maximize the routine involvement of civil society in management conflicts.

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