CONFLICT EARLY WARNING RESPONSE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is currently facing existential threat due to myriads of conflict situations in the country. Attacks by Boko Haram insurgents, cross border criminals, bandits and herders coupled with kidnappings and armed robbery have resulted in deaths, internal displacement, livelihood disruption and destruction of property. Government seems overwhelmed by the increased spate of violent conflicts in the country. Existing mechanisms for conflict management and prevention have failed to mitigate the outbreak of conflict in the country. This paper thus examined the imperative of conflict early warning response system as mechanism for conflict management and prevention in Nigeria. It interrogates Nigeria's experience from the perspective of conflict management and peacebuilding within the context of early warning. The paper submits that early warning response system has the potential for conflict management and prevention in Nigeria. Thus, the paper argues that in order to mitigate the various conflicts facing the country, it is imperative to increase the use of conflict early warning response system across the country. The paper recommends strengthening of early warning systems at the community level as well as quick response to early warning signals.

Introduction

Violent conflicts continue to undermine human security in many African societies. It is certain that violent conflicts and insecurity pose a great threat to human development and progress (Institute for Security Studies, 2008). The Nigerian situation is pathetically entrenched in our colonial past. Thus, Chinwokwu (2012c:425) argues that "because the Nigerian nation was built on a faulty foundation of suspicion, intimidation, fear, violence or threat of violence and terrorism, stability, peace and oneness had eluded us as a nation". Consequently, every small misunderstanding or statement is immediately perceived wrongly with intense acrimony resulting to conflict tension and insecurity. In other words, there is too much hatred filled with suspicion of each other and so every ethnic group in Nigeria (no matter how small) is always on the look out to avoid being suppressed by another. This is true, because historically, "violence was the means used to impose colonial domination" on the people (Akinwale&Aderinto, 2012:65). It is still the same modus operandi that is been used in the country by the neo-colonialists and imperialist stooges parading the country as our political leaders. Anugwom (2010:214) described this kind of leaders as "opportunistic political and economic elite" whose power base are fanned in the ambers of violent conflicts.

It is important to note that Nigeria's colonial past is still haunting the country with the implication that since 1963, violent conflicts have dominated the geographical landscape of the nation with greater intensity, pattern and dynamics. The current trends emanating from the emergence of militia groups and religious fundamentalist coupled with suicide bombers have posed great national insecurity and weakened the structure of the state. Kwaja (2009) was right when he observed that as far back as pre-independence, Nigeria has been entangled with one kind of conflict or the other. In fact, we can aptly aver that the return of democracy in 1999 till date violent ethno-religious conflicts and terrorism have become a common instrument or tool for bargaining and expressing disaffection over the affairs of the country. The implication has been massive destruction of lives and property. Notwithstanding, its plurality and heterogeneity, violent conflicts occupy its landmark. More so, the state capacity to build synergies to address conflicting issues has been lacking. Where they have been employed, it had come late or at wrong time when lives and property might have been destroyed and wounds yet to heal. Many of the current conflicts in Nigeria would have being avoided if early warning systems are either in place or adhered to. It is important to stress that prevention of violent conflicts should form the bedrock of any early warning mechanisms. Utilising content and narrative review of relevant publications, this paper examines the imperatives of conflict early warning response system as mechanism for conflict management, prevention and peace-building in Nigeria.

Conceptualisation of Terms

Throughout history, human beings have sought to warn and be warned of future calamities. From shrill-voices of soothsayers to cold war military strategists, the objective has always been to accurately predict impending dangers, usually in order to avoid or be better prepared (Nwaneri&Uwakwe, 2017). Early warning mechanisms has become prominent in contemporary conflict prevention and management strategies. Early warning refers to the communication of information on a crisis area, analysis of that information and the development of a potential, timely, strategic response options to the crisis (Adelman, 1998). Haye (2014) notes that early warning is basically concerned with prevention, mitigation or management of violent conflicts within a geographical landscape.

The United Nations introduced early warning as mechanism for conflict prevention and management in 1992. This was sequel to the report, '*An Agenda for Peace*' released by Boutros BoutrosGhali (former UN Secretary General), which highlighted the link between humanitarian actions and the peace process. In the report, Boutros Ghali outlined the 'valuable work' of the early warning system on environmental threats, the risk of nuclear accidents, natural disasters, mass movements of populations, the threat of famine and the spread of disease. He stressed the need to strengthen arrangements in such a manner that information from these sources can be synthesized with political indicators to assess whether a threat to peace exists and to analyse what action might be taken by the United Nation to alleviate it (Amao, Uzodike, Ettang&Tugizimana, 2014). African Union and ECOWAS have also adopted early warning mechanism as frameworks for conflict prevention. Specifically, early warning is among the 14 objectives of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework.

Conflict is seen as a situation between two or more individuals in which one individual observe that another individual has negatively affected, or is about to take actions that will adversely affect his interest. Conflict is described as the resort to the use of force and armed struggle in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interest and goals by contending groups or individual (Oraegbunam, 2006). In other words, for conflict to occur, individuals must perceive a situation against each other or among themselves irrespective of the accurate or inaccurate nature of that perception of the situation. Nonetheless, whenever such perceptions are held, there are usually negative and the contending matter must be something parties involved have a common interest or desire. Most often; none of the contending parties would like to be short changed in the matter. Thus, Shehu (2007) argues that conflict is inevitable in social life process and even in well-developed human societies such as United States and Britain conflict occurs.

Uzuegbunam (2010:80) notes that conflict evolves in phases such as "early conflict indicators, conflict resistance, explosive or exhaustive conflict and the most-deadly

spiral and the highest level of violence". Conflict managers must be wary of the early conflict indicators in order to assiduously ensure that it does not erupt into unmanageable crisis. Despite its negative connotation, VanTongeran (2005) argues that conflict is intertwined with the notion of change, and can be embraced as a way of creating a proactive solution to an existing problem. The key to successful change is in avoiding armed and direct conflict or violence. It is this concept that guides peace building theory to work towards an improved future among all the parties in a conflict. Conflict may also be described as "a period of intense pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups" (Reychler, 2001:15). Henderson (2005:4) contends that conflict is a "sustained violent clash between opposing groups, which may or may not involve fatalities".

Conflict prevention is the process of controlling and managing strained relationships early enough (timely and promptly) to avoid the threats of a conflict. This calls for effective, proper and timely use of early warning mechanisms or systems to contain and respond to early threats of violence and thereby save the situation from escalating out of unmanageable proportion. This is premised on the notion that prevention is better than cure. However, extant literature on conflict prevention have failed to agree on any acceptable definition of conflict prevention (Best, 2008; Carment& Schnabel, 2003; Munuera, 1994; Lund, 1994), while others have referred conflict prevention as 'preventive diplomacy' (Lund, 2002; Boutrous-Ghali, 1996). According to Munuera (1994:3) conflict prevention is "the application of non-constraining measures that are primarily diplomatic in nature". The onus is on the non-constraining measures which imply that a compromise of 50-50 should be adopted to ensure peace is achieved without the application of force or intimidation. In other words, it is not a win-win or loss affairs.

Carment and Schnabel (2003:11) see conflict prevention as "the medium and long term proactive operational or structural strategy undertaken by a variety of actors, intended to identify and create the enabling conditions for a stable and more predictable international security environment". This view is predicated on networks of intelligence gathering aimed at preventing conflict at short- and long-term period at the international level. It ignores conflict prevention at the domestic level, but pointed out one of the main issues in policing which is proactive policing. Lund (2002:117) defined conflict prevention as "any structural or intercessory means to keep intrastate or interstate tension and disputes from escalating into significant violence and use of armed forces, to strengthen the capabilities of potential parties to violent conflict for resolving such disputes peacefully, and to progressively reduce the underlying problems that produce these issues and disputes". This definition recognizes the part of structural provisions and mediations as ways of reducing conflict and enshrines peace amongst contending groups in the society. It also downplayed the

use of force in ensuring peace in troubled areas of the society. The typical example of what Nigerian government is doing in the North East Nigeria to stem the outrage of Boko Haram insurgency. But we must stress that the use of combatant force to checkmate conflict must be pursued with caution and as a last resort when all other peaceful actions failed.

The concept of peace-building refers to activities, efforts and interventions which are directed at alleviating the sufferings caused as a result of breakdown in the social structure. In other words, it is the attempt to remedy the trigger and root causes of conflict. It is an attempt to surmount the structural, relational and cultural contradictions which lie at the root of conflict in order to underline the processes of peacemaking and peacekeeping (Best, 2007). Peacebuilding is a reactive strategy aimed at engaging multiple agencies to interact towards solving socio-economic challenges in order to have conducive environment for sustainable peace. According to Reychler (2001:12), peace-building is "a synergy on social and economic development through multiple organizations". He went on to say that it is fundamentally targeted at transforming conflict in a constructive way to creating environment conducive enough to sustainable peace. Thus, successful peace-building is that which encompasses a complex process that is truly interdisciplinary and which covers such areas that include: direct security, economic development, social rehabilitation and political reform (Jeong, 2005).

For Lederach (1997:84), peacebuilding is "more than post accord reconstruction and is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships". Boutrous-Ghali (1992) contends that peacebuilding is an action aimed at identifying and supporting structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. This definition is very implicative in many conflict situations across the globe. Conflicts have been seen to break out even when it seems that peace building was gaining grounds in many troubled societies. The United Nations (1992) Agenda for Peace described peace building as a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing the root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. It is important to reiterate that peacebuilding process have failed to yield positive and lasting peace because the root causes of many violent conflicts have been properly addressed by stakeholders at the end of a peace building and reconciliation processes. The result has been relapse and recurrence of violence in such situations thereby rendering peace building and reconstruction process untenable. For peacebuilding to make sense

and be sustained, the root causes of conflict must be fully addressed.

Theoretical Framework

There are various theoretical perspectives that could be used in explaining conflict and peace building in the Nigerian context. One conceptual theoretical framework that provides an insight into the Nigerian case study is the human needs theory as articulated by John Burton to the study of social conflict. Burton (1990) explains that in analyzing conflicts one must distinguish among interests, values and needs. In trying to resolve conflicts it should be understood that only interests are negotiable in the short term; while values can only change over the long run in an atmosphere of security and nondiscrimination, and needs cannot be negotiated away under any circumstances (Burton 1990: 36). For Burton, the implications of these formulations are far reaching. For example, it suggests that there are limits to the extent to which the human person, acting separately or within a wider ethnic or national community, can be marginalized or manipulated, and that there are human developmental needs that must be satisfied and catered for by institutions, if these institutions are to be stable, and if societies are to be significantly free of conflicts. Thetheory of needs is very relevant to the Nigerian situation especially if juxtaposed with the various conflicts in the country. The above reviewed theory pointed at several reasons as the basis of conflict and insecurity in Nigeria, but failed to expose the veil behind the conflict – the inner struggle between the rich and the poor, the owners of production and the workers/labourers, the employer and employee and so many other socio-economic relationships in the society. In other words, the economy plays a vital role in determining the kind of political or social relations which exist in the society.

Conflict Management and Peacebuilding: The Nigerian Experience

Conflict management is "the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in the conflict. It covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict, by being proactive. It encompasses conflict limitation, containment, and litigation" (Best, 2007, p.101). According to Okolie (2009), "the fundamental processes involved in conflict management include: grassroots community-based activities, good governance, communication, collaboration, negotiation, conciliation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication and crisis management which at times could involve the use of law enforcement agencies to maintain the peace" (cited in Nnamani & Okpara, 2010:105).

The Nigerian nation has witnessed various dimensions of conflict situations since its birth as an independent state in 1960. Many of these conflict situations have threatened the very foundation of the nation, yet providence has kept the country united and strong. There are many instances of troubled

waters that the Nigerian state has carefully ferried across to the shore without its boat capsizing. According to Chinwokwu (2012c:420), "insecurity and social vices resulting from political and religious tensions among rivalry ethnic groups dominated the geographical landscape of the country culminating to the present state of terrorism and acts of violence being experienced". Awoniyi (2013:125), noted that "the phenomenon of conflict and its attendant effects with our day-to-day struggles over inter-locking agitations on issues like primordial ties, national resources distribution, power sharing, ethnic tolerance, social justice and welfare should be critically examined" in order to fashion a road map for peaceful co-existence and harmony in Nigeria. We may thus inquire, "how has Nigeria managed its conflicts all these years to ensure the spinal cord of the Nigerian state is not broken or damaged beyond repairs"

Nigerian state has become increasingly involved in the management of conflict situations through military engagements, economic blockade and blackmail. These were the conflict management strategies that was deployed during the Nigerian – Biafran War of 1967-1970 in addition to the total war of annihilation carried out against the Igbo nation. This war of attrition has been on-going against the Igbo nation despite the declaration of "no victory no vanquished" by the Nigerian state.

In the area of ethnic and religious pluralism, Kwaja (2009:110) observed that the Nigerian state has managed the situation through the following ways:

1. Establishment of relevant agencies and Commission for the promotion of inter-faith cooperation and dialogue.
2. In the design and report of population census, questions of religious or ethnic identity were downplayed;
3. The establishment of the Federal Character Commission (FCC) in the Nigerian constitution, so as to ensure inclusivity of all the states of the federation in appointments, admission and promotion among others;
4. The application of the principle of the North –South power sharing arrangement. For instance, if the President comes from the North, the Vice President would no doubt come from the South and vice versa; and
5. Emphasis on the non-registration of political parties with ethnic or religious colorations so as not to heighten ethnic or religious apathy in the electoral process

Furthermore, the Nigerian state has employed state of emergencies, amnesty and dialogues in the management of conflicts in the country. The emergences of ethnic militancy in the Niger Delta, the rise of Boko Haram in the North East Zone of Nigeria are instances. This is in addition to legislations that proscribes terrorism, kidnapping and other acts of violence across the country. In most of these instances, the

use of dialogue had not solved the situations at first instance. Nonetheless, dialogue tends to be effective when conflicting communities, individuals and groups have flexed their muscles and tested each other's strength in one way or the other. After that time, everyone will be tired and willing to accept dialogue in resolving whatever conflict. It is important to emphasise that in most instances, the use of force in the management of conflict had not yielded the desired positive results other than massive waste of human lives and properties. Potential causes of conflicts in Nigeria have increased and intensified to a large extent posing greater problems for conflict management. Nigeria has recently engaged in diplomatic dialogue with neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger, Benin, and Cameroun with motive of addressing the threats posed by Boko Haram insurgents, terrorists and cross border bandits.

Imperatives of Conflict Early Warning for Conflict Management, Prevention and Peacebuilding in Nigeria

Early warning refers to "the communication of information on a crisis area, analysis of that information and the development of a potential, timely, strategic response options to the crisis" (Adelman, 1998:52). According to Haye (2014), early warning is basically concerned with prevention, mitigation or management of violent conflicts within a geographical landscape. Haye went on to distinguish between early warning system and intelligence system. He argued that early warning is not concerned with a direct threat to the gatherer or analyzer of the information, or those contemplating a response. However, we argue that there is no significant difference between them. It all depends on the mode of gathering the information and the prevailing security situation at the time of sourcing the information. Intelligence gathering however, does not always involve risk or threat to the gatherer unless it is covert intelligence (undercover, secret or spy work in which individuals doing it are not supposed to be known or identified).

Both early warning and intelligence involves the use of anticipatory initiatives or removing criminogenic social conditions that breed violence or conflicts in a society. This is their meeting point. In that case, information on social situations are carefully gathered, assessed, interpreted and if the social actions have antecedents towards violent actions, such social conditions are stopped to avoid conflicts or crisis situations. By these reports, actions are carried out to prevent what might have become a major disaster. This is what we consider as early warning, the ability to forestall unhealthy social conditions from spreading or escalating into uncontrollable situations by acting timely to contain conflicts from breeding into major disaster. The process of gathering this information need not be in secret or threat of the individual safety. This paper submits that the key to early warning lies in the prompt action of preventing conflict issues from escalating beyond control.

The development of early warning systems as a strategy for conflict management has gained currency across the world. In most countries, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have played a vital role in the development of a framework for conflict early warning and response. Nigeria has benefitted from their experience and expertise of gathering information on the political, socio-economic and security aspects of the community (Haye, 2007). The fundamental reason for this is not unconnected with the fact that CSOs are basically grass rooted. Foster and Mattner (2006) highlighted seven peace building roles associated with Civil Society Organizations. These are: protection; monitoring and early warning; advocacy; socialization; social cohesion; intermediation and facilitation; and service protection. We reiterate that for early warning system to be effective, it must be understandable, trusted by and relevant to the communities that they serve. In this regard, early warning system must have a local content that is domestically relevant to the geographical area where it is applied and managed.

Radice and Tekle (2011) identified basic requirements for an effective conflict early warning response system for conflict management, prevention and peacebuilding which include but not limited to the following:

1. Individuals and institutions have knowledge about what is threatening them;
2. People are able to monitor, analyze and forecast the hazards;
3. Communicating or disseminating a change in threats, alerts and warnings is possible; and
4. There is sufficient local capacity to respond to warnings.

There are various early warning models that countries across the globe have adopted to suit their local needs in the management of conflicts. We shall briefly discuss only a few of them. The International Crisis Group Early Warning Model is anchored on the analysis of what is happening and why. They are basically centered in the collection and analysis of information from the local field and are at home with the language and culture of the people. They ensure timely release of information to the appropriate authority for immediate action to prevent conflicts from escalating to dangerous dimension. This model is applicable in over 50 countries (Haye, 2007). There is also the West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network (WARN) which is concerned with human security. The ECOWAS has effectively utilized this model in solving and managing conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. It is important to note that the ECOWAS early warning mechanism is anchored on the United Nations Council Resolution 1625 and is a core component of the elements of the comprehensive conflict prevention framework (Ibrahim &Ndongo, 2008; Ndinga-Muvumba&Lamin, 2006: Miller & King, 2005).

it must be noted that an important component which early warning system should address is the mandate to provide incident and trend analysis report on peace and security as well as real-time preventive response options. This will make policy makers to ensure predictability that will facilitate interventions towards averting, diffusing and innovatively transforming delicate situations of conflicts, insecurity, disruptions and disasters. According to Ndinga-Muvumba and Lamin (2006), early warning system has intended to collect and analyze data systematically as it occurs in real-time. The implication of this is that early warning information must be processed timely, accurately, validly, reliably, verifiably and must reflect the actual on-going event within a community especially Nigeria. The system's methodology for gathering information is an open system. Early warning system is adversely affected by lack of prompt preventive response actions which leave a gap that may generate into uncontrollable situation.

Recommendations

Effective and functional conflict management aids the prevention of violent conflicts. Moreso, early warning response systems results in conflict prevention. The potentials and imperatives of early warning as mechanism for conflict management and prevention of government in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. Thus, this study makes the following recommendations:

Effective management of conflict and peacebuilding in the society should be anchored on efficient and sustained communication between government and stakeholders. The government should engage non-governmental agencies within communities that will help in sourcing information regarding any conflict sensitive issue within communities. Early warning data banks should be created for the analysis of such information and every information received should be investigated promptly; to determine its veracity or otherwise.

One of the issues that can weaken any early warning signal is the rate of response. Efforts must be put in place to ensure that early warning signals are responded to promptly and decisively in order to checkmate any unpleasant security situation within any locality. Thus, pro-active preventive strategy should form the nucleus of any peace building approach in tackling conflict.

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