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CONFLICTS AND INTER-GROUP RELATIONS IN NIGERIA: WHAT WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria existed as tribal groups before the colonial era. With the diplomacy of the British, coupled with the Berlin Conference of 1885, the partitioning of Africa for great exploitation, ethnic groups and ethnic rivalries emerged as part of colonial creations. The disarticulation, disorientation and perpetual subjugation suffered by the people culminated in a style of governance which metamorphosed into great enmity, distrust and suspicion among the major regions of the country. Today, this has resulted to an acceptable constitution, to issues of boundary adjustments, challenges of resource allocation, scramble for the nation's resources, followed with the question of leadership at the highest level. This forced cohabitation has led to many crises as witnessed in the Nigerian civil war, ethnic and religious militias, the Niger-Delta situation, the Bakassi Peninsula, for which there seems to be no clear solution in sight. This paper examines the dangers of perceived breakups and fragmentations, which could lead to vulnerability from external aggressors. It also considers the fact that unity, tolerance and peaceful co-existence could be the way forward for a better, stronger and prosperous Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of independence, African States hoped for political and socio-economic development. Unfortunately, this never materialized and many states were soon embroiled in conflicts. These conflicts took the form of internal wars (as in Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo) or coups (as in Nigeria, Ghana, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Uganda and Ethiopia), often with ethnic and at times religious undertones, and were fuelled by political intolerance (Osei-Hwedie, 200).

The result has been a devastating impact on political and socio-economic development. In fact, Obasanjo (1991) stated that Africa continues to witness socio-economic development decline and regression and the hope of

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development in the decade of independence has been replaced by a revolution of rising frustrations characterized by economic structural adjustments, rising poverty and withdrawal of government involvement in the social service sector.

In addition to the economic decline and associated problems, Africa suffers from continuing conflicts and security problems. Osei-Hwedie (1998) has also stated that multiparty politics has heightened ethnic and regional divisions that were intensified and consolidated under colonialism. African conflicts often have domestic and regional causes. This is due to problems associated with social, ethnic, cultural and religious differences in the context of massive inequalities in the distribution of power, wealth and other resources that make challenges to the status-quo inevitable. According to Deng and Zartman (1991) the fight against colonialism brought together different ethnic groups against a common enemy, and thus for a while, differences were put aside as such as in Nigeria, as a common front was crucial in the Nationalist struggles. With independence, however, the issue of distributive justice rose to the fore and was reinforced by the fact that national self-determination was not an answer to ethnic differences and domination.

Indeed according to Awe (1999) while governance in the pre-colonial period was largely the participation and the accommodation of the interest of all, the later periods witnessed the alienation of the ruled from the rulers; an elite group, the British and their Nigerian successors, made the interest of the majority subservient to their own. The long period of military rule only increased this alienation. Other potential factors of conflict such as ethnicity and religion intensified the subsequent crisis, which was further aggravated by the oil boom and the attendant consequences of corruption, economic mismanagement and challenges of resource allocation which it encouraged.

According to Adejumobi (2002) in Nigeria, primordial identities of ethnic, communal and religious formations have taken the centre stage in social and political interactions. Ethnic socio-political organizations like the Afenifere, Ohaneze and Arewa are perhaps the most palpable on the political turf. These groups have penetrating networks and profound influence in the Nation's political parties. The corollary of these groups especially at the youth level are the ethnic militias, such as Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Niger Delta Volunteer Force, Ijaw youths, Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) and other religious militia groups in Northern Nigeria. These groups claim to represent specific ethnic or communal interest and adopt various tactics including violence in the conduct of their activities.

Violence, especially ethnic violence in contemporary Nigeria can be located in the internal contradictions and dialectics of the Nigerian Political economy. In recent times such conflicts have been recorded in such places as Ilorin, Kafanchan, Kaduna, Funtua, Kano, Zaria, Ile-Ife, Zango Kataf, while virtually all the oiproducing communities of the Niger Delta have been the epicenter of communal conflicts especially with the challenges of marginalization and social deprivation. The politics of oil has played a key role in all of this. Oil which constitutes the mainstay of the Nigerian economy is sourced from the Niger Delta; unfortunately, the communities live in squalor and abject poverty, lacking basic social amenities like feeder roads, electricity, pipe-borne water, and cottage industries. The general perception in the area is that their marginalization is related to their minority status in the Nigerian federation. Also, that the dominant ethnic groups use the resources gained from the oil producing areas to develop their own places.

The fact that oil producing communities suffer serious ecological and environmental damages in form of land, water and air pollution, destruction of aquatic life suggest that the people of the area are confronted with economic dangers. The sufferings and tribulations of the Niger Delta people have been well documented (Civil Liberties Organization, 1996; Human Rights Watch, 1995).

Consequently, just as the government has intensified its presence in the area by militarizing the environment against restive youths, so also have the people reconceived and sharpened their demands from purely social and economic to political demands which have been refocused on relative autonomy and self-determination for their ethnic areas within the context of the Nigerian federation. All this has resulted in a vicious circle of conflict between the government and the people and between the communities and other communities and their groups.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity has been perceived by various sociologists and anthropologists as a much contested concept. It is a basis either for national separation or for political subordination. In practice, ethnicity tends to be used loosely to refer to commonality of language, religion, identity, national origin and even skin color. According to Blumer (1986) along with many sociologists and anthropologists, the core element in ethnicity has to do with "memories of a shared past", involving the collective memory of a people. The challenges and opportunities of contemporary ethnic relations in Nigeria are shaped within the framework of social, political, economic and cultural institutions. Contemporary trends, currents

of opinion and attitude are influenced by significant events and woven into a porous configuration of local, regional and national relationships.

The colonial masters introduced 'the principle of divide and rule' in the administration of pre-independence Nigeria thereby deepening the ethnic division in Nigeria. The colonial masters also left at independence a country that was ethnically and religiously divided. It was this situation characterized by suspicion and distrust that eventually resulted in Nigeria's civil war experience regarded as the bloodiest political crisis in Nigeria which was more of an "ethnic cleansing", a terrible euphemism for genocide as it claimed over 30,000 lives of Igbos living in the Northern region.

One cannot also forget the fallouts of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election which Chief M.K.O. Abiola was said to have won. Following the annulment and eventual incarceration, ethnic sentiments were provoked as political tension mounted. The annulment generated much resentment among the Yoruba ethnic group who saw it as a deliberate attempt to deny them the opportunity to rule the country, especially when the election was acclaimed to be the freest ever in the history of Nigeria. The consequent effect of this was disorder, chaos and violence in the Western part of the country and some other parts of the country.

Ethnic rivalry is a major cause of Africa's backward states. Thousands have been annihilated during inter-ethnic clashes in Africa particularly in countries like Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, Chad, Niger Republic, Nigeria etc.

CONFLICT

One of the earliest definitions of conflicts was by Karl Max (1818 -1883) a conflict theorist who defined conflict as the existence of divergent interests within a group or the result of each group or class trying to pursue her interest and in the process come against one another with conflict emerging. Salem (1993) stated that conflict is a state of tension which exists when one party perceives that its goals, needs, desires or expectations are being blocked by another party. In addition, Imobighe (1993) defines a conflict as a condition of disharmony in an interactional process. It is the direct result of a clash of interest by the parties involved and it arises usually as a result of the pursuit of incompatible ends or the use of incompatible means to pursue desired goals. According to Sofer (1972), one of the well known causes of conflict is the distribution of financial resources to individuals or groups. He asserted that the manner in which financial resources are distributed to individuals or groups can generate conflict because each

contending person or group considers the allocation as inadequate to fulfill everyone's need.

It is important to state that all conflict is not necessarily negative (Enery, 1985). It is a necessary element in all human contact and can either be a factor for creative progress or a cause of disruption. It can be malignant or benign. Within a given unit, whether a Nation-State, a religious group or an ethnic aggregate, people can be in conflict when one group perceives the other as a barrier or threat to its own goals or survival. This captures the situation in Nigeria. Conflicts can be regarded as the violent exhibition or expression of incompatibility. According to Bates (1986) ethnic groups persist in the modern socio-political systems largely due to their ability to extract goods and services to satisfy the demands of their members.

Gurr (1991) also stated that since the 1960s, there have been over 18 full-fledged civil wars, and 53 out of 171 overt military interventions were targeted at African countries. Between 1960 and the late 1980s, there were 11 genocides compared to 24 in other parts of the world. In the beginning of 1990, over 2.5 percent of all Africans were refugees, most of who were fleeing from political violence. The situation is clearly replicated in Nigeria with so much of political violence, religious and ethnic violence, violence over economic resources and the challenges of resource allocation.

ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

Ethnic conflicts have the potential to destroy and have often destroyed the weak foundations of national unity, nation building and inter-group relations. This is because ethnic and sub-national demands and aspirations often challenge nation-building and allocative policies, and ultimately, the legitimacy of the state (Zartman, 1991). Ethnic conflict in this context is defined as 'forms of identity conflict that take place on a state and regional level' (Richmond, 1991: 182). Conflicts according to Stedman (1991) result from human interaction in the context of incompatible ends and where one's ability to satisfy needs or ends depends on the choices, decisions and behavior of others. This invariably involves in this context the competition among ethnic groups in the struggle for state resources.

In Nigeria, the conflict and disparity between the rich and the poor, between the Masses and the Elites (Political Class) or between one ethnic group or the other in the struggle for state resources is on the increase. Some of these conflicts have involved in the Ife/Modakeke crisis in Osun state, the crisis between the Aguleri and Umuleri communities in Anambra, the conflict between

the Tiv and Hausa/Fulani people in Nasarawa etc. There have been communal clashes in Jos (Plateau State) since 2001 especially between Christians and Muslims. In the Niger Delta, the conflict has been among the Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri tribes and between the youth and government security forces.

According to Nnoli (1993:44), ethnic groups are groups characterized by exclusive symbolic formations, value systems, language, normative behaviour and territory. They are groups whose members share similar socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics distinct form those shared by members of other groups. Atere and Olagbemi (1998: 18) see an ethnic group as a group whose culture is sufficiently different in beliefs, values, and customs such that its members are in-group identity, which sets them apart from others. Ethnicity is thus a complex term. It is indeed a social phenomenon associated with interaction among members of different ethnic groups. It involves the intensity of ethnic identity or the feeling of allegiance to one's ethnic group in the context of multi-ethnic existence. Ethnic differences do not always translate into open conflicts, and some that do are sometimes not threatening to the social and political order as mutually accepted mechanisms exist to regulate them. Most ethnic conflicts in the world involve situations where ethnic groups pursue their claims within an existing state structure. The aim is not to create an alternative state, but to either capture the existing state or improve access to state resources. When this fails then there is demand for secession or autonomy.

Ethnic groups may not always have permanent enemies (except 'permanent' interests), as they maybe forced to make alliances in order to achieve their objectives. In a multi-ethnic setting like Nigeria, domination or exclusion is often achieved by one central group acting in alliance with other groups on a regional basis or on other criteria such as religion and loosely defined ideologies. For example, it can be argued that the Igbo of Nigeria lost their war of secession partly because most of the ethnic groups in the oil regions of the east that were to form part of the Biafra did not see themselves as part of an eastern coalition. The secession question has continued till date due to issues of marginalization both economic and political. Gurr (1991) Rothchild (1991) Deng and Zarthman (1991) among others have outlined the factors that precipitated ethnic conflicts in Africa. According to them, most of the wars in Africa are characterized by ethnic and other deep social divisions. In Somalia and Rwanda for example, the conflict has been between clans of common ethnic origin. Tensions in Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Liberia and Nigeria testify to the ethnic factor in African conflicts.

The Niger Delta situation in Nigeria typifies a case of marginalization, deprivation, crisis of resource allocation among ethnic groups. Poverty has

contributed immensely to violent conflicts in a number of ways. In Nigeria, economic resources have been mismanaged by the leaders and this has become worse especially in the Niger Delta where oil exploitation has left the people highly impoverished resulting in youth restiveness and kidnapping of oil workers as a way of expressing their grievances and need for adequate compensation.

CONFLICTS AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Conflicts and Inter-group relations in Nigeria must be examined historically, starting from the pre-colonial to the colonial and Post-colonial periods of Nigerian existence. The World Bank Report on Nigeria (1996) described Nigeria as a Paradox: "the country is rich but the people are poor... Nigeria is rich in land, people, oil and natural resources. If more wealth had been channeled to the development of its people... Nigeria could have been poised for a promise"

(a)   The Pre-colonial Period

Nigeria, prior to the imposition of British rule, did not exist as a nation. Rather what were in existence were tribal groups which organized themselves within their own politics. Some of these tribal groups had highly centralized structures such as the Yoruba, Edo, Hausa, Jukun while some were highly decentralized such as the Ijaw, Urhobo, Igbo, Tiv and so on. The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria belonged to the first category of highly centralized states. Its government centred on a hereditary rule, often the descendant of the first inhabitants or settlers in that area. The Yoruba traditional ruler was never a dictator as he had to govern with a council of chiefs who represented the interest of the community in its different modes. According to Akinjogbin and Ayandele (1980) civil and religious affairs were intertwined and no major political decisions were made without the sanction of the religious chiefs who represented the various deities.

Among the Urhobo, Ukwuani, Isoko, Ijo and Igbo which had a decentralized structure, there was a council of elders responsible for the governance and welfare of the people. Alagoa (1972) also pointed out that among the ethnic groups in the Cross River and Niger Delta area, where the societies were decentralized, order was maintained by a balance of understanding among the associations, overlapping memberships, and respect for the rules of public conduct generally recognized in the community.

In all of these politics therefore, there was no situation where the will of the ruler was allowed to threaten or endanger the interest of the ruled and the

society at large. Only among the Hausa-Fulani did there appear to be an authoritarian system. This may have been due to the accident of history and the conquest of the Hausa States by the Muslim Fulani Jihadists with its headquarters in Sokoto and Usman Dan Fodio as its leader. Even though these various groups tried to maintain their separate entities, there were some commercial and social contacts which led to a great deal of linguistic borrowing and cultural diffusion. Efforts were also made to maintain peaceful relations in order to encourage trade and reduce the degree of tension and differences in their areas.

Between the 18th and the 19th centuries, external factors brought about many changes in the social and political organization of these societies. This involved the intensification of slave trade and the introduction of foreign religion notably Islam and Christianity. This affected the social, religious and political life of the people especially through the introduction of Western Education, which led to the emergence of a new group of elites, who were distinct from the traditional elites as they could aspire to positions of leadership. The absence of Christianity and Western Education in the North eventually heightened nationally the potential for conflict and distrust among the people.

(b)   The Colonial Period

The colonial era introduced new elements and altered greatly the political, economic, and social organization of the people. The British gradually established their political dominance over the different tribal groups and by 1914, Lord Frederick Lugard had amalgamated the different parts into what is now known as Nigeria leading to the emergence of ethnic groups with no clear but boundaries. According to Tamuno (1980) the British did not seek the views of the people to ascertain if the amalgamation was necessary. They were interested in creating new markets for British industries and also the desire to exploit the natural resources of the people. So the primary aim of the amalgamation was economic – the export of cash crops from Nigeria. The British ruled through an Indirect Rule system especially in the southern part of the country, which involved ruling through the people's institutions of government and introducing the use of Warrant Chiefs. The system was marked by the imposition of the will of the colonial masters.

Consequently, Nigerians were forced to plant cash crops like cotton and cocoa which were mainly for exports, as were forest products like timber, rubber and palm oil. In order to facilitate maximum returns from the export crops, the colonial administration provided basic infrastructures and took various steps to facilitate trade. Shipping facilities were developed at the Lagos harbour while Rail

lines and feeder roads that linked areas of cash crop production were constructed. The money economy was introduced including an enforced tax system. The emphasis on cash crops also had a devastating effect on the production of food crops. The effect of all of these was that Nigeria became a consumer nation importing chocolate and beverages, as well as textiles and other products. Commodity marketing Boards were set up for the cash crops, but the accumulated surpluses were transferred to Britain rather than being invested in Nigeria.

The introduction of Western education was delayed in the North, giving rise to an educational gap between the North and the South. With the increasing demand by the educated elite for independence from British rule, ethnicity began to rear its head as it led to the struggle for dominance politically and economically between the major ethnic groups in the country, most especially the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. According to Adebisi (1992:21) the seeds of ethnic violence were sown by the British colonial policies in Nigeria with the adoption of a divide and rule tactics, which later robbed Nigerians of the common front for nation building. The consequent effect of this is that the indirect rule system paved way for the emergence of regional leaders and political parties whose manifestos were designed along ethnically determined interest.

In the West, the Action Group (AG) was headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) in the East was headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe while in the North, we had the Northern People's Congress (NPC) headed by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto. According to Arazeem (2005) the Richards Constitution of 1946 provided for the division of the country into regions, each built around one of the major ethnic groups. This culminated in a pattern of political rivalry between the regions.

Ironically, each of these dominant groups had its own history, traditions, customs, values and languages distinct from each other. Within each of these regions there were numerous other ethnic groups with distinct cultures who were known as the minorities. This arrangement provided "playing ground" for fear of domination by one region or the other. This suspicion, distrust and fear of domination was clearly exhibited when political leaders of the North and South met for the first time in 1947 in the Federal Legislative Council and in the motion for independence moved by Chief Anthony Enahoro.

(c)   Post-Colonial (Independence Era)

When Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960, many Nigerians expected the attainment of independence to usher in an era of widespread prosperity, democracy and self-governance. Unfortunately, the leaders failed to take on the right responsibilities. What we eventually attained at Independence was more of a "Flag Independence" as the nation also lacked "functional sovereignty". There was so much of external interference in the polity and this greatly fueled the distrust and conflict that had built up in the system and which characterized the colonial period. The new rulers were the new state as the instrument to be manipulated at will. Lip service was paid to the concepts of democracy, federalism and accountability as corruption became the order of the day. The various development plans stressed positively on the development of a just, fair and egalitarian society, but the opposite was the case.

According to Usman (1979); Gavin (1982); Onimode (1992) and Awe (1999), the discovery of petroleum, rather than improving the quality of life of Nigerians, only made it worse. Although it led to the establishment of many development projects such as industry and road construction, which generated employment for skilled and unskilled labour, it also led to the drift from rural areas to urban areas and the decline of agriculture in the national economy. Nigeria became a net importer of food items such as rice and sugar, which were obtainable elsewhere at prices cheaper than that of the traditional food crops produced locally. These cheaper food imports also discouraged the production of export crops. In the long run, the neglect of agriculture resulted in a steep rise in food and fiber prices and food insecurity. The disruptive impact of petroleum activities also directly affected the agricultural productivity of oil producing areas, since some of the lands in onshore oil fields were farmlands. The pollution that accompanied oil drilling activities also affected the fish production in the area. In addition, oil money fostered in the rulers' thinking, what has been described as illusions of scale. They started to think big, aiming to produce more than the country could manage at once.

Thus, politically motivated steel-rolling mill projects (such as Ajaokuta Steel Company) were developed in various parts of the country even where the heavy raw materials are not available and there were no satisfactory means of transportation to bring them in. A more astonishing project was the creation of River Basin Authorities of dams and agricultural development. Many farmers lost their farmlands and were barely compensated. The River Basins provoked riots and violence in some areas amongst aggrieved citizens.

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The high levels of corruption and mismanagement of several occasions gave the military an opportunity to seize power, supposedly in an attempt to "correct" the ills of the nation. According to Nwankwo (1987), the first Nigerian Republic collapsed due to lack of vision, opportunism, and the political elites' acceptance of the logic of the colonial political system. Other contributory factors were the cleavage along regional, ethno- cultural and religious lines, all of which provided a basis for the triumph of ethnic chauvinism and parochialism including geopolitical sentiments.

With regards to civilian rulers, the political campaigns leading up to high levels of electoral rigging, bribery, violence, fraud and corruption characterized primaries and main elections. The military according to Adekanye (1993, 1997) was no better. For example, the inquiry into the administration of General Yakubu Gowon only absolved two of his twelve governors of corruption and mismanagement.

The vast majority of Nigerians are currently excluded from modern governmental process and do not enjoy the services provided by government agencies. The government in Nigeria still operates as a product of the colonial period which serves only the interest of the small minority. There is no convergence in thoughts, objectives, and actions between the rulers (government) and the ruled (the people). All these factors have hindered Nigeria's development in spite of its high level of oil revenue and its endowment in other forms of natural resources. Consequently, the average Nigerian is now more afraid than ever of threats to his or her life, because of the increasing violence in the country. Nigerian leaders according to Ayiteh (1991) seem to be incapable of providing solution to their problems.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION TECHNIQUES

The fact that 'conflict' is inevitable in human relations presupposes the need for conflict resolution techniques to avert the levels of destruction, suspicion and antagonism which often results from conflict between groups. Scholars over the years have shown general interest in conflict management which have resulted in a number of techniques. Horowitz (1985 cited in Richardson, Jr. and Wang, 1993: 178) notes that whereas deep issues may be addressed, some ethnic differences, however, may be unresolved. Thus, he favours conflict reduction: creating proliferated points of power; raising the saliency of intra-ethnic conflict; creating incentives for inter-ethnic cooperation; encouraging alignments based on interests other than ethnicity and reducing disparities between groups so that dissatisfaction declines. According to Imobighe

(1993), most attempts at conflict resolution usually begin with direct negotiation or interaction between the parties in conflict. *Direct negotiation technique* could be coercive or non-coercive. However, the technique adopted will depend on the specific goals the parties want to pursue at the negotiation table. Coercive Bargaining Techniques are meant to exert pressure on the opponent, to demonstrate resoluteness and create problems in the possibility of retreat for the party applies them. This technique amounts to pressurizing the opponent in making most of the concessions in order to achieve a settlement; hence they frequently do not result in any lasting solutions.

The Non-coercive or mutually beneficial techniques have been described by Imobighe (1993) as those techniques which if adopted would lead to mutually accepted outcomes. These include:

(i) Gaining an understanding of the opponents fears and concern

(ii) Preparedness to compromise

(iii) Avoidance of gaining too much since the opponent can afford to lose too much

(iv) Building golden bridges behind the opponents to facilitate retreat.

There is also the Third-Party Mediation Techniques. The techniques of Third Party involvement in conflict Resolution according to Imobighe (1993) is shown in the table below:

Judicial technique	--- Arbitration
	--- Conference resolution and
	--- Resort to International Court of Justice
Power Politics techniques	--- Arms Balancing
	--- Use of threats; and
	--- Coercive physical action
Conciliatory techniques	---Appeasement
	-- Needs satisfaction; and
	--- Problem solving

Source: Imobighe, T. (1993: 42)

(a) **The Judicial Method** relates to an attempt at resolving conflict through some legal framework, in which a third party is given or assumes the responsibility of reaching an effective decision concerning the settlement or resolution of the conflict. Unfortunately, this method does not always lead to the effective resolution of the particular conflict.

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(b)   **The Power Politics Method** of conflict resolution relates to how the outcome would affect the existing balance of power between the parties and their affiliated groups instead of responding to the genuine needs and aspirations of the parties involved in the particular conflict. Other variants of this method Imobighe (1993) notes include the use of threats, blackmail and coercive physical force to keep the parties in conflict restrained, neutralized or to impose an unpalatable settlement on both or either of the parties. The major shortcoming of this approach hinges on the likelihood of ignoring the salient issues of particular conflict in favour of the pursuit of strategic advantages.

(c)   **The Conciliatory Method** relates to an informal process in which a third party tries to bring the parties involved in conflict to an agreement through the improvement of communication between them and through helping to interpret the salient issues involved in the conflict. Thus, conciliation is an attempt by a third party to create an atmosphere of trust and cooperation that is conducive to fruitful negotiation as it provides for mutual understanding of their respective positions. Among the variants of this method includes appeasement and need satisfaction.

It is important to state that the techniques for resolving conflict vary from one social situation to another and any or a combination of these methods could be employed in resolving a conflict.

CONCLUSION

It is necessary to state that one way of resolving conflict and improving inter-group relations will be for the government to resolve the issue of hunger and poverty in the land. The focus also must be on the human-centred values and norms of peace, social justice and freedom for the citizenry. People desire decent income, education, political freedom, security and guaranteed human rights. There is also a need for discussion among the various peoples of this country. Nigeria must start from the very beginning in rebuilding Nigeria. They are very convinced of the need for a sovereign national conference. It is the only plausible forum where people as equals can express their grievances. It will provide a platform for all sections and groups to express their feelings about how they can minimize conflicts and achieve the needed harmony so as to be able to live together as one Nation. Only this way will the imbalance, distrust and suspicion between the North and the South be corrected.

Indeed as stated by Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1993), democracy must incorporate equity, human rights and security for all members of the Nation irrespective of ethnic, religious, or other group identification; it must meet the basic human needs and provide an enabling environment for to develop the productive abilities. So, in enhancing unity in diversity, Nigerians must learn to live in peace with one another no matter what part of the country they are from. They must accommodate each other by building on their strengths and ignoring their weaknesses as a people. They must learn to speak about the destiny and future prospects for the country by learning how to undertake more equitable distribution of resources and addressing the needs of the citizenry appropriately. Above all, inter-group relations can only be encouraged through Consultations, Dialogue, Mediation and Negotiations in all dealings with one another.

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