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# FACTORS PROMOTING CO-OPERATIVE BEHAVIOUR AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This article investigated ethnicity and inter ethnic relations in Nigeria and also highlighted the factors that promote co-operative behaviour among ethnic groups. Such factors are to be encouraged to promote better understanding so that unity can be fostered among the different groups. Counselling has a significant role to play in ethnic relations. Cross cultural counselling may look into ways the different cultures within the country could be studied and understood as most of the mistrust existing between groups may be due to lack of information about the different groups.

## Introduction:

Groups and Societies in general, have recognized the benefits in cooperating with one another and the social ideal that cooperation is good, is shared to a reasonable extent by members of every community. Cooperation generally leads to better understanding among the participating groups during the process of interaction. Groups have also been observed to cooperate when there is similarity in aspiration, and when there are shared goals. In a multi-ethnic society, ethnic groups may seek co-operation with one another, probably to ward off the threat by the dominant group. In such an ethnic cooperation, participating ethnic groups may gain either in an immediate advantage or indirectly through the advancement of their ultimate goals. Broom and Selznick (1955) observed that in cooperating groups, gains may not be equal, as weaker groups gain more from co-operation than the stronger and dominant groups. Consequently, group leaders who are alert to group interests always evaluate the cooperation itself. The common question is usually, 'cooperation for what, with whom and at what price?' Cooperation is an essential ethnic relation which needs to be encouraged between groups and individuals, defined as ethnic groups.

*Objectives:* This paper attempts to synthesize the essentials of cooperative behaviour among different groups. It also has as one of its objectives how cooperative behaviour can be fostered in Nigeria so as to achieve unity in diversity. The possible contribution of counselling in promoting co-operative behaviour is also explored.

*Rationale:* Cooperative behaviour is very relevant to social adjustment both in urban and sub urban settings. In the urban setting, projects may be embarked upon through the cooperation of many members and community projects may be carried out through co-operative behaviours of rural dwellers. The Government at the Federal or State level is calling for such co-operative efforts among different groups, so that the government can also be encouraged to participate in such projects started by different communities. It is equally important for the different groups in the country to co-operate to ensure not only the better understanding of themselves, but also to ensure the progress and survival of the different groups concerned.

## THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

Ethnicity and inter ethnic relations is usually considered as one of the most politically sensitive areas of social life in Africa. Nigeria is usually regarded as a multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society in which both larger and smaller groups compete for power and growth. In a society where both the highly dominant and the less powerful ethnic groups compete for access to scarce resources, accusations and counter – accusations of favouritism among the groups tend to be common. Nigeria, with the population of about 100 million (by projection) came into formal being by January 1, 1914 as a result of the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Provinces. Nigeria is the largest single geographic unit along the West Coast of Africa. The making of the country, however, spans several hundreds of years and embraces the periods of Arab influences in the Northern States and the European influences in the Southern States. These influences have their own impact on the different relations found among the different ethnic groups in the country today.

The first Europeans to visit the coast of Nigeria were the Portuguese. In the winter of 1472-73, Fernando Po and Pero de Centra first explored the Bights of Benin. This exploration was followed by others and England later on established herself along the coast of Nigeria. Despite the coming of the Europeans, some ethnic groups still maintained some of their traditional cultures and relations, through some influences are noticeable.

With reference to ethnicity, opinions seem to differ among scholars as to its status in Nigeria. Whereas the concept of ethnic group may be conveniently defined in some societies on the basis of nationality, race, religion, time or sequence of migration or a combination of these, Sanda (1976) remarked that the sense of identification with an ethnic group is by far different from that with either race or religious group as far as Nigeria is concerned. Some scholars subscribe to the theory of three dominant ethno-cultural or ethno-linguistic groups in the country while at the same time recognizing ethnic heterogeneity. The dominant groups recognized by these scholars are the Hausas, the Igbos and the Yorubas.

In some studies related to Nigeria, the terms ethnic group and tribe have been used synonymously. The concept of tribe as denoting unity of language and culture seems in itself to be inadequate. Wallerstein (1965 & 1971) suggested that the membership in an ethnic group is a matter of social definition, an interplay of the self definition of members and the definition of the groups.

Ethnic identification in the case of Nigeria according to George (1976) may be viewed from two angles, namely, self identification and functional identification from the point of view of administration. Self identification is concerned with individuals while functional identification is concerned with the joining together of certain ethnic groups in a continuous geographical zone for the purpose of establishing local, regional or state governments.

Cultural Diversity; Owing to a long and complicated migratory and settlement history, as well as overlapping in social relationship, Otite (1976) observed that Nigeria can hardly be successfully divided into neat group and cultural areas. As language is quite often viewed by anthropologists as a system of culture, through which a particular culture can be described, some scholars have classified the cultural diversity of the country through the languages spoken. According to Williams in (1971) most Nigerian languages belong to three main "language families". The first, the Niger-Congo with its sub groups, including such languages as the Fulani, Busa, Bariba, Yoruba, Igbo, Edo (including Bini and Urhobo), Nupe, Idoma, Ijo, Chamba, Vere, Jukun, Efik, Tiv, Birom and Kambari.

The second major language family is the Afro-Asiatic, to which Nigerian languages like Shuwa, Hausa, Angas, Bachama, Bara, Mergi and Higi belong. The third major language group in Nigeria, the Nile-Saharan, includes such languages, as Kanuri and Dendi. This language classification is used by some scholars in postulating the universality of common cultural elements amongst large groups of Nigerian people. As Nigeria is a linguistically heterogeneous country where over two hundred and fifty indigenous languages are known, it is possible to recognize the same number of ethnic or cultural groups, if one goes by the language classification.

## FACTORS IN COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOUR

The correlates of cooperative behaviour among the ethnic groups of Nigeria can be inferred by analyzing:

1. the conditions under which the groups cooperate;
2. the reasons for preference of interaction and
3. the factors which encourage or compel interaction, to mention a few.

Many developments in the Nigerian society today seem to bring the ethnic groups more together. Preferences of interaction among ethnic groups are also noticeable in cases where choice has to be made. The modernization which the country is undergoing coupled with job opportunities in bigger cities, the ease in transportation and the improved communication system encourage people of different ethnic groups to mix and interact more frequently.

Notable among the studies on correlates of ethnic cooperation in the Nigerian society, is the work of Seibel (1967). His study was based on a random sample of 509 workers in industrial firms in Ikeja and Ibadan. The ethnic groups represented in the research included, the Yorubas, Igbos, Hausas, Ijaws, Ibibios, Benins, the Calabars and some other tribes. Few of the workers were also from Togo, Ghana and Benin Republic. The researcher observed reasons for preference of interaction between some of the ethnic groups in the study to be honesty, sincerity, faithfulness, straightforwardness, friendliness, holiness, similarity in religion and similarity in dressing. Thus, a member of one ethnic group preferred interaction with the member of another group when any or a combination of these qualities become apparent in the other. With reference to attitudes to co-operate with different ethnic groups, the distribution of answers in this study showed that the positive attitude to cooperation with different ethnic groups is especially strong among smaller groups. Eighty percent of the workers had a positive attitude to cooperation with different groups and only 17% had a negative attitude. Readiness to cooperate with different ethnic groups was also found to increase with educational standards while correlations showed that age and place of origin do not influence the worker's attitudes.

Salamone (1973) saw marriage as providing means of inter-ethnic contact between the Gungawas and the Hausas. Ogunlade (1976) also noted, in a study with some school children, that the subjects were more socially closer to their own ethnic group than the other ethnic group. Lack of contact was suggested as one of the factors affecting the ethnic preferences of the subjects.

Akiwowo (1976) felt that competition of groups for class, status and power systems may lead to tribalism. A strategy for equitable distribution of economic and political advantages will minimize tribalism (favouritism to one's own ethnic group) while promoting co-operation. The review of literature, in the cooperative behaviour among groups

seems to suggest that ethnic groups co-operate in Nigeria:

1. When there is similarity in dressing, customs, educational background, religion and aspiration;
2. when there is equitable distribution of resources, equal representation in sensitive position of the government;
3. when opportunities are available for communication, contact, friendship, and marriage;
4. when the ability to speak other ethnic languages is demonstrated;
5. when ethnic groups develop, regard, respect, tolerance and openness among one another.

Industrialization and urbanization also seem to bring co-operation among the ethnic groups.

### COUNSELLING AND COOPERATION AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS

Improving ethnic relations in general and cooperative behaviour in particular, among Nigerians is something counsellors should not "shy away" from. Identifying conditions, and preferences for cooperation could be an important point from where to begin. Some of the steps, to ensure co-operative behaviours may have to be taken at the governmental level such as:

1. dissemination of more information concerning other ethnic groups in the local newspapers.
2. wider coverage of ethnic activities of groups and sub-groups in the mass media;
3. planned governmental programmes that involve co-operation and participation of many groups.

Counsellors can also employ different methods and other psychological strategies to facilitate cooperative behaviours. Themes and sub-themes relating to ethnic cooperation, for instance, may feature in counselling workshops and conferences organized at state levels. Participation and involvement of respectable personalities from different ethnic groups may be encouraged in such seminars. The contributions of such personalities from different ethnic groups to the development and survival of the nation may be explored. This discussion can also be organized by school counsellors among secondary school students at a lower level. Factors that bring about inter ethnic conflicts may be brought to the open and discussed in a none-threatening atmosphere as in group counselling while those factors that encourage co-operative behaviours are promoted.

It has been shown that counsellors who differ from their clients in race, culture or social class have the greatest difficulty in effecting constructive changes, while counsellors who are most similar to clients in these respects have a greater facility for appropriate intervention (Carkhuff & Pierce 1967; Sue 1975; Vontress 1971). The advantages of developing cross-cultural skills in counsellor - training have also been highlighted (Pederson 1978). The Nigerian Counsellor, in the first instance, needs to be comfortable, working with clients from the different ethnic groups in the country. His knowledge about the mores, folkways, traditions and belief system of the different ethnic groups may be an additional asset to understanding the client, in addition to developing other cultural skills.

As the Nigerian counsellor, presently, functions largely in the school setting, the counsellor has a role in the development of healthy and cooperative attitudes among the pupils from different ethnic groups. Group counselling may be initiated to begin interaction among students, as they explore the need and advantages of cooperative interactions.

Group activities may also be organized by involving students from different ethnic groups in tasks that encourage cooperation. Positive images about different ethnic groups may be created in students when cultural activities, depicting each ethnic group, are displayed.

Many factors seem to promote the mixing of ethnic groups in the country now. There is increased mobility and many families work in different ethnic settings. Consequently, the children in most cases have to adjust to the new ethnic setting, make new friends and relate to their peers in the new environment. Counselling may be helpful in alleviating the feelings of loneliness and isolation that may occur in these children.

## CONCLUSION

There must be co-operation among people for development and survival, this co-operation is more imperative when such groups of people differ in many respects. Co-operative behaviours must be encouraged in Nigeria so that better development can be enhanced and the unity of the people maintained. Even though the conception of ethnic groups in Nigeria may vary among researchers, there is the consensus of opinion that many ethnic groups exist. The factors that promote cooperative behaviours when identified can be encouraged while those that lead to conflicts are minimized. Counselling has a role in decreasing ethnocentrism, while increasing willingness to cooperate among the different ethnic groups, without excluding their feeling of belonging to the group.

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