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Chapter Thirteen:
Conflict: Preventive Mechanism and Early Warning

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Preventive Mechanism and Early Warning

The history of conflict is as old as human history (Abebe 2006). Since the advent of human society, communities have been competing for control of resources and for dominance. These competitions have led individuals as well as social, political, economic, and religious groups to inevitable conflicts. Varying interests of individuals, groups, societies and states often than not, lead to conflict, either because they are pursuing opposing or incompatible goals (Ousman, 2011). It is true that conflict has devastating effects and it is unwanted. It is also true that conflict is unavoidable and it continues to occur.

And people live and stay together in community, and also as states interact in the international system, conflict is inevitable. It is therefore necessary for measures to be put in place to avert conflict from escalating into full brown war.

What measures should be taken to prevent conflict?

According to Souare (2007), in order to prevent conflicts, the factors which cause them must be identified. In general, the root causes of

conflict include: bad governance, relative poverty and illiteracy. To prevent conflict, therefore, the following elements should be in place:

• *Genuine democratic rule* this requires a clear separation of powers between branches of government, political pluralism, accountability of rulers to citizens and equality before the law.

- *Respect for human rights* governments should strengthen protection of individual rights by empowering national human rights commissions to operate without state interference.
- *Independent and credible mass media* Governments should ensure that all barriers to freedom of expression are removed.
- *Economic development* Nations cannot rely on external donors for economic development and must seek solutions within the state. States must fight corruption, develop local production capacities and pursue regional economic integration.
- *Improvement of educational systems and standards* Governments should increase spending on education and increase the number of vocational and professional training schools and colleges.

In other words, Ousman (2011) is attempting to point out that Preventive Diplomacy and Mediation are part of conflict prevention and management mechanisms used by individuals, states, regional/international organisations and international NGOs alike..

Preventive diplomacy and mediation are instruments of conflict prevention and management that are used by third parties to achieve positive outcomes in conflict situation especially where the parties to the conflict are on their own unable to find a way out.

Mediation is only one way of third party intervention and only one way of resolving national and international conflicts. Mediation is being used

increasingly in the management of international conflicts, albeit with varying degrees of success. Today's conflicts in the post cold war era are dominated by ones that are intrastate in nature with effects on international politics and security. It is therefore clear that a more improved instrument of peaceful conflict management is indeed needed especially in view of the defiance conflicts have put up to sanctions and the use of military force.

However, in all social systems, be they simple or complex there are essentially three ways of conflict management, which are the use of military force and coercion, bargaining and negotiation or the involvement of a third party herein referred to as mediation. What all these methods aim at, is the restoration of broken relations but there is a fundamental difference between the use of force or coercion (military/threat) and negotiation (bargaining) or mediation as means of conflict management (Ousman, 2011). Then, what is mediation?

Mediation

According to Moore (1996), mediation is the intervention in a negotiation or conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power but who assists the involved parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute.

In the same vein, Beer and Stief (1997), defines mediation as any process for resolving disputes in which another person helps the parties negotiate a settlement.

Ousman (2011), defines mediation as a process of restoring broken relationship between individuals, communities, ethnic groups or nations

with the involvement of a third party. It is a process that begins with the voluntary acceptance by the parties in a conflict of third party assistance with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable solution to their conflict. The third party could be individuals, representatives of states, regional organization or international organization who enter a dispute as a result of their own initiative or in response to a call from the adversaries. Normally mediation is used in the heightened phase of a complex conflict when antagonists are seeking a way to break a stalemate (Ousman, 2011). From this viewpoint, one can say that mediation is reactive in that it brings disputants to the negotiating table when dislocation in the social set up might have already taken place. In the same vein, mediation, being a part of a complex and continuous set of process, also takes place when the parties have come to accept that pursuing the conflict is unlikely to achieve their goals, but before they have reached the stage of consenting to negotiation.

When disputants are ready to cooperate and communicate, mediation can provide a safe way for the parties to come together and in this way the third party involvement has the potential for the transformation of the conflict into a peaceable situation. As such mediation helps adversaries to gain greater understanding of the issues, interest and values that divide them by putting them in contact with one another, gaining their trust and confidence clarifying issues and formulating agreements.

By assuming such tasks, the mediator is taking up a task that left to the adversaries alone could turn out to be contentious and probably troublesome for the conflictants to carry out themselves.

Mediator's Objectives

Principally, the third parties work on two basic objectives: (1) to manage the potential conflicts by seeking an area in which everyone could cooperate, (2) to develop confidence building measures or processes so that the various claimants would be comfortable with one another, thus providing a conducive atmosphere for the solution of their conflict/disputes. To this end efforts are directed towards achieving the transformation of the habit of confrontation into a habit of cooperatio Therefore, it is important to find a common denominator, no matter how slow the process may be or how small was the result at the beginni (Ousman, 2011).

The pre-conditions for successful mediation and preventive diplomac Realization by the parties to the disputes that the outbreak of armed conflict will not settle any disputes, nor will it bring benefits to either parties, and is in fact inimical to the interests of all.

The parties must develop the political will to settle their disputed peacefully and to take measures to prevent conflict. The parties may be moving in this direction, but much more needs to be done to encourag them to do so.

The parties should refrain from unhelpful or provocative acts, and should try to shift public opinion from support for a "hard line" to a more accommodating stance based on the need for co-operation. Preventiv diplomacy should be undertaken by all parties who have an interest in the solution of the problems, either regionally or internationally and importantly doing so by taking into account all interests.

Preventive Diplomacy

According to Ousman (2011) preventive diplomacy is a peace making mechanism usually taken to prevent disputes from turning into armed conflict. Other preventive mechanism types are preventive deployment of peacekeepers in the form of military and/or police personnel; preventive humanitarian action, for example, to manage and resolve a refugee situation in sensitive borders; and preventive peace-building, which itself comprises an array of activities in the political, economic and social fields (Ousman, 2011).

All these early peacemaking undertakings have the following commonalities and depend on them for decision: they all depend on early warning that the risk of conflict exists; they require information about the causes and likely nature of the potential conflict so that the appropriate preventive action can be identified; and they require the consent of the party or parties within whose jurisdiction the preventive action is to take place. So where one or all parties refuse preventive intervention, peacemaking would proof difficult to do (Ousman, 2011).

Apart from the importance of acceptability by the parties for third party involvement, another important consideration is timing. It is crucial that the potential conflict is ripe for the preventive action proposed. Timing isalso an important consideration in peacemaking and peace-keeping. The prevention, management and resolution of a conflict can be likened to the prevention, control and cure of disease. If treatment is given at an inappropriate time in the evolution of a disease, it is very likely the sick would not improve, and the credibility of both the treatment (peacemaking) and the physician (mediator/third party) who prescribed it

is compromised (Ousman, 2011).

In undertaking preventive diplomacy there is the use of diplomatic means to persuade parties in conflict against the use of force and herd them in the direction of a negotiated peaceful settlement of their dispute. In the process the types of approaches and undertakings for the sole aim of preventive purposes, such as diplomatic peace-keeping, humanitarian aid and peace-building, have their role in creating conditions for successful peacemaking, and implementing and consolidating the negotiated settlement for peace.

What to Avoid

Where they are involved as third parties, larger countries undertaking mediation and preventive diplomacy should be mindful of the views about them, and take steps to ensure that they are not perceived to be domineering or bullying (Ousman, 2011).

It is necessary to broaden participation in cooperative programs and to increase the areas of cooperation. If the benefits are seen to be mutual, the chance of success is all the greater. The approach should be inclusive rather than exclusive. The countries of the affected region could pursue their national interests within context; pursuit of regional interests is to be also pursued taking on board the national interests of individual countries (Ousman, 2011).

Major external powers, wherever possible and practicable, should lose no opportunity to support the development of constructive atmosphere for peace, stability and progress. Countries in the region should exercise preventive diplomacy by preventing dispute from becoming open-armed conflict or by preventing a conflict from spreading or aggravating.

Countries in the region could develop various fora for dialogue, either bilateral or multilateral, formal or informal, sometimes referred to as multi-tract diplomacy. The various fora for dialogue should hopefully in the end be able to produce a set of agreement for the mutual benefits of all (Ousman, 2011).

Countries could pursue various avenues of peaceful settlement of disputes, either through negotiation, bilateral if the disputes are bilateral or multilateral if the disputes are multilateral.

Structural conflict prevention comprises long term interventions that aim to transform key socioeconomic, political and institutional factors that if left unaddressed, could lead to violent conflict in the future. This encompasses a broad range of factors, including but not limited to: addressing inequality, exclusion and marginalisation; developing social capital and social cohesion; promoting livelihoods, local development and economic opportunities; and promoting legitimate and equitable political, justice and security institutions (GSDRC, 2012).

Early Warning Mechanism

This can be defined as the capacity for information gathering and analysis with the purpose of providing strategic option for preventive action and/or informed appropriate response. It refers to the set of activities that aim to collect, collate, and analyse data in order to detect and identify the signs of an emerging crisis before it explodes into uncontrollable violence. It is concerned with forecasting the potential for the escalation of inter and intra-state conflicts. It has to do with predictions, but ultimately with preventions (Gurr, 1996; Davies and Gurr, 1998).

Devising a System for Early Warning

We need to note that identification of conflict factors is complex because what may appear as signals or trends that appear indicative of an impending conflict to one analyst or actor may not be so to another.

However, they are general consensus on how early warning should take place. They include:

1.   Information Gathering: Information gathering is central to the discovery of early warning which could lead to a full blown crisis/violence if not curtailed at the beginning.

   a. Primary Source: This entails gathering the information directly from the conflict region

   b. Secondary Source: This entails reliance on qualitative and quantitative analysis of information carried out by institutions and academics. In other words, relying on the information gathered by others.

On a final note, the sources (whether primary or secondary) must be reliable and verifiable.

Factors to be considered when Gathering Information:

1.   The intensity of grievances
2.   Parties' awareness of differences
3.   Parties' perception and attitude toward each other
4.   Level of political mobilization and the organizations behind parties
5.   Extent of polarization (division)
6.   Amount of hostile behaviour
7.   Extent that parties use or threaten the use of arms
8.   Number of issues in dispute
9.   Number of parties supportive of each side

10. Intensity of emotions and level of psychological investment in parties' positions and views of the world

11. Amount of direct interaction and communication the parties have with one another.

12. Cohesion between leaders of respective parties and their constituencies.

13. The parties involved in the information gathering process.

Actors that can be involved in Information Gathering:

i. Global and regional intergovernmental organizations such as the united nations (un), Africa Union (AU) and European Union (EU)

ii. Individual governments.

iii. NGOS, humanitarian and development agencies.

iv. Press and media.

v. The academic community.

2. Information Analysis

The aim of analysis is to clarify how the information available can be used as an indicator of conflict escalation. For instance, the Rwanda 1993 genocide would have been prevented if the available information were well analyzed to indicate growing public unease and increasing ethnic tensions.

The Possible Indicators for Early Warning include:

a. Political and Leadership Issues: Regime capacity, Characteristics of the elite, political and economic cleavages, conflictual political Cultures, and international influence, level of participation in (and exclusion from) the decision-making processes and institutions etc.

b. Economic and Environmental Issues: The cost of living, Inflation rate, Unemployment, Scarcities, Food Security, Opportunities for access to critical resources, level of pollution, impact on indigenous livelihood, natural catastrophes, epidemics and pandemics etc.

c. Demographic and Societal Issues: Population Pressures, Militarization of society, Economic Strength, Quality of life, Constraints on resource base, Government's economic Management , Economic Openness and trade, International economic aid, etc (Mwanasali, 2006; Van and Vlugt, 1996).

3. Responding Appropriately:

There is a need for quick response to forestall the possibility of total break out of conflict and violence in the society. Policy must be formulated and implemented to enhance harmonious living. Early Warning is effective when and if it can unveil the internal dynamics of an emerging conflict sufficiently early and provide policy tool to contain it in a timely manner. Early warning serves as deterrent factor if it can act as watchdog (Collier and Anke, 1998; Van and Vlugt, 1996; Davies and Gurr, 1998).

Conclusion

Conflicts do not erupt overnight. It is always the manifestation of accumulated hostility and aggression between or among parties. Thus, resolving conflicts and achieving peace between or among the factions takes a long time just as conflicts build over time. Therefore, it has been

argued that rather than wait until conflict escalates into full violence, it is better to prevent it. This can only be done through early warning mechanism.

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