

# Implications of Gender Disparity in Concepts of Conflict Resolution for Peace and Stability among Residents of Gombe Town

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined the implications of the concept of conflict resolution which male and female residents of Gombe town have on peace and stability. In attempt to provide solution to the problem raised by the topic, an instrument was designed that consists of twelve items. One hundred and fifty residents of Gombe were served the instrument to which they responded. Seventy five of them were males and seventy five were female. Their responses were subjected to t-test analysis. Generally, there was no significant difference in the way they think of conflict resolution. However, on examination of each of the responses using their mean scores to determine how they rank the items, differences were observed. Based on this analysis, five implications were drawn out. Recommendations were made at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** Implications, Gender Disparity, Concepts, Conflict Resolution, Peace and Stability

## 1. Introduction

At the root of any crisis are unresolved conflicts and this paper discusses concepts of conflict resolution among residents of Gombe town and the implications such concepts have for peace and stability in social settings. The question this paper seeks to provide answers to is; how do residents of Gombe town think of conflict resolution and what implications have such thoughts for societal peace and stability? The point the paper makes is that, when more people acquire the skills of resolving conflicts amicably, crisis situations in every area of national life will be minimized and as a result peace and stability will ensure. It is however, important to always remember that, conflicts are inevitable whenever personal interests are involved and whenever persons are organized into groups (Wallace, 1982). Many contemporary societies, organizations, homes and groups are not enjoying good interpersonal relationships or moving strongly towards the achievements or their planned objectives because of conflicts of one kind or the other. The lack of skills in handling conflicts has resulted into loss of gains that would have accrued to societies and groups while, the negative aspects of conflicts are given undue prominence. A case in point is that of the Nigerian nation that is still struggling to attain national integration after fifty years of existence as a nation.

In this paper, implication means an implied natural consequence of concepts of conflict resolution on peace and stability. Gender refers to male and female human personalities and disparity means lack of equality while, concept is an abstract term referring to an idea or understanding someone has about things. Resolution is formal consensus reached after a meeting in conflict situations. Conflict is not inherently destructive or constructive, rather it is how it is managed and what outcomes it produces that makes it destructive or constructive. Every conflict has within it both constructive and destructive potentialities.

## 2. Literature Review

The literatures reviewed were presented under the following subtopics, understanding conflicts, causes of conflict, types of conflict, advantages of conflict, disadvantages of conflict, appropriate conducts during conflict and preliminary steps in conflict resolution.

### 2.1 Understanding Conflict

Conflict may be described as a struggle, a clash or battle between opposing forces. It may also be a state of opposition between ideas, interests, theology, a disagreement or controversy and so forth (Collins English Dictionary, 1998). An instance of conflict is when two appointments are slated for the same time simultaneously, both of which are incompatible in wishes or drives. This shows that conflict is a sign of life and people get upset when they feel strongly about something. Similarly, Bruggs (1982) said conflict is a major source of job-related stress particularly for managers. Conflicts he maintained kill job satisfaction, morale and

self-image. He also pointed to an assumption about conflict which is, increase rate of change means increase in potentials for conflict hence, whenever people are pushed into changing what they are used to or the status quo, conflict is expected to be an outcome. What are some causes of conflicts?

## 2.2 Causes of Conflict

McSwain and Wilburn (1981) pointed out that, the pressures of competition at school, work and social circles, the accelerated pace of life, complexity of change and feelings of helplessness that confront people create conditions for anxiety which promote conflicts. When people disagree, rather than patiently work out their differences, they resort to hostilities which hinder and disrupt group work and possibly lead to crises. Most conflicts are based on fears rather than facts; they are fuelled by confusions, concealment, control of power and communication (Wallace, 1982). Confusion produces frustrations that generate anger which hinder people from seeing issues clearly and objectively. A problem with confused people is that, they hate to admit that they are confused lest they show their ignorance. Usually they have a strong stance for their opinion and fight for it committedly in defense of their pride.

Attitudes which foster confusion are, ignorance, distortion and mood; as behind every argument is someone's ignorance (Ibid). Ignorance may be of facts, of the nature of the conflict, of hidden agendas or motives behind those promoting the scope of the conflict. Distortions come in the form of misinformation, half or incomplete truth about the information or even lies just to make a conflict become complex. Moodiness fosters confusion when parties cannot understand each other and therefore, interpret actions, speeches or body language negatively for unjust reason(s). Concealment as a cause of conflict occurs, when someone is hiding behind agreeable reason to negotiate consensus. Even though such "agreeable reasons" may not be a genuine solution to the ongoing conflict; it is accepted anyhow to satisfy people for the sake of moving on. Control of power as a source of conflict appears when there is abuse or misuse of power through resistance to change in attempt to keep the status quo.

Conflicts may also arise out of cultural, traditional and theological understanding of people (Kumtong, 2006; Pandan, 2005). It is therefore, essential for administrators to have a good understanding of the culture and traditions of the people in the community they work. With regard to theological issues, it is expected that every application should be packaged taking into consideration the cultural milieu of the audience. Doing this will facilitate making of meaningful impact on the people within the community. A right theology is expected to place God first and above all things and then put people at the center of divine activities. People and not things should be the utmost item of concern for every work done in the name of God (Hafield, 1971). Another cause of conflict is unforgiveness which Stiles (1981) described as the "seed-bed" for discontent. Again, being too critical of another person's efforts, contributions or attempts at contributing to the overall achievement of group's interest can cause conflicts; particularly when it is observed that the criticisms are based on prejudice. Criticisms should be objective and factual, done with element of love, concern and appreciation for the efforts of the one being criticized.

## 2.3 Types of Conflicts

Willimon (1994), Stiles (1991), Bruggs (1992) suggested that, there are primarily three types of conflicts. They are intrapersonal, interpersonal and substantive conflicts.

**2.3.1 Intrapersonal Conflict:** describes a situation when an individual is not at peace with himself or herself. According to Stiles (1991), intrapersonal conflicts are usually rooted in individual's inner inconsistencies. These inconsistencies manifest in such elements as feeling that one knows more than everyone else, exhibition of the character of "contentious spirit" which does not seek for peace but domination of others in such a way that when one does not have his or her way, conflict is started. To remedy intrapersonal conflict, individuals must control themselves when relating with other people.

**2.3.2 Interpersonal Conflict:** generally results from personality differences that are not primarily related to the issues at stake. This kind of conflict is usually an indication of pre-existing tension which stimulates the rise in feeling and consequently motivates a kind of action towards another person or group of persons. Most often, interpersonal conflicts are rooted in prejudices of all kinds, class differences and interpolation of roles. However, this kind of conflict can be avoided if people engaged in interpersonal relationships quickly recognize that a conflict has arisen and do not engage in withdrawal or avoidance of each other.

**2.3.3 Substantive Conflict:** arise as a result of disputes over facts, ways or means of doing things or achieving objectives, purposes and values. Willimon (1994) pointed to four kinds of substantive conflicts. First is the *conflict over facts of a situation*. For instance, in attempts to carry out a development project, one may ask the question; do we have enough resources to execute the project at that particular time? Conflict may arise when those bent on embarking on the project would not want to consider the realities of resources on ground while, those who want to work with facts would prefer a postponement to avoid a situation of abandoned projects. Secondly is *conflict over methods or means* of executing projects. The question, how do we achieve solution to

this problem? is the major concern in this kind of conflict. Differences in ideas about how to go about achieving the same objective may turn out to become a conflict when there is no consensus or objective evaluation of discussions about alternatives presented. Thirdly is *conflict over ends or goals*. Answer to the question; should this person or group be involved in what is to be done? is the major concern of this substantive kind of conflict. Occasionally, because of some hidden agenda, conflicts arise as to which person or group of persons may be requested to join in the efforts to achieve certain ends or goals.

The fourth kind of substantive conflict is *conflict over values*. This kind of conflict seeks to answer questions like; should we be engaged in confrontation or agitation over certain issues or should we be always reconcilers and peace makers even when our rights are denied? People view issues differently and everyone is entitled to have personal opinions. Attempts to suppress the opinion of others without minding how they feel may result into substantive conflict. Substantive conflicts can become highly emotional but it is a more treatable kind of conflict. Managers and other category of leaders should learn to lose graciously in conflict situations, not because they are weak, incompetent or lacking wisdom; rather it is to ensure that the group, organization or family is not divided and that group goals are pursued with the contributions of all stake holders.

Zaccaria (1984) in his contribution said that, conflicts can be developmental or situational. Conflicts are *developmental* when they appear at each stage or phase in the life of organizations, groups, societies and families. Each stage in the life of any organism is accompanied with certain general demands. It is when these demands are confronted and resolved that movement can be comfortably made to the next stage which, inherently has its own conflict to resolve. In this understanding, conflict is a common continuum except there is no more development. *Situational conflicts* result from structural problems; how for instance a group is to be organized, how responsibilities and authorities are allocated. Where a structural arrangement is overheated conflict arises.

#### **2.4 Advantages of Conflicts**

Advantages of conflicts may not be obvious but they are useful for personal and group development. Bruggs (1982) said that, conflicts provide opportunities for empowerment as persons are energized to overcome apathy and also create a sense of urgency in organizations. When conflicts arise and they are confronted, people usually discover that they have hidden energies and potentials to provide solutions such that the conflict will not degenerate into crisis. Again, conflicts enhance the development of a sense of self-image or self-esteem. During conflicts people begin to understand who they really are as they understand better who they are not. For instance, when people confront conflict situations and then resolve it amicably, each party involved becomes more satisfied with self that, his or her views or position has been expressed; in this way, self-image is boosted or promoted. Another advantage is that, conflicts serve as a release valve for emotions and feelings which might otherwise explode if not released in less dramatic ways. When people do not have the opportunity to release tensed-up emotions, their health may be negatively affected.

Wallace (1982) also highlighted other advantages of conflicts that include; conflicts develop tolerance in individuals and can be an indication that; the supposedly right things which one does are not popular with people. Conflicts can assist one to know how people feel and why they react or behave the way they do. This understanding will assist in enhancing harmonious working together as efforts would be made to avoid what may strain good relationships. Conflicts also enable people to tap of the strength that is available in diversity and assist in self-discovery of one's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and limitations.

#### **2.5 Disadvantages of Conflicts**

Disadvantages of conflicts include disintegration of result that may be in the form of time, money, energy, human resources and creativity diverted into non-productive activities. There can be dissociation in relationship which may create alienation or a loss of sense of belonging. When this happens, the group is robbed of the benefits of joint action by stakeholders toward achievement of objectives. Conflicts distract everyone involved and impair effectiveness, a consequence of which people loss motivation to give much of themselves toward organizational success. In conflict situations, organizational weaknesses and breakdown in relationships are evident and combined efforts directed at goal achievement becomes difficult. Conflicts also send different messages to interested observers outside of the group. Such messages may be the correct or wrong interpretations of what is actually going on in the group. Those who made wrong interpretations will have a negative image of the people in conflict.

#### **2.6 Appropriate Conducts During Conflict Periods**

During conflicts, the tendencies are there that people behave in uncomplimentary ways. As an example, people who prior to a conflict are usually happy and smiling may suddenly become moody, aggressive, unfriendly and uninviting. They can be subjective instead of being objective and vindictive rather being impartial and straightforward. They do all these because they want to make a point or put down an opposition whether real or imagined. But when in conflicts, people should not lose control of their emotions or practice deception.

Whenever falsehood is introduced into conflict situations, whether it is for reasons of justification or to intentionally misdirect the attention of others who desire that conflicts be resolved; there is always the likelihood that more confusion will erupt to disrupt the groups' unity. It is most profitable that truth prevails in situations of conflict even when it does not give advantage to personal position. Presumption lends itself to subjectivity and insincerity and they indicate attempts to get quick answers or solutions to conflicts.

In conflict, it is not right attitude to have retaliation at the back of one's mind as it does not accommodate an intention to seek for reconciliation. The process of reconciliation is a continuous one therefore, ensuring that communication line is not closed but open to meaningful, frank and sincere discussions on issues, is an appropriate conduct. People should be ready to listen well, understand well what is being communicated and be able to reconstruct them well and briefly. There will always arise the need to evaluate personal involvements in conflicts and pray about it (Briscoe, 1994). One needs to regularly ask the question; is this conflict worth the trouble? Can there be a better way to handle the issues that stimulate the conflict? Is there damage done to the group image through the conflict? (Wallace, 1982). Evaluating oneself by giving answers to above questions and others like them will ginger appropriate conducts during conflicts.

## **2.7 Preliminary Steps in Conflict Resolution**

For better resolution of conflicts, taking certain preliminary steps can aid in hastening resolution of conflicts. Willimon (1994) suggested four steps that include (1) obtain as much information as it is possible concerning the conflict. It is noted that many conflicts are the result of misinformation or poor information. (2) Buy as much time as it is possible because when people are under pressure to reach quick decisions during conflicts there is the possibility that only a little time is left to work out differences and to seek for alternatives to what is the subject of conflict. Delay sometimes can be a means by which time is gained to function wisely. (3) Make an assessment of individuals involved in conflict or potential conflict situations. Assessment is to be based on the following questions; how mature are the people involved in the conflict? Is the conflict a work of isolated, chronic trouble makers who are trying to create group crisis where none exists? An assessment of individuals involved in conflict can provide an appropriate framework through which parties in conflict may be properly addressed. (4) Reduce or completely remove high emotional temperature off the conflict. Elements like humour or distraction can be used to cool down high emotions. Once a conflict has become open to the public, it is not good to take a passive approach to solving it. Next part of this work addresses how one should approach resolution of conflicts?

## **2.8 Approaches to Conflict Resolution**

Approaches to conflict resolution include the conventional methods of ignoring, avoiding, diffusing, withdrawal, smoothing, compromising, forcing, consensus or integrative decision making and confronting conflicts ([www.mindtool.com](http://www.mindtool.com); [www.stressabout.com](http://www.stressabout.com); Bulus, 2007; Amadi, 2004; Bruggs 1982). Withdrawal takes the form of apathy or a feeling of lack of interest or concern about what is going on. Withdrawal does not bring out the best contribution by individuals into group cause. In soothing, the real issues are not sincerely addressed therefore, relationships are artificial and nothing is concrete. In compromising, even the objective and mission of the group may be abandoned for something less important. By neglecting conflicts it is hoped that it will somehow disappear and in avoiding it everything is done to hide or suppress feelings and emotional response in clash interests. The result is that hypocrisy is being nurtured among group members. But in confronting conflicts, there is no denying the obvious but a practical step is taken to acknowledge the reality of a problem then a search for solution to the problem is undertaken.

Other approaches to conflict resolution include the "integrated" approach that involves three phases broken down into several steps. First phase is "readiness" which is primarily meant to see and understand a conflict. It involve steps one and two (i) creation of awareness of the problem; (ii) understanding the problem. Second phase is "preparatory" in which reflection and focusing is emphasized. It involve steps three to six (iii) clarification of how the problem relates to the mission of the group; (iv) development of a set of expected outcomes; (v) generation of a range of alternatives and courses of action; (vi) selection of courses of action to be tried. Third phase is "implementation and evaluation" which focuses on action and reviews. Steps to be taken in this phase involves developing an evaluation plan, preparing the group for change, initiation of a course of action with the provision of adequate resources and monitoring the progress and consistent following of agreed plans (Zaccaria, 1984).

At other times people take sides in hostile contexts such that emotions are now made to become the determining factor in a win or lose struggle within the group (Wallace, 1982). There is the "diffusion" approach advocated by Willimon (1994) which works better when conflicts are already made public. The approach involves taking the following steps; leader must ensure that everyone in the group knows about the facts of the situation, with the understanding that no one should hasten others to reach decision. Next is that someone would be asked to explain the history of the conflict and then the conflict would be referred to a proper committee for discussions

and recommendations thereafter; action is delayed until there has been time to attempt to manage the conflict. Diffusion approach then proceeds with problem solving analysis by (1) considering all facts gathered about the conflict, the feelings expressed and opinions stated about the conflict. (2) List all possible options available for solving the problem considering the potential positive and negative consequences of each option. (3) Each option is to be listed in the order of its priority to guide in proper selection of steps to take. (4) Group options according to issues and not according to personalities. (5) Develop a consensus of items and methods to use.

### 3. Concepts of Conflict Resolution among Gombe Residents

This research is a survey and for the purpose of ascertaining the concepts of conflict resolution among residents of Gombe town, an instrument in the form of a questionnaire was prepared. It contained twelve items (Appendix A). It was pretested and scored 0.78 when alpha is 0.05. The instrument was administered on one hundred and fifty Gombe residents who were randomly selected cutting across different works of life, seventy five respondents were males and seventy five were females. Items on the questionnaire were generally requesting respondents to indicate whether leaders are to be trusted for conflict resolution and to know respondent's idea about pretending as if no conflict exists even when one does or resorting to law courts and violence as solution to conflicts. The responses obtained were quantified and the results analyzed using t-test statistical tool. The analysis is presented on table one below.

#### 3.1 Findings

**Table 1:** - Gombe Resident's Responses to Questionnaire on Concepts of Conflict Resolution.

Item	No	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Df	Tc	P	Tt	Sig
Male Respondents	75	32.08	10.41	148	0.37	0.05	2.04	NS
Female Respondents	75	29.56	12.51					

Table 1 shows that, when alpha is 0.05 calculated t (0.37) is less than table t (2.04). This show there is no significant difference reported on the concepts which male and female residents of Gombe town hold about conflict resolution most probably because of the similar conditions and situations through which each of them has experienced or is experiencing. It is clear that the respondents' understanding of conflict is ideal and this is reflected in how they responded to practical ways by which conflicts may be resolved. However, using the mean scores to compare the order in which males and females responded to each of the items on the instrument (Appendix A), the first five positions are reported accordingly, first the males and then females.

3.1.1 *The Male Respondents:* First: - conflicts should be discouraged as it destroys relationships (item 10 on Appendix A). Second: - persons in conflicts should learn how to talk one-on-one basis about a conflict (item 7 on Appendix A). Third: - conflicts should be avoided but if it comes one should pretend that nothing is happening (item 6 on Appendix A). Fourth: - religious leaders can be bias therefore, they cannot be totally trusted for conflict resolution (item 5 on Appendix A). Fifth: - elders may be invited to intervene but with a condition that their verdict may not constitute a final decision (item 3 on Appendix A).

3.1.2 *The Female Respondents:* First (two items recorded same mean score): - (a) allow elders to intervene with a condition that their verdict does not constitute final decision, (b) avoid conflicts at all cost and pretend as if it is not there if it eventually comes (items 3 & 6 on Appendix A). Third: - take issues to elders within the community and accept whatever verdict they arrive at without complaining (item 1 on Appendix A). Fourth (three items recorded same mean score): - (a) attempts at conflict resolution should be embarked upon only when people are ready for it, (b) religious leaders cannot be totally trusted for conflict resolution because of bias, (c) conflicts should be encouraged because it enhances a vigorous and dynamic social environment (items 11, 5, 9 on Appendix A).

### 4. Implications of findings

In view of the above findings, implications that may be drawn for those involved in making attempts at ensuring social peace and stability within the Nigerian society include:-

1). The different ways male and female residents in Gombe responded showed that religious and traditional leaders who are supposed to be the custodians of age long legacy of peaceful communal living amongst different

nationalities in Africa seem to have lost credibility. They are now looked upon as partial rather than impartial arbiters in social and community issues. This calls for serious re-examination and consequent changes on the part of both our spiritual and temporal leaders. When leaders are least trusted by followers it signals danger for peaceful co-existence.

2). There seems to be a culture of pretence and hypocrisy prevalent among majority of the people hence, the preference of pretending that a conflict does not exist even when evidences prove the contrary. This culture cannot help situations to become better. For instance, in many families husband and wife look good to people outside or visitors but the reality of their existence is that they are avowed antagonists. In churches people will sing and dance, but at the bottom of their hearts are unresolved conflicts with other church members, so it is in other religious gatherings and places of work. Peace and stability cannot be realized with an attitude of pretence.

3). There is an implication of being ready to open up one's life and heart for meaningful discussions to take place. As soon as unpleasant situations are observed people should permit that concerned individuals can come in to resolve conflicts that gave rise to those conditions. Suppressing emotions can be harmful and when it is aggravated can cause outbursts that may be violent. Though there is the issue of right to privacy and other rights, it is observed that they are generally alien to the African culture that is sound, historical and not spontaneous. The doors of our relationships should be opened to positive interventions. We live for each other.

4). By the way females responded, they still reserve some level of confidence in religious leaders. This is a good omen which has evidence in the current way our religious houses are being populated more by female worshippers than the men. If the women translate their religious fervency to younger ones with sincerity of purpose and practice the better for all.

5). Conflicts should not be allowed to degenerate into crisis of any kind so as to enjoy peace and stability and the benefits that go along with that atmosphere.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the concepts of conflict and its resolution among male and female residents of Gombe town. These concepts are very important elements in ensuring peace and stability in the Nigerian nation. Findings from the research showed that there is much distrust for leaders of social and spiritual institutions who are supposed to be influential in carrying people along in conflict resolutions. Leaders under normal circumstances should earn the respect of the people however results indicate they are not fully trusted for arbitration in conflict situations. This cannot be said to be a comfortable condition for an African nation in search for peace and stability. There is need for urgent steps to be taken to restore confidence in the leadership by followers.

The paper also drew some implications out of the responses collected and analyzed from respondents for this study. These include that conflicts must not be allowed to degenerate into crises and doors of relationship should be opened to positive interventions. The current crises situations going on in different parts of Nigeria have claimed so many innocent lives and seen the destruction of properties worth several millions of American dollars. These are situations generally perpetrated under the guise of religious fanaticism, terrorist activities, tribal sentiments, claims of marginalization of different kinds and territorial claims. It is the contention of this paper that most of the crises situations should not have appeared if they had been resolved amicably at the conflict stage. The entire society stands the chance of enjoying peace and stability and consequently developments of positive kind when citizens can handle conflicts as soon as they appear on the surface whether it is at the family, organizational, community, tribal or national levels.

## 6. Recommendations

1). Government as matter of priority should introduce into educational institutions at all levels a course that will enable graduates of the Nigerian education system acquire the skills of conflict resolution.

2). Religious organizations and traditional institutions should as a matter of national interest embark on house cleaning exercises that will see the rank and file of their system becoming more credible in the public eye.

3). Nigerians should learn to be tolerant and not be exploiters of each other in their interpersonal relationships. They should rather be happy for the growth of their fellows and continually work at sustaining and making the peace they enjoy becoming stable.

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**Appendix A: Questionnaire**

Question: - In your opinion how should conflict resolution be approached? Tick (/) your response from the options provided. SA=strongly agree; A=agree; SD=strongly disagree; D=disagree

No	ITEMS	SA	A	SD	D
1	Take issues to elders in the community and accept whatever verdict they gave without complaining				
2	Seek for your rights through the law courts				
3	Allow elders to intervene but with a condition that their verdict may not constitute a final and automatic decision				
4	Invite religious leaders to initiate steps toward resolution of conflicts and be prepared to accept their judgment				
5	Religious leaders cannot be totally trusted because they also have their biases				
6	Avoid conflicts at all cost but when it comes pretend it is not there				
7	Learn to talk one-on-one basis with persons with whom one is involved in conflicts with aim to resolve differences				
8	You do not surrender what should be your right for the sake of peaceful resolution of conflicts				
9	Conflicts should be encouraged because it enhances a vigorous and dynamic social environment				
10	Conflicts should be discouraged because it destroys relationships				
11	Attempts at conflict resolution should only be embarked upon when people are ready for it so as not to waste time				
12	Best way to maintain peace is to prepare for war				

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