

Peace and Conflict Resolution: A dimensional discourse of the oil producing communities in NIGERIA.

EJOVI AUSTINE & MGBONYEBI VOKE CHARLES
POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT, COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, PMB 2090, AGBOR. DELTA
STATE, NIGERIA, WEST AFRICA.
austinejovi@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a national phenomenon and an unavoidable consequence of human interaction in any society. It can take many shapes in the work place and community; it can occur between people representing different organizational units, it can occur between people who work together. Conflict is a dynamic process that is precipitated, developed and governed by the joint communication strategies of the parties involved.

In support of the above viewpoint is Ukadu (1999) who stated that conflict is a natural occurrence in everyday inter-relationship. Any organization without conflict problems implies that the organization is not dynamic and nothing significant is going on in the organization. Conflict is a fact of life and it occurs between individuals (inter-personal conflict) or between groups (inter-group conflict) individuals engaged in conflict typically experience stress, anger, bitterness, frustration and anxiety, yet this natural outcome of relationship between individuals and groups makes an organization move forward if well managed. However, indifference to it, threatens the very existence of an organization.

On the other hand, peace is an agreement or treaty between warring or antagonistic Nations, groups etc. it is also a state of mutual harmony between people or groups, especially in personal relationships. It is the cessation of or freedom of any strife or dissension.

On the premise of the above expressions, this piece of work discusses the following salient issues.

- *The meaning, nature, concept of conflict and peace.
- *The need for peace.
- *The causes of conflicts in the oil producing communities.
- *The ingredients of conflict.
- *The effects or consequences of conflicts.
- *The different methods adopted in the management of conflicts .
- *Conflicts Resolution strategies.
- *How to end the conflicts in the oil producing Areas.

THE MEANING, NATURE AND CONCEPT OF CONFLICT AND PEACE

Different authorities have given different definitions and meanings to these terms; Conflict and peace (and their Management) but few views are expressed and taken and as working definitions for this exercise. According to Hecker and Wilmot (1991:12) Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two independent parties who perceive incompatible goals in a similar way. Gasiokwu (2004) notes the conflict presupposes the existence of opposing principles, aims and ideas with various actors struggling to establish dominance by channels available to them. It is the prosecution of rights, views and ideas by people whose interests and methods differs, each trying to maintain supremacy. It is when the prosecution of rights, views and ideas by parties is accomplished by force that armed conflict is said to occur.

Conflict is a serious disagreement, struggle and fight arising out of differences in opinions, wishes, needs, values and interest between and among individuals or groups. (Hornby, 1995). It is a struggle between groups or among groups over claims to scarce resources, status symbols and power bases. The objective of the individuals or groups engaged in conflict is to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals so that they can enjoy the scarce resources, the status symbols and power bases. (Coser, 1956) It is not surprising to read that conflict is conceived as a purposeful struggle between collective actors who use social power to defect or remove opponents in order to gain status, resources and push their values over other social groupings. (Himes, 1980). Conflict is prevalent within and between social relations such as families, ethnic groups, social institutions and organization, political parties and states – furthermore, it is prevalent in situations where goals, aspirations, interest and needs of social groups cannot be achieved simultaneously and the value systems of such groups are at variance, invariably, the social parties purposely employ their power bases to fight for their position with a view to defeat, neutralize or eliminate one another (Anstey, 1991).

Descriptively, conflict can be defined as a situation of interaction involving two or more parties in which actions in pursuit of incompatible objectives or interest result in varying degrees of discord. The principle dichotomy is

between normally harmonious and co-operative relations and a descriptive adversarial confrontation, culminating at its worst in high-intensity violence. Conflict has also been described as an event, issue, occurrence or situation that could be described as a turning point, for better or worse. Following from this definition, conflict has either negative and positive valences or scores as a change factor or agent in organizational management.

Following from the above expressions is that conflict is a phenomenon that is an important part of human existence and a natural part of our daily lives and as long as man lives, there must be conflict of interest. (Gasiokwu, 2001:352) What is important is that in the face of such conflicts, people are still able to achieve proper management and resolution of such conflicts.

THE NEED FOR PEACE

Conflict as noted in the preceding chapter is descriptive and destructive. It has caused misery to millions of people throughout the world ,indeed, several people died as a result of conflict between oil producing communities on one side and oil producing communities and government on the other side. Since conflict among and between social groupings tends to escalate into violence and then war which in turn, results in the loss of lives and destruction of infrastructures and facilities, there seems to be consensus about the need to find lasting peace and harmony. It was not by accident that after the Second World War in 1945, the United Nations established the security council with a mandate to promote and maintain peace throughout the World through mechanisms such as diplomacy and the UN peace-keeping force. It was evident then, as it is evident now, that conflict is not the best strategy to attain peaceful-coexistence in the world and in the oil producing communities in Nigeria in particular. Similarly, it was not by default that Article XIX of the charter for organization of Africa Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU) required member states to pledge to settle all disputes among themselves by peaceful means. To this end, the Africa Union established a commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration. The “black gold” (Oil) is still a source of conflict today in the oil producing communities in Nigeria. If possible, it is better to avoid conflicts than letting them come, only to begin to seek resolution.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN OIL PRODUCING COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

Most writers on the issues of conflict seem to agree that the causes of conflict include, among others, competition for scarce resources, difference in terms of goals, value systems and interest; and structural imbalances and ambiguity in coordinating social structures.

It emanates from socio – economic inequalities, ethnicity, absence of opportunities for political participation, differences in religious inclinations, fragile government structures, inadequate civic structures, differences in political ideologies and competition over scarce resources (Klingebiel 2002) indeed, conflict is caused by actual or perceived inequality of control, use, ownership and distribution of scare resources. It takes place in heterogeneous society where the dominant group, using power enforces its own value systems, symbols, culture and language over other powerless groups.

With regards to this discourse on the causes of conflicts in the oil producing communities in Nigeria, a brief description of the life of people in the oil producing communities will easily draw home some of the reasons for the conflicts between the oil producing communities (Host) and the oil producing companies. As Dafinone (2008:30) puts it, the Niger Delta has suffered gross neglect and deprivation over the years despite its enormous contributions to the economic property of this country. As a result of this utter neglect and deprivation, there is a widespread poverty, complete lack of social and economic infrastructure and lack of basic amenities and there is high rate of unemployment and crime. This state of affairs has in turn bred a frustrated population (which over-time become aggressive) ethnic polarization, communal suspicion, anti-establishment agitation and hostility, all of which create instability and further impede development.

In support of the above views is Johnson (2007:24) who states that the oil producing communities conflict is a symptomatic of how environmental and economic degradation have resulted in a violent response infused with cultural solidarity. Nigeria’s history is one of running environmental, economic and cultural exploitation. Oil, which accounts for over 90 percent of exports and 80 percent of government revenue, earns much to the coffers of this nation Nigeria.

While many insist that oil money can be used to facilitate the launching of future development plans, the progression towards development remains stagnant. Oil producing communities have endured lack of social amenities and their indigenes have been frozen out of employment opportunities in the oil companies.

Cataloguing further the causes of conflicts in oil producing communities, Soeze (2003) state that while many host communities have demanded for the construction of access roads, pipe-born water, electricity, schools, hospitals, employment and so on, most of the oil companies, instead of addressing their issues, go through the back door to “grease” the palms of illiterate, greedy, unpatriotic and poor community leaders under the guise of public relations to circumvent the people’s demands. This has made many youths to become restive, aggressive, militant and violent in their domains.

On of the remote and immediate causes of youth restiveness in the oil producing communities Alameyesigha (2004:51) a one time Governor of Bayelsa state who was among the beneficiaries of the state pardon granted by President Goodluck Jonathan outlined the following factors:

*Long – standing marginalization of the Niger – Delta, especially oil producing communities in successive governments at the three tiers: Federal, State and Local Governments.

*The diabolical activities of oil and gas companies which have employed various tactics to divide and rule the communities and deny them real development. These companies identify strong opinion leaders in their host communities using them against the rest of the communities. This encourages the emergence of rival groups to precipitate frequent and often violent change of leadership among the youths.

*The improved educational level of the youths who are now increasingly aware of their plight and the need to reverse it.

*The lack of political will by post federal governments to enforce environmental laws as they affect the oil companies, especially as the modus operandi of the same companies is different in developed countries.

*Compromise with oil companies by a few indigenes in the communities against their own best interest.

*The excessive use of force and weapons by the security agencies (like the Joint Task Force, JTF, Navy etc) in the course of peace – keeping, sometimes leading to avoidable deaths.

*The deliberate refusal of oil companies to honour their obligations to communities as contained in various Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which they voluntarily signed with their host communities.

*The sponsorship of some youths by some leaders in the communities with the concurrence of the oil companies to cause spillage with a view to receiving percentage of compensations arising from there and obtaining spillage cleaning contracts.

*The phenomenon of “stand by labour” whereby oil companies regularly pay some youths who are not members of their staff and have no job to do. This usually brings social conflict between those paid and unpaid and hence attack on oil companies by the “Unemployed” ones.

*The absence of the basic necessities of life such as electricity, portable water, housing, communication, good roads, health and leisure facilities in the oil – bearing communities. In sharp contrast, all the good things of life abound in the flow stations and plat forms of oil companies just a stone throw away.

*The continued existence of unjust, mischievous and obnoxious resource laws which have been roundly rejected by the youths and elders of the Niger – Delta among them in the land use Act and Petroleum Act.

*The skewed structure of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in which eminently qualified sons and daughters of the Niger Delta return to the region unemployed, while some of their colleagues who serve in the oil states, especially those privilege to do their primary assignments in the oil companies are retained.

*The 2 million Man March organized for (in support of the transformation from military head of State to democratic President of the federal Republic of Nigeria) the late Sani Abacha exposed the Niger Delta youths to Abuja for the first time. Being scandalized by the sharp contract between the spender, they saw in the federal capital and the thatch houses and polluted waterways they know in the creeks at home, they had no option than find a means of redress because they saw how their oil money was squandered, a movement the uninformed Nigerians dismissed as restiveness, militancy and cultism.

The litany of causes of such conflicts is endless, however, members of the group in authority feel threatened, and seek new ways or do whatever is in their power to ensure that they retain their authority. On the other hand, members of the subservient group would do anything or whatever is in their power to ensure that their concerns and interests are addressed. Invariably, with the passage of time, conflict escalates, sometimes into violence resulting in the loss of life and destruction of physical facilities, communication infrastructures etc.

THE INGREDIENTS OF CONFLICTS

Needs: Needs are things that are essential to our well-being. Conflicts arise when we ignore others needs, our needs or groups needs.

Perceptions: People interpret reality differently. They perceive difference in the severity, causes and consequences of problems. Misperceptions or differing perceptions may come from self-perceptions, others perceptions, differing perceptions of situation and perceptions of threat.

Power: How people define and use power is an important influence on the number and types of conflicts that occur. Conflict can arise when people try to make others change their actions or to gain an unfair advantage.

Value: Values are beliefs or principles we consider to be very important. Various conflicts arise when people hold incompatible values or when values are not clear. Conflicts also arise when one party refused to accept the fact the other party holds something as a value rather than a preference.

Feelings and Emotions: Many people let their feelings and emotions become a major influence over how they deal with conflict. Conflict can also occur because people ignore their own or other feelings and emotions.

THE EFFECTS OF CONFLICTS

*It has negatively affected the oil producing communities economically, socially and politically as their houses, properties and other social – infrastructural facilities are always damaged when the Federal Government opted into using force as an instrument of conflict resolution.

*It has divested the money that ought to have been used in developing the communities to replacement and repairment of oil facilities.

*Exposed the youths to getting rich quickly through negative ways such as oil bunkering, kidnapping and stealing of the properties of oil companies at the expense of their gradual planning and working towards a better tomorrow.

*Destroyed the properties of the oil companies, stopped production of oil and gas in most places and have drastically reduced the total man – power and revenue sum profits of the oil companies and national income of the country.

*Destroyed the local and international image and reputation of the country particularly the Niger Delta region and made the zone high risk area for investment by foreign investors as they could not be guaranteed of their resources and investment conflicts management in oil producing communities.

*Money compensation Role: During seismic surveys, exploration and exploitation of oil, occurrence of oil spillage and other damage to the environment of communities, the oil companies to pay some money as compensation or damages to the affected parties. However, the rates generally paid to the affected victims are far less than the market values internationally. Orubu (2000).

CREATION OF COMMISSIONS AND AGENCIES

The government has previously set aside 1.3% of the federally collated mineral resources revenue (from the federation account) which was later increased to 3% for the rapid development, it has increased to 13%. In addition was the creation of the different Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MENDA) all geared towards the regions development.

Some State Government in addition to the federal government oriented agencies and commissions had created their own commissions to bring development to the grass roots in the oil producing communities concerned. Among them are:

*The Imo State Oil Producing Development Commission (ISOPADEC) for Ohaji/Egberna and Oguta LGA.

*The Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC)

*The Ondo State Oil Producing Areas Development commission, among others.

THE MILITARY OPTION:

Highly disturbed and affected by the activities of the militants in the Niger Delta who engage in oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping (both oil and non-oil workers for ransom, hostage taking and other threats to lives and properties, the federal government set up the Joint Task Force (JTF) to maintain Peace in the region.

NIGER DELTA PEACE CONFERENCE/SUMMIT

Thinking that dialogue is the solution to the conflict and crises in the Niger Delta, the Federal Government on several occasions in the past had organized peace conferences, seminars, public lectures and workshops at a point, a 40 man Technical Committee was put in place of the aborted Niger Delta Summit to discuss and proffer solutions to the problems of the region.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

- A. Collaborating: win/win
- B. Compromising: Win some/Lose some
- C. Accommodating: Lose/Win
- D. Competing: Win/Lose
- E. Avoiding: No Winners/No Losers.

COLLABORATING:

Fundamental Premise: Teamwork and Cooperation help everyone achieve their goals which also maintains relationships.

Strategic Philosophy: The process of working through differences will lead to creative solutions that will satisfy both parties concerned.

When to use:

*When there is high level of trust.

*When you don't want to have full responsibility.

*When you want others to also have ownership of solutions.

*When the people involved are willing to change their thinking as more information is found and new options are suggested.

*When you need to work through animosity and hard feelings.

Drawbacks:

*The process takes lots of time and energy.

*Some may take advantage of other people's trust and openness.

COMPROMISING: You Bend, I Bend.

Fundamental Premise: Winning something while losing a little is Okay.

Strategic Philosophy: Both ends are placed against the middle in an attempt to serve the "Common good" while ensuring each person can maintain something of their original position.

When to use:

*When people of equal status are equally committed to goals.

*When time can be saved by reaching intermediate settlements on individual parts of complex issues.

*When goals are moderately important.

Drawbacks:

*Important values and long-term objectives can be detailed in the process.

*May not work if initial demands are too great.

*Can spawn cynicism, especially if there's no commitment to honour the compromise solutions.

ACCOMODATING: I LOSE, YOU WIN

Fundamental Premise: Working towards a common purpose is more important than any of the peripheral concerns; the trauma of confronting differences may damage fragile relationships.

Strategic planning: Appear others by down-playing conflict, thus protecting the relationship.

When to use:

*When an issue is not as important to you as it is to the other persons.

*When you know you can win

*When it's not the right time.

*When what the parties have in common is a good deal more important than their differences.

Drawbacks:

*One's own ideas don't get attention

*Credibility and influence can be lost.

COMPETING: I WIN, YOU LOSE

Fundamental Premise: Associates "winning" a conflict with competition.

Strategic planning: When goals are extremely important, one must sometimes use power to win.

When to use:

*When you know you are right.

*When quick decision is needed.

*When strong personality is trying to steamroll you.

*When you need to stand up for your rights.

Drawbacks:

*Can escalate conflict.

*Losers may retaliate.

AVOIDING: NO WINNERS, NO LOSERS

Fundamental Premises: This isn't the right time or place to discuss the issue.

Strategic Planning: Avoids conflict by withdrawing, sidestepping or postponing.

When to use:

*When conflict is small and relationships are at stake.

*When more important issues are pressing and you feel you don't have time for this particular one.

*When you see no chance of getting your concerns met.

*When you are too emotionally involved and others around you can solve the conflict more successfully.

*When more information is needed.

Drawbacks:

*Important decisions may be made by default.

*Postponing may make matters worse.

HOW TO END THE CONFLICT IN THE OIL PRODUCING COMMUNITIES

1. The Oil companies should establish special positions or offices that should be responsible for mediation, arbitration or third party peace making in order to facilitate resolution of predictable kinds of types.
2. The key personnels of these companies on public relations should be properly trained in the appropriate use of tactics for coping with conflicts and crises.
3. In policy making and decisions on issues affecting them, the companies should allow the factions (communities) with different orientation to be represented so that the end decisions will be binding on all concerned. One that note, the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) signed between the oil companies and the communities should be respected, honoured and effectively implemented and not politicized.
4. The oil companies should as a deliberate policy employ indigenes of host communities and social dialogue between oil companies and most communities remains the key strategy for peaceful resolution of conflicts in the religion (Ajaero, 2007).
5. The provision of social amenities like electricity, water, school, roads, health centers and even awarding scholarships to indigent students of their host communities.
6. The oil companies should adopt effective and workable sustainable development program in the region. Policies of Gas flaring, oil spillage and environmental pollution by both the federal government and oil companies should henceforth stop and practical solutions suggested and implemented.

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