PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study sets out to explore the psychological processes of resolving conflicts in Nigeria. The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm and data were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews. The participants were fifteen survivors of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Some intriguing findings were made following the interviews of these participants. These findings were presented and analysed by means of thematic analysis method. The three major themes that emerged from the interviews capture participants' experiences of the conflicts: consequences of the conflicts, resolving conflict and government's tactics to reduce the conflicts. The study also gave recommendations on prevention of future conflicts.*

KEYWORDS: Group conflicts, conflict resolution, ethno-religious conflict, psychological processes.

INTRODUCTION

The protracted nature of the ceaseless ethno-religious conflicts witnessed in Nigeria, the destruction of properties and the loss of lives which follow it raise several questions regarding the consequences of conflicts on the country in terms of economic, social and political development. Conflicts between religions and ethnic groups in Nigeria are among the causes that create divisions between the citizens. Further, in line with the contributions of corruption and weak states and institutions to conflict as described by Irobi (2005), politicians presently exploit ethnicity and religion to manipulate and/or mobilise the citizens. The manipulation is so commonplace that almost all the institutions and sectors work alongside religious and ethnic lines. Job security and sometimes survival may be dependent on one's religious or ethnic affiliation. One may also face intimidation at the workplace due to ethnic or religious affiliation and peaceful coexistence is sometimes jeopardised.

Resolution is another important term in this report because it always follows wherever there is a conflict. However, it only comes when the parties involved or some concerned parties want the conflict to seize. Resolution, according to Heitler (2011), is a collaborative problem-solving process that involves cooperation of the parties who are involved in the conflict, ensuring that a plan of action which is suitable for the parties is adopted. Frequent conflict in any country undermines peace and security of that country (Perouse de Montclos, 2014). Security is important in sustainable development because every industrial activity requires security to prosper.

In Fred-Mensah's (2008) definition of the term conflict resolution, he considers some important terms in this process, such as 'conflict management' and 'social control.' He describes the process as involving methods, principles and skills necessary for resolving a conflict, or at least reducing it. Conflict resolution also embodies post-conflict activities, which include reconciliation between the aggrieved parties, reintegration of those separated or divided by the conflict, rehabilitation of ex-combatants and war-affected persons, and the establishment of early warning systems.

Irobi (2005) identifies three common conflict patterns in Africa as follows:

1. The claims for ethnic and cultural independence,

2. The claims for power, land and money, and

3. Conflicts that are due to rivalry among ethnic groups.

Irobi (2005), however, fails to acknowledge conflicts taking place between religious groups or caused by religion. This failure is understandable because, while religion has been identified as one of the main sources of conflict across histories (Horton, 2011), and presently causes serious conflicts in Nigeria, religion is not a common cause of conflicts in Africa as a whole. Relative to the patterns described by Irobi (2005), religious conflicts are few, such as Boko Haram, which is restricted to Nigeria and occasionally its neighbours, and Al-Shabab, which is also restricted to Somalia and occasionally spreads to Kenya.

Hook (2013) identifies a variety of consequences resulting from conflicts and these are as follows: (i) economic impacts; (ii) human costs; (iii) social tolls; and (iv) political instability. In terms of economic impacts, conflicts cause destruction of infrastructure, diversion of assets

to violence, capital flight, reduction of economic growth, loss of assets and investments. Under human costs are targeting of civilians, population displacements, refugee flows and death tolls. Under social tolls are high mortality rates, reduced life expectancy, increased mental and physical health problems, destruction of educational and health systems and the spread of infectious diseases. Under 'political instability' are human rights violations, heighted opportunities for corruption and the possibility of authoritarian regimes.

Conflicts of thoughts, interests, values, choice and many more characterise human beings and are regarded as intra-personal conflict. Such conflicts not only hamper individuals' efforts to make decisions but also stand as among the major sources of stress for the individuals. Inter-personal conflict, however, is not restricted to the individual person; rather, groups, organisations or even states can equally be caught up in this process.

The inability to reach a resolution or reconciliation in the presence of conflict can be too destructive to the extent that crisis, war or chaos may follow (Ifeanyi, 2006). Duncan (1975) is of the opinion that conflict can wreak havoc through hostility. Conflict and competition do not necessarily correlate: conflicts can be witnessed in the absence of any competition, such as when decision-making mechanisms break down. Based on this view, DeCenzo (1997) links conflicts to serious disagreements involving two individuals or groups who were unable to resolve their differences and manage their affairs well. The type of disagreement referred to by DeCenzo (1997) above can become so serious to the extent that it can degenerate into chaos, which may also go beyond the individuals or groups involved to affect the wider population or society. Whenever such a situation arises, conflict is very likely to follow.

Similarly, Igbuzor (2010), as cited in Aniekwe and Kushie (2011), views conflict as any act of violence committed in the course of championing political activities, including those perpetrated before, during or after political elections. He identifies such activities as thuggery, the use of force with the aim of disrupting a political process, the use of dangerous weapons for the purposes of intimidation or causing grievous bodily harm during political activities. Conflict in the view of Kesterner and Ray (2002) is a situation in which two or more individuals or groups, including a state, strive to attain a goal designed for one person or party. They note that, often, incompatible means could be applied to attain such a goal. In other words, the situation warrants competition for scarce resources or values and in order to succeed, one party may choose to injure or eliminate the other. The two concepts – 'crisis' and 'conflict' – represent destruction to harmonious relationships and peaceful coexistence. Conflict is part of human existence as previously stated (Horton, 2011). Therefore, the existence of conflict itself does not always attract much question; rather, what seems to attract questions is about how such conflict is managed or resolved. Crisis comes after a conflict has persisted for so long without resolution. The Niger Delta crisis meets this description because the crisis had existed for more than 3 decades until when amnesty was granted to the militants to surrender their rifles and be allowed to engage in a peace process by the late Nigerian president, Umaru Yar'Adua.

Religiously induced violence is said to have a relationship with faith and conviction, i.e., people who belong to the same religion try to safeguard their faith by excluding those who are not part of their religion (Danjibo, 2012; Okolie-Osemene, 2015; Olojo, 2014). General elections also contribute to conflicts and violence in Nigeria, such as the massacres of hundreds of people after the presidential election, which took place in the country in 2011 (Nwankwo, 2015). Killings also occur in response to events in other parts of the world, such as the bloody riots by

Kano Muslims to protest America's Afghanistan campaign in 2001, which resulted in high death tolls (Okoye, 2014). Similarly, the Danish newspaper cartoon of Prophet Mohammed in 2006 led to violence by Nigerian Muslims which claimed the lives of 157 people (mostly Christians) in Maiduguri alone and 25 in Bauchi; other places, including Katsina, witnessed the killing of Christians by Muslims, including the burning of 30 churches (Okoye, 2014).

Religious conflicts in Nigeria also occurred in the form of reprisal attacks after Christians were killed in the northern part of the country where Islam is predominant. Christians, particularly in some South-eastern states would take to the streets to avenge the attacks, such as the incidents of 1999 and 2002 in Abia and Anambra States, whereby Northern Muslims in these two states were targeted because their kinsmen were killed in the northern states.

Alongside the aforementioned steps and processes, several debates and attempts have been made on how to resolve several crises facing Nigeria. This current study, therefore, aims to contribute to such developments, and understand participants' experiences and beliefs about conflict resolution. The major objectives to be addressed are the following:

• To examine the various consequences of the conflicts in their respective communities

• To explore the contributions of the governments in reducing and resolving the conflicts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The serious implications of conflicts made conflicts a subject of study attracting an increasing number of students and scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines, such as theology, management study, sociology, political science, economics, psychology and several others. A variety of theoretical frameworks are equally applied in the study of conflicts, including the frustration aggression theory and interactive problem-solving model.

Interactive Problem Solving

The interactive problem-solving model of conflict resolution originates from the work of Herbert Kelman. It is anchored on the necessity of social influence and group interaction in resolving violent conflict between groups. Under this approach, according to Kelman (2010), a conflict resolution process should start by exploring the causes of the conflict, especially those in the form of unmet needs or needs which threaten identity, recognition, security, autonomy and justice. He emphasises the need for active engagement and problem solving by both sides. This is in line with White's (1984) idea of 'realistic empathy' which he suggests that both parties must demonstrate in order to understand each other's situation. One more important step identified by Fisher and Ury (1981) is the necessity to focus on 'underlying needs' instead of holding on to opposed positions. They argue that doing so will enable both groups to search for solutions, which they would never obtain from positional bargaining. Kelman (2010) argues that agreements mutually achieved by both parties and the determination to genuinely resolve the conflict are likely to lead to a long-term commitment and transform the relationship of both parties unlike a bargaining process imposed or administered by third parties.

Kelman (2010) reports that parties caught up in a conflict whereby both view themselves as victims are helped to deal with the dilemma of leaving behind some elements of their identity in a way that will not threaten their core identity.

Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis

The frustration-aggression hypothesis originated from the work of five researchers: Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, and Sears (1939) at the Yale University Institute of Human Relations. According to Dollard et al. (1939), aggression is a resultant effect of blocking one's goal or frustrating the effort made by that person to attain a particular goal. The theory explains why violence occurs, particularly as it relates to scapegoating. It holds that one can become aggressive when frustrated but when the cause of that frustration cannot be challenged, then the aggression is displaced on a person who otherwise may be innocent.

However, although the frustration-aggression hypothesis explains aggressive behaviours, this hypothesis was later viewed as controversial. Berkowitz (1989), for instance, stated that anyone who compares the frustration-aggression hypothesis by Dollard et al. (1939) with existing theories in personality and social psychology literature might begin to wonder if the formulation is really important for understanding human aggression. Berkowitz's (1989) view here is supported by those of several influential psychologists. For example, Bandura (1973) criticised the work for being a drive theory, which claimed that frustrations usually lead to general emotional arousal without considering other motivations for aggression, such as social learning in those who are frustrated. For Bandura, aggression is often learned and those who learn this behaviour are more likely to demonstrate it when an opportunity arises compared to those who do not learn it. Another influential psychologist who criticised the formulation by Dollard et al. (1939) is Zillmann (1979). Aggression, according to Zillmann, results from frustrations due to other factors, such as a personal attack on the frustrated person or the instrumental gain likely to follow the aggression.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative paradigm was chosen in this study. The need to explore the experiences of those who have witnessed ethno-religious violence in Nigeria led to the choice of qualitative paradigm in this study. This is because the nature of the topic requires an exploratory approach, that is, the qualitative paradigm. Thematic analysis was utilised in the presentation of themes that emerged from the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), Thematic analysis enables the facilitation and reporting of the data that emerged from the study in a form of patterns. This method provides practical procedures for analysing data.

Sampling: This study utilised a purposive sampling method. Participants were selected based on their knowledge of the topic under investigation. The participants chosen for this study had first-hand information and experience of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria.

Participants: Fifteen participants (five females and ten males) were recruited for this study. Participants' names and any identifiers were replaced with numbers to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The participants aged 18-26 years were students' representatives from the University of Lagos representing Katsina State and Delta State.

Data Collection: Semi-structured interview was utilised to get information from the participants. Interview questions were prepared to tap into issues that relate to ethno-religious conflict based on participants' knowledge.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval was received from the Psychology Departmental Research Ethics Panel (DREP). The researchers also got the approval of the National Association of Katsina State Students and the National Association of Delta State Students of the University of Lagos Nigeria. The leaders of the groups distributed the researcher's phone number and email address to their members. Interested members contacted the researcher via phone call and suitable time was arranged for the interviews. Prior to the interviews, participants signed a consent form. Participants were properly briefed about the purpose of the study and the reasons for their selection, and they were assured of confidentiality.

Data Transcription: This process started with the familiarisation of data. This was done by repeatedly playing the recorded interviews before transcription. After transcribing the data, the researcher read through the interviews and gave attention to important points made by the participants. Interesting aspects of the data were labelled during the initial coding. The researcher took note of relevant narratives, words or phrases. The set of codes were categorised by grouping related codes into themes. The steps were repeated on all the interview transcripts.

FINDINGS

The three themes that emerged from the analysis include: consequences of conflict, resolving conflict and dousing conflict. There are sub-themes attached to each of the main themes. The sub-themes throw more light on the analytical process involved.

Consequences of Conflict

After the conflicts were triggered, the witnesses or the victims lived with several consequences, from mild to severe and very severe ones. These consequences ranged from living in fear to marginalising out-groups, spreading mistrust, lack of progress/success and destruction of properties/lives. The processes are described below.

Living in Fear: The experiences of conflicts created fear in the minds of the witnesses or victims. Therefore, the groups involved live in fear:

The two sides end up living in fear of one another. … You are afraid of your neighbour. Too bad (Participant 3).

Out-groups could capitalise on any trivial issue, such as arguments, to strike their opponents:

We live in constant fear. A small argument can trigger religious or tribal conflict (Participant 1).

Participant 1 further described other consequences, including her mother's resignation from her job for fear of the unknown:

My family are living in constant fear. My mum had to resign from her job because of the tribal conflict that took place in her office.

Spreading Mistrust: Conflicts spread mistrust, making witnesses cling more to their in-group, thereby avoiding their out-group. Participant 13 serves as an example here:

Makes you choose friends from your circle … My friends are from church!

Participant 1 described the suspicion that comes with this:

Everybody is a suspect. There is no trust … Trust is at stake. You see your neighbour as a potential enemy.

Participant 5 described how mistrust also led to fear:

There is also a lack of trust. You are afraid of your neighbour.

Lack of Progress/Success: The frequent conflict in both regions of Nigeria under study here has led to a lack of progress in the affected communities as well as poor success in the community members' endeavours. Participant 2 simply described the situation as follows:

No progress at all.

For Participant 7:

It keeps you stagnated.

Both Participant 6 and Participant 8 made the same comment:

No achievement.

According to Participant 3:

I have not seen any achievement. All I see is devastation.

Participant 11 was able to specify where achievements were difficult:

No achievements in terms of physical structures.

Participant 11 made similar comments:

Backward. My community is backward. No good structures. No industries. Nothing!

Participant 6 further described how dreams were shattered and hope lost:

No achievement … It affects your dreams for the future … You become hopeless.

Participant 3 described poor progress/success in terms of her academic career:

We missed a whole school session when religious crises erupted in my school. It affected my grades.

Participant 5 not only mentioned difficulty in success but also the cause:

It is difficult to succeed when trust is lacking, and people are living in fear.

Destruction of Properties/Lives: Destruction of properties and lives stand as the ultimate consequence of conflict. While stagnated progress was witnessed in the community, the existing resources were destroyed, including lives. Five people mentioned it caused destruction, six mentioned loss of lives, while two talked of properties being destroyed. Whenever there is conflict in Nigeria, travellers are not left out because groups involved in the conflict usually mount roadblocks on the roads. They would ask passengers to come out. They harm any passenger that does not belong to their group or is opposed to their philosophy.

Participant 1 provided a clear picture of the situation as follows:

Whenever there was unrest in the Northern part of the country, our people were killed and churches destroyed. There was a time we were caught up in the crises. We were going on a trip when crises started in the North. Our vehicle was stopped and all the Muslims were asked to leave while the Christians among us were raped and stabbed. It was pathetic.

Resolving Conflict

This main theme captures the experiences of the conflict victims on how those conflicts were resolved. It also involves their views on how future conflicts could be resolved or prevented considering their current experiences. These experiences were grouped under the following subthemes: reconciling with others, reaching peace/tolerance, and acknowledging one's fault. These are described below.

Reconciling with Others: The witnesses of the conflict reconcile with others by means of acknowledging their own fault, apologising and making peace. As Participant 7 said:

We forgive.

For Participant 8:

Said I'm sorry.

Then Participant 2:

Beg the person if you are at fault.

Participant 5 described it better:

We settle amicably. No pride or ego. Just admit your fault and apologise.

Participant 13 described how she was able to resolve her issues by apology:

Told her where she went wrong. She apologised and we hugged.

For Participant 14:

We accepted our mistakes, discussed and then settled it.

Similarly, for Participant 15:

Apologise … if you are wrong.

Preaching Peace/Tolerance: The preaching of peace and tolerance was a conflict resolution strategy, which several participants have used to sort out their situations. Participant 1 took the following step in resolving conflict:

I tried to educate them about my religion. I also tell them about my tribe. I feel cool in their midst. We understand ourselves.

Participant 5 took a similar step:

I tried to be objective. I tell both my Muslim and Christian counterparts what part we are supposed to play to bring an end to this division.

Promoting Understanding/Tolerance: Conflicts were resolved through tolerance and understanding, and the participants believed that future conflicts could be prevented and resolved through similar methods. Participant 10 discussed how this method has worked for him before:

We settled it ourselves. We talked it over.

Participant 4 recommended the following:

Listen to both parties anytime there is a problem.

Participant 1 also made a similar recommendation:

There should be a forum where all tribes and religions air their views.

Participant 4 was of the view of people coming together:

Maybe come together and address it.

For Participant 5:

Bring in different parties.

Participant 6 believed that understanding matters:

I think we need to understand ourselves.

Participant 11 was more specific:

Understanding of all communities, religions.

Dialogue mattered for Participant 14:

There should be dialogue.

Distributing Resources Equally: As seen in the first theme regarding the triggers of conflicts, marginalisation and fight for resources featured recurrently. This could be the reason why participants believed that distributing resources evenly could resolve and prevent future conflicts. Participant 7 spoke about this:

They should do the right thing. Give to everyone what belongs to them. Or let's share it equally.

Participant 10 also shared the same view:

There should be fairness when it comes to sharing of resources.

Government's Tactics in Reducing Conflict

The theme 'reducing conflict' is different from resolution or prevention above in the sense that the former is concerned with the efforts made by the government to stop conflicts whenever they erupted. Such efforts include deploying security personnel, calming warring parties, reaching out to elders and granting amnesty.

Deploying Security Personnel: This seems to be the commonest strategy used by the government as it appears in the comments by most of the clients. Participant 7 simply mentioned 'Military' before adding, 'They use force' when asked about government steps. Participant 1 described the process below:

The government deploys soldiers and police anytime there is conflict.

Participant 2 supported this observation:

And there are military personnel.

Participant 6 also mentioned security personnel:

… place soldiers at strategic areas.

Participant 10 said the same:

There are military men everywhere.

Participant 8 specified the situation with Boko Haram:

There are military all over the northeast where Boko Haram started.

Participant 3 not only described the processes but also how the personnel operated:

The army and police are always available during crises and they effect dawn to dusk curfew.

Participant 12 described the situation specifically in the Niger Delta:

There are military everywhere in the Niger Delta at present. Many militant group members have been arrested.

Participant 9 also described what the soldiers did:

Soldiers patrol the areas and make arrests.

For Participant 14:

The government enforces law and order by deploying military and police.

Participant 13 also described the situation as follows:

They are trying to solve the problem. We have the police. You can report any suspicious gathering to them. The army too is operating at the crisis zones.

Again, Participant 15 supported the above views:

They assigned forces to areas experiencing crises and asked people to live in peace.

Although most of the participants mentioned security personnel, only Participant 13 accepted that they were effective. When asked 'Are these steps useful?' she stated 'Yes. They are trying.' Although Participant 10 accepted that 'It helps,' he believed that they 'need more' efforts. Similarly, Participant 8 answered, 'Well ... they can do more.' Participant 9 stated that it worked 'Sometimes.' Participant 3 described this strategy as 'Not enough.' Like Participant 3, Participant 2 also stated that 'They need to do more.' Participant 1 stated 'No' straightaway, so also Participants 7 and 12.

Reaching out to Elders: Elders are accorded respect in the Nigerian society and as a result, the government sometimes tried to reach out to them to help reduce the conflict. Participant 6 mentioned this:

They talk to community leaders.

Participant 5 also supported the former participant:

They also reach out to leaders.

Granting Amnesty: Due to the importance of amnesty in conflict resolution, government had given amnesty to some perpetrators of the conflicts as mentioned by Participant 11:

They started with giving amnesty to militants.

DISCUSSION

Consequences of Conflict

As demonstrated by the participants' interviews above, the ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have a variety of consequences in the society. There are several comments about 'living in fear' because of the insecurity caused by the conflict. Fear is a well-known consequence of conflict, and this is probably why in the social psychological dimensions of conflict model, Seymour (2003) suggests that fears be recognised before a conflict can be managed. Fear, as established by several researchers (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Gallagher & Clore, 1985; Clore, Schwarz & Conway, 1994) heightens expectations of both threat and danger. At risk groups in a conflict may live in fear of being dominated by their enemy or even fear of extinction (Lischer, 1999). It is possible that the participants in this study lived in 'fear of one another' due to these issues. Kaufman (1998) reports that fear is what compels ethnic conflict. Lake and Rothchild (1996) report that collective fears of the future are what trigger intense ethnic conflict.

The fear in question results from the mistrust of the enemy. Such mistrust was equally described by the participants in this current study, which led to group members choosing 'friends from your circle', seeing their 'neighbour as a potential enemy' and being 'afraid of

your neighbour.' Therefore, one can see the sources of such fear. Lake and Rothchild (1998, p.4) note that 'a toxic brew of distrust and suspicion can explode into murderous violence, even the systematic slaughter of one group of people by another.' However, the level of fear experienced during conflict, as well as any issues resulting from it, may depend on the government's ability or inability to protect the victims, or the victims' perception of their government's resolve in this respect (Smith, 2012). As also explained by Smith (2012), such mistrust of the government may also contribute to the escalation of the conflict when the at-risk groups see the need to protect themselves against physical attack and to ensure their survival.

Participants made several comments on how the ethno-religious conflicts led to a lack of progress/success and the destruction of lives and properties in the affected regions. The participants' experiences of conflict validate Hook's (2013) report on how conflicts come with economic impacts, social tolls, political instability and human costs, as discussed in Chapter 2. Hook (2013) found that conflict could lead to high mortality rates, as well as physical and mental health problems. This also supports the findings by Hoeffler (2008) on the link between conflict and public health problems. He found that part of the social ills of conflict is the destruction of education systems, and this is consistent with a participant's comment in this study that they 'missed a whole school session when religious crises erupted.'

The participants' comments, from lack of 'progress' and lack of 'achievement' to being 'stagnated', witnessing 'devastation' and other terms used to describe the consequences of conflicts, can also be explained by Hoeffler (2008) findings. Hoeffler found that the per capita income of countries living in peace is more than four times higher compared to countries experiencing war or have recently experienced war. Marshall and Gurr (2003) have earlier detailed how internal conflicts have caused so much suffering, destruction and death in many parts of the world. The experiences of the participants in this current study support these events.

Resolving Conflict

'Reconciling with others' appears as the first subtheme under this main theme. Here, words, such as 'forgive', 'sorry', 'apologise', 'beg' and 'settle' capture what the participants who were the survivors of the conflicts did in their quest for peace. The role of apology as a way to resolve a conflict has been well researched and written about. First, apology serves as evidence that the person in the wrong acknowledges damages caused; second, it serves as a 'moral restitution' (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004, p.8). In his critical assessment of conflict resolution processes, Tidwell (1998) notes that a greeting when expressed with remorse could end a weeklong hostility. However, he also acknowledges that in some instances, these efforts achieve almost nothing, that is, the victim fails to accept them.

Preaching peace and tolerance as well as promoting understanding and tolerating others as suggested by the participants in this report are in line with the conflict resolution processes found in relevant academic literatures. Mayer (2010) has argued that understanding is basic to conflict resolution. This is because conflict resolution will be almost impossible in a situation whereby the parties hold on to their grievances without making any efforts to approach and understand each other. Peace, tolerance and understanding are also part of the subjects discussed within the 'interactive problem-solving model' (Kelman, 2010). The model suggests that a resolution process starts by understanding what caused the conflict in the first place. It encourages all the parties involved to take active parts, show realistic empathy and understand

each other's situations (White, 1984). Therefore, the suggestions by the participants in this current study are in line with these established methods.

The participants also suggested equal distribution of resources as part of the solution to the conflicts. The participants understood that uneven distribution of resources formed the main basis for the conflict, and hence suggested that 'fairness when it comes to sharing of resources' can solve the problem. Their experiences support Albert (2010) theories on how competition for resources contributes to many conflicts witnessed in the world today. It has been previously discussed under the 'frustration-aggression' (Dollard et al., 1939) hypothesis on how frustration causes aggression. Considering this, the suggestion on equal distribution of resources sounds credible because it can remove the frustration caused by unequal distribution of resources, which leads to aggression. Bar-Tal (2000) suggests that mutual needs should be considered if conflicts must be resolved.

However, it is debatable the extent to which equal distribution of resources can solve the Nigerian conflicts considering the emphasis on how amalgamation of groups with different cultures and religions set the scene for these conflicts (Ugorji, 2016). This area will require further research.

Government's Tactics in Reducing Conflict

The research participants used several phrases to describe how the Nigerian government actively deployed security operatives as part of its efforts to contain the recurrent conflicts in the country. Nigeria's method here is in line with that used by the international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), African Union (AU) and others in dousing conflicts in many parts of the world. Conflicts, as shown in Chapter 2, involve destruction of properties and lives (e.g., Perouse de Montclos, 2014; Ugorji, 2016) amongst other disastrous consequences, which the current participants also validated. So deploying security personnel is a practical method of preventing this or at least stopping further destruction in a situation whereby the destruction has already occurred. However, it is also worth noting here that the security operatives can worsen the situation for the victims sometimes when they engage in human rights abuses. Such abuses tend to be common with the Nigerian security personnel.

The participants also stated that the government had tried to reach out to the elders in the community as part of dousing conflicts. Although this method seems unpopular, it may be active in Nigerian society for some reasons. Africa is known for its culture of collectivism (Agazue, 2013; Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 2000) whereby community members relate together in a way, which is uncommon in the Western societies. Within this culture, community members respect their elders and heed their advice on what they should or should not do. This is the possible reason why reaching out to the elders may be an active solution for reducing conflicts because when the government reaches out to the elders, they will in turn reach out to their members.

The Nigerian Government, according to the participants, granted amnesty to the perpetrators of the conflicts. It is described in Chapter 2 on how the late Nigerian president, Umaru Yar'Adua, offered amnesty to the Niger Delta militants to surrender their arms and to engage in a peace process. Again, the Nigerian government seems to follow the steps of the international communities, such as the UN, EU, AU and others, which have all granted amnesty

to some aggrieved groups in the past. Amnesty is an important tool for preventing bloodshed and achieving peace (e.g., Anderson, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore peace and conflict resolution in Nigeria. This was carried out by gathering the experiences of ethno-religious conflict survivors in Nigeria. Participants were made up of Boko Haram and the Niger Delta Avengers conflict survivors. The identified themes suggest that the consequences of conflicts are huge, particularly in terms of peaceful coexistence and national development. As a result, one cannot overemphasise the relevance of this study since development is almost always very hard to achieve in the absence of peace.

These conflicts have numerous consequences on the witnesses and the Nigerian society in general. One of the consequences described by the participants was 'living in fear.' The participants, due to the severity of the conflicts and the destruction of lives and properties witnessed, lived in fear of what could happen to them anytime. They found it difficult to trust people, especially those from other religions or ethnic groups. The recurrent conflicts not only destroyed lives and properties but also led to a lack of socioeconomic progress in the affected regions.

The Nigerian Government also made efforts to douse the conflicts whenever they erupted by deploying security personnel to the conflict areas, liaising with community elders and granting amnesty to some aggrieved parties who perpetrated the conflicts. The participants suggested that the conflicts can be prevented by trying to reconcile with the aggrieved parties, promoting tolerance and understanding as well as distributing the country's resources equally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This current study has both psychosocial and political significance because the persistent conflicts described not only create a sense of social distance but also hamper the political and socioeconomic development of the country. This current study, therefore, serves as a guide to politicians and policymakers on how to effectively manage ethno-religious conflicts and practise peace building more safely.

The Nigerian Government and the community elders should also engage in a serious peace-making campaign. They should find better ways of doing this, such as making provisions in the school curriculum on the importance of making peace and tolerating people from other ethnic groups and religions. It is arguable that if schoolchildren start early enough to learn the importance of peace and tolerance, it will have an enduring effect on them.

The importance of equal distribution of resources cannot be emphasised since this appears at the heart of the conflicts, particularly those perpetrated by the Niger Delta Avengers. Government should try to fight corruption and nepotism in order to achieve enduring peace in the country. It is also important that the authorities do something about religious extremism, such as clamping down on clerics preaching hatred and encouraging jihad. By considering the

above recommendations and working towards them, it is believed that the recurrent conflicts in Nigeria can be put to an end.

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