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Conflict Resolution and Rural Development as Tools to Achieving Sustainable Food Production in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
The quest to attain sustainable food production in Nigeria requires concerted efforts towards creating a peaceful and conducive environment for agricultural and economic activities to thrive as no meaningful progress would be made in a state of chaos. Conflict resolution has become an integral part of democratic institutional design for global community. Nigeria has witnessed series of community conflicts that have raised political tension and disrupted social, economic, religious and cultural activities of the nation. This paper examined the meaning of conflict and its major theories. The causes of conflicts in communities and means of resolving them were highlighted. Also discussed were concepts of rural development, sustainable agricultural development and food production. The paper concluded that conflict resolution and rural development are the only means to attain sustainable food production in Nigeria and recommended among others that conflict alert committee to be set up to engage in conflict prevention among communities in Nigeria.

Key words: Conflict resolution, rural development, sustainable food production.

INTRODUCTION

> ***The battle for peace has to be fought on two fronts. The first is the security front, where victory spells freedom from fear. The second is economic and social front, where victory spells freedom from want.***
> US Secretary of State, Cordell Hull 1945
>
> ***Our common humanity transcends the oceans and all national boundaries... Let it never be asked of any of – what did we do when we knew another was oppressed.***
> Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa, 1992.

These were powerful words from two great respected global citizens which are still very much relevant in the contemporary global community at large and Nigeria society in particular. The last twenty years have witnessed exciting global efforts in increasing the number of international peace operations designed to ensure politically sustainable

community through conflict resolution and rural development aimed to promote better living condition with active participation of the people.

The mounting interest in conflict resolution and rural development is traceable to the recognition of the fact that they are keys to sustainable food production and foundation for peace, and sustainable national economic development in Nigeria. As no meaningful development and sustainable food production would be made in conflict and chaotic community.

Nigeria recently has been confronted with some conflicts and developmental problems and challenges that have brought about instability in the nation's polity. The country is living amidst problems ranging from socio-economic, political, religious, ethnic and cultural conflicts among others. According to Bulya and Ameh (2013), these problems and challenges have manifested in forms of quarrelling, fighting, trading unpalatable words, hate speech and other unwholesome behaviours that have characterized peoples' lives. Many contemporary Nigeria communities have experienced several cases of communal conflicts; which can be divided into two broad categories, ethnic conflicts, attributed to actors primarily divided by cultural, ethnic, or religious communities and identities, such as instances of religious violence between Christian and Muslim communities.

The conflict between the herdsmen and the local farmers has become national and international embarrassment and concern to all Nigerians. The face-off between Biafra agitators and quit notice order of Igbo-northerners by Arewa Youths Forum with backing of Northern Elders Forum, the propose Ruga farm settlement have all further widen the cold conflict between the South-East and the North. There has been spate of gruesome murder and kidnapping by suspected herdsmen in the south-west. All these problems and challenges are not in any way healthy to rural development and overall interest of the people. Political issues that emanate from injustice resulting from the imbalance between the rich and the poor, the "haves' and the "have nots" in terms of distribution of natural and national resources, lopsided, political appointments and development have led to inequality and fuel agitations and conflicts among communities. People are afraid to go about their normal business especially farmers in the rural communities for fear of possible herdsmen attack, Boko Haram landmines and kidnapping and killing. It has been observed that efforts made by the Government to address these problems and challenges have not yielded much results. The economic and social dislocations caused by internal conflict have negatively affected the economic well-being of individuals and businesses in various ways especially in the rural areas. As a result of internal conflict, people have fled their homes to live in Internally Displaced People's camp (IDP). These people are able bodied men and women engaged in agricultural activities, a vital sector of the economy that has the capacity to end poverty, unemployment and generate revenue needed to develop other sectors when developed in a sustainable way. This has affected the agricultural sector negatively. Adams (2013) noted that the potential of the agricultural business sectors as a major employer and earner of foreign exchange has been undermined.

Although, the Nigeria Government has also enacted policies in the area of rural development, peace and conflict resolution to create enabling environment for sustainable food production and provision of more rural employment opportunities through agricultural development towards increasing farmers income and bettering the lot of rural dwellers. It seems these policies lack political will to actualize what they were intended to.

These policies can only work in atmosphere of conflict free environment, the environment that encouragesrural development programmes, human and natural resource development for sustainable food production. These policies were made to develop rural communities and discourage conflict.

Concept of Conflict

Conflict is as old as mankind. It has been an integral part of human existence and community living. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists and archaeologists attest to the fact that human development from palaeolithic (old stone) through Neolithic (New stone) to the present day has been characterized by incessant cases of Conflict (Anyanwu, 2002). This is premised on the phenomenon of "Survival". Akande (2016) noted that a better understanding of the concept and nature of the community substantiates the fact that conflict cannot be divorced from social relationship in the community.

Conflict has been defined differently by scholars from various disciplines; however one of the traditional definitions of conflict, which explains it as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals" (Cosert, 1958). This means that conflict may be conceptualized as a way of settling problems originating from opposing interest and for the continuity of society (Otite and Albert, 1999). Thus, Park and Burgress (1921), argue that conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism and achieve some kind of unity even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflict parties. However, our attention must be drawn to the fact that conflict may not be considered only in the negative, as a dysfunctional or disjuncture process. It could also be seen in the positive, which with struggle and contest is a normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies having scarce resources. Such conflicts may take place between individuals, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities. Intergroup as well as intra-group conflicts, conflicts are perennial features of social life.

Conflict is viewed as meaning one or all of the following scenarios:

- The putative incompatibilities that precede a collision.
- A situation in which two or more motives are partially blocking one another, thus, it shows a degree of cognitive difference concerning the perception and interpretation of the parties involved.
- A sharp disagreement or collision in objectives, interest, ideas and the likes, and
- Incompatibility between two opposing interests. (Oghenekuhwo, 2003). This means that a conflict simply involves incompatible goals, pursued, leading to conflict. Conflict exposes actors in pursuit of incompatible goals, which one needs to hold on to for advantage.

Viewed from a broad spectrum of definitions, scholars agree that behind the concept of conflict-whether social, political, economic, ethnic or religious-is human fear of and response to domination and deprivations (Anyanwu and Njoku, 2010). Akande (2016), noted that conflict is always a struggle for survival and continuity. Causes of many conflicts in Nigeria therefore revolve round the interplays of domination, deprivations and reactions. Thus, the common sense understanding of conflict is always in the negative (Aja, 2009).

Theories of Conflict

Theories of conflict are the explanations put forward to explain causes of conflict. Some of the theories explaining causes of conflict include structural theory, realist theory, biological theory and economic theory.

Structural Theory of Conflict

The structural theory attempts to explain conflict as a product of the tension that arises when groups compete for scarce resources. The central argument in this sociological theory is that conflict is built into the particular ways societies are structured or organized. It describes the conditions of the society and how such condition or environmental can create conflict. Structural conflict theory identifies such conditions as social exclusion, deprivation, class inequalities, injustice, political marginalization, gender imbalances, racial segregation, economic exploitation and the likes, all of which often lead to conflict (Oakland, 2015).

Realist Theory of Conflict

Political realism explains conflict as an inherent attribute of man. As far as men live with their "Baggage of emotions", so will conflict remain a part of their habitat; and as long as man remains a "political animal" with interests different from others, so shall conflict of interests remain a feature of society. More importantly, as long as there are scarce resources where most men are ambitiously seeking comfort or control of resources, conflict is inevitable. Realism is a good blend of the Marxist, international capitalist and economic theories in the explication of conflict.

Biological Theory of Conflict

This theory explains that human nature is genetically transferred from generation to generation. Just as parents can genetically transfer their natural qualities and ingenuity to their children, so can evil nature of man be genetically transferred. The argument goes that since our ancestors were instinctively violent beings and since we evolved from them, we must bear aggressive or destructive impulses in our genes.

Economic Theory of Conflict

Economic theory of conflict explains the economic undercurrents in conflict causation. There is considerable interface between politics, power, resources, or a means to end, more often, economic ends. Communities feud over farmlands, grazing fields, water resources, and groups fight government over allocation of resources or revenue. Scarcity, wants, need or the fear of scarcity is often a driving force for political power, contention for resource control, conflict is thus, not far-fetched in the course of such palpable fear or threat of scarcity. Just as the fear of property and deprivation could lead to fraud or corruption; so is threat of or real famine; deprivation, mismanagement of scarce resources, could propel conflict over resource control.

Conflict Theories

According to Karl Marx, in all stratified societies, there are two social groups: a ruling and a subject class. The ruling class derives its power from its ownership and control of the force of production. The ruling classes exploits and oppress the subject class. As a result there is a basic conflict of interest between the two classes. The various institution of society such as the legal and political system is instruments of ruling class domination and serve to further its interest. Marx believed that western society developed through four main epochs-primitive commission, ancient society, feudal society and capitalist society.

Primitive communism is represented by the societies of pre-history and provides the only example of the class's society. From then, all societies are divided into two major classes-master and slaves in ancient society, Lord and Serfs in feudal society and capitalist and wage labourers in capitalist society.

Causes of Conflict in Communities

Causes of community conflicts are many and varied. Laden (2013) highlights some causes of community conflicts. These include;

- Conflicts caused by parties having different criteria to evaluate ideas, or by different lifestyles, ideologies, or religion (value conflicts)
- Conflicts caused by strong emotions, misinterpretation, miscommunications and regular, negative interactions (relationship conflicts)
- Conflicts caused by a lack of information, different interpretations of data and different views on what is relevant (data conflicts)
- Conflicts caused by competition over substantive interests, procedural interests or psychological interests (interest conflicts); and
- Conflicts caused by destructive patterns of behavior, unequal control and ownership of resources, unequal power and authority, time constraints and geographical/environmental factors that hinder cooperation (structural conflicts).

Conflicts by implication don't just happen they are caused by different sectors or groups in the communities. Conflicts in communities may involve the following stakeholders; community members, community leaders, community workers/change agents, the interventionists (government or non-governmental organizations) imposition of ideas on the community members.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Conflict mediators see conflict in the positive aspect since they believe it brings social transformation when it is well managed (Ugwu and Mbalisi ,2016) Ugwu (2014) note that "the presence of conflict in an organization indicates that members are involved in something to sufficient importance that they face the tensions conflict inevitably brings. Ugwu and Mbalisi (2016) listed the following as advantages and disadvantages of conflict.

Advantages

- Clarify issues, that is, it helps to clarify people's view points
- Clarify expectations and roles
- Strengthen relationships
- Stimulate creative thinking
- Make people understand themselves and others better
- Produce better ideas and force people to search for new approaches to handling or resolving issues
- Challenge people or give them opportunity to test or discourse their abilities
- Keep group alert to members interest which help to prevent further conflicts,
- Provide medium for releasing tension.

Disadvantages of Conflicts

When conflicts are not well managed, they can be destructive and can lead to a lot of negative effects as can be seen below;

- Disruption of social unity: That is parties that needed to cooperate and work together pursue their own self or different interests which results in resistance instead of team work.
- Intergroup tension which can lead to violence
- Generation of bitterness which may lead to disruption and blood-shed.
- Disruption of normal channel of communication and cooperation and the diversion of member's attention from group goals.
- Climate of suspicion and distrust is developed which reduces contact among people and sometimes lead to break in communication

Conflict Resolution

Conflict is unavoidable and its resolution is necessary for harmonious existence of mankind. Conflict Resolution can be defined as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their disputes or conflict. According to Shonk (2019) Conflicts can be resolved in a variety of ways, including, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and litigation.

- ***Negotiation*:** In conflict resolution, you can and should draw on the same principles of collaborative negotiation that you use in deal making. For instance, you should aim to explore the interests of underlying parties, positions, such as a desire to resolve a dispute without attracting negative publicity or to repair a damaged business relationship.
- ***Mediation*:** In mediation, disputants enlist a trained, neutral third party to help them come to consensus. Rather than imposing a solution, a professional mediator encourages disputants to explore the interest underlying their positions working with parties both together and separately, mediators seek to help them discover a resolution that is sustainable, voluntary and non-binding.
- ***Arbitration*:** In arbitration, which can resemble a court trail, a neutral third party serves as a arbitrator listens to the arguments and evidence presented by each side, then renders a binding and often confidential decision. Although, disputants typically cannot appeal an arbitrator's decision, they can negotiate most aspects of the arbitration process, including whether lawyers will be present and which standards of evidence will be used.
- ***Litigation*:** In civil litigation, a defendant and a plaintiff face-off before either a judge or a judge and jury, who weigh the evidence and make a ruling. Information presented in hearings and trials usually enters the public record. Lawyers typically dominate litigation, which often ends in a negotiated settlement during the pretrial period. Unless properly managed, conflict can retard meaningful development in the community. This is because development can only thrive in a peaceful environment (Imhabekhai, 2009). Hatred, mistrust, hostility, and war are domicile in crises-prone community. This poses a challenge to community change agents to properly manage conflicts as they crises in the communities. Community trained agents as professionally trained personnel in the management of community development are to locate and identify the conflict adequately as well as identify stakeholders and map out good strategies to resolve the conflict.

Concept of Rural Development

All over the world, development of the society is about the reason why governments are elected or constituted. In spite of all the orchestrated policies and programmes of successive governments in Nigeria, the problem of rural backwardness and underdevelopment has remained unresolved. The evidence of the persistence of rural backwardness is amply manifested in agricultural stagnation, hunger, poverty, disease, ignorance, unemployment and under-employment, poor housing and rural-urban migration.

The concept of rural development is nebulous and its activities are generally broad enough to include all change strategies that are deemed necessary for upliftment of the level of living of the rural masses (Umezulike, 2003). After all, underlying any rural-based development programme is the convergence of individuals' initiatives as groups, organization to share ideas and pool resources for wider impact on the community (de Tocqueville, 1991).

The ILO advisory working group (1975) defined rural development as the promotion of agriculture and various non-agricultural activities in the rural area.Whereas Kumar (1979) defined rural development as a comprehensive mode of social transformation which recognizes that national development must involve all elements of population. It is a socio-economic process, which seeks to bring about a more equitable distribution of resources and income within a society. It involves the integrating of the rural poor, the vast majority of the population of all developing countries into the national economy. Rural development is an observable and measurable rise in the quality of life of people resident outside the urban areas and in corresponding increase in the infrastructural status of such non-urban areas (Tamuno, 2015). This implies that a true and meaningful national development is possible only through a balanced development of a country's rural and urban areas.

Rural development therefore, is a process and efforts of the people in solving problems of persistent backwardness in rural areas of the community through provision of basic infrastructural facilities such as power, water, health services, inclusive education, transport and communication network. Rural development is a holistic development of human and material resources resident in a rural area for improved living condition of the people. It is only when the rural dwellers are developed, equipped through desirable skills that they will be able to harness the local resources for the common good of the community and people, manage external assistance from government and non-governmental organizations.

Sustainable Agricultural Development and Food Production

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were born at the United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The objective was to produce a set of Universal goals that meet the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing our world. Sustainable development has been defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UNDP). Alleviating Poverty in all its form which is central to conflict resolution remains one of the greatest challenges facing the global community. It seems that one of the ways of reducing poverty to a single digit is to develop the agricultural sector for sustainable food production.

Sustainable food production is the production of food, fibre or other plant or animal products using farming techniques that protect the environment, public health, human communities and animal welfare (westernsare.org). That equally is sustainable food production for human, animal and industrial consumption. According to Mehmood (2014), sustainable food production ensures efficient production of safe, high quality agricultural products, in a way that protects and improves the natural environment, the social and economic conditions of farmers, their employees and local communities, and safeguards the health and welfare of all farmed species. Sustainable food production to a large extent depends on sustainable agriculture.

Sustainable agricultural development implies maintaining good condition of the ecosystem, expressed in terms of the quality of living. It reflects desires and concern with lasting profitability of agriculture. Anyanwu (1981) noted that when independence came, there was the belief that Nigeria's survival lay with the ability of the people to continue to carve out an existence directly from the soil. Hence, government embarked on programmes and experimental schemes. The government further proceeded to urge crop rotation, a mixed agricultural economy of cattle and crops, and large-scale of schemes of resettlement to provide fresh opportunities. Agricultural policies and programmes like National Accelerated food production programme, Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) Operation Feed Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) were introduced to bring about sustainable increase in food production.

Model and experimental farms began to be developed, and several agricultural schools were built to encourage the masses to embrace agriculture. Equally, the report of the commission on post-school certificate and Higher Education Commented: "Investment in agricultural improvement and agricultural education could double Nigeria's wealth". For this reason, successive governments in Nigeria since independence had poured substantial amount of money into agriculture, yet, available evidence points to continuous decline in this sector's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), to foreign exchange earnings and to food requirements for the growing Nigerian population.

Today, agriculture is Nigeria's second-largest source of National wealth, after oil (NPC, 2014). Yet, there is so much poverty in the land. Unemployment is high. These no doubt have contributed to conflicts among communities and the nation at large. Hence, the needs to promote the cultivation of improved, higher yielding crop varieties and provide extra-support to agricultural research and training for sustenance of agricultural development. This could only be attained in a peaceful atmospheric environment. It is only a conflict free environment that can guarantee human security which ensures that individuals are given opportunities to contribute maximally to agricultural development of their families, community which will eventually translate to sustainable agricultural development and food production in Nigeria.

Sustainable Food Production

Sustainable food production is a method of production using processes and systems that are non-polluting, conserve non-renewable energy and natural resources, are economically efficient are safe for workers, communities and consumers and do not compromise the need of the future generation. Sustainable food production is the management and conservation of natural resources base, and the orientation of

technological change in such a manner as to ensure the attainment of continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generation (Mehood, 2014).

In Nigeria, farming is an indispensable part of rural economy, accounting for 30 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 65 percent of all unemployment (NPC, 2014). To secure the livelihoods of rural populations, generate decent income and provide a basis for inclusive growth and poverty reduction, there is urgent need to support farming systems that are viable in long term for sustainable food production.

The rate of growth in agricultural production has stagnated and failed to keep face with the needs of a rapidly growing population, resulting in a progressive increase in import bills for food and industrial raw materials (NPC 2004) . Lending credence to this assertion, Buhari (2016) noted that for too long, government policies on agriculture have been half-hearted, suffering from inconsistencies and discontinuities. Yet, our real wealth is in farming, livestock, hatcheries, fishery, horticulture and forestry. This has necessitated the need and for improved agricultural development to be vigorously pursued with not only the aim of achieving sustainable food production and reducing poverty but attaining national development. (Aliwa, 2017)

Today, sustainable agricultural development and food production are challenged by not only climate change but serious and disturbing social and political conflicts as mentioned above. These conflicts are capable of putting sustainable food production to a stoppage. What is needed is the development of sustainable food value chains in order to offer innovative pathway out of poverty through local processing, and by linking farmers directly to higher-value export markets, food waste reduction represents an important but often overlooked component of sustainable food systems. Globally, up to 33 percent of all food harvested is wasted. (unienvironment.org)

CONCLUSION

In the contemporary world, conflict resolution and rural development has been recognized as the keys to sustainable agricultural development and food production. unfortunately, Nigeria as a nation has been facing some conflict and community development problems which have manifested in all forms of destructive patterns of behaviour, unequal control and ownership of resources, unequal power and authority, quarreling, fighting, hate speeches and other forms of anti-social behavirous that have characterized people's life. Except these problems are addressed and resolved, the quest to attaining sustainable food production in Nigeria will be a mirage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper therefore recommends that:

- Ranches should be built across the country to forestall conflict between herdsmen and local farmers.
- Public awareness campaigns should be created to enlighten the public on the need to participate in conflict resolution and dialogue rather than engaging in hate speeches.
- Conflict alert committee should be created to engage in conflict prevention among communities.

- There is a strong need to create functional policies for sustainable agricultural development to generate employment for unemployed youths and to provide local raw material for our industries.
- Institute of peace and conflict resolution should be strengthened and decentralized to the six geo-political zones of the country to facilitate and co-ordinate discussion on conflict issues and means of resolving them among ethnic groups in Nigeria.
- Government and security agencies should work towards building trust among people in different communities through good governance.

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