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Western Proactive Conflict Resolution Methods: A Panacea to Peace, Conflict Resolution and Development

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Abstract

Conflict is an inherent and inescapable part of human existence. Since the creation of man, it has become a reality that, conflict is inevitable with him in his environment. The degree of conflict and insecurity which appear to have gained or found a fertile ground in the life of man are so alarming that, if absolute care is not taken, man may be threatened with the challenges of total destruction and possible extinction. Consequently, it became incumbent on man to channel significant effort in the resolution and settlement of conflicts any time conflict occur. The peaceful and amicable resolution of conflicts, create room for the existence of lasting peace, harmony, cooperation and development. In order to achieve the above, certain methods must be put in place and firmly implemented. The Western alternative conflict resolution paradigm came into play, as a necessary panacea to peace, conflict resolution and development. It evolves the conflict resolution patterns imbibed by the Europeans in the settlement of conflicts and in the enthronement of peace and development. These methods would be highlighted and examined in this work. The Western proactive conflict resolution methods examined the various ways through which conflicts would not be allowed to occur at the first instance. Both primary and secondary historical methods would be put in place in our bid to unravel the Western proactive conflict resolution methods as strong elements that would facilitate peace, conflict resolution and general development.

Keyword: Western, Proactive Conflict Resolution Methods, Panacea, Peace, Development

Introduction

Conflict is an everyday occurrence in the life of man. It is one aspect in man's life that had gained ground and eaten deep into him. Generally, conflict had become an inevitable part of human creation and existence. Man had first become prone to conflict in his environment. Again, since it has become evident that man must exist in the midst of conflict and conflict must exist in the life of man, it is therefore important for man to devise a way to avoid the occurrence of conflict.

Conflict is a clash or disagreement, between two or more people or between two opposing groups, or individuals. Many times, conflict may turn violent or evolves the use of physical force by either of the parties or by both parties. When an issue turns violent and conflictive, it is often necessary and ideal for parties to quickly resolve the issue before it gets out of hand.

Matters should be resolved before it turns conflictive and violent ridden. In order to achieve this, strategies should be put on ground not to allow conflict to occur in the first place. It is not healthy to allow situations or issues to become conflictive as its resolution may be difficult and sometimes

impossible. At this level, lives may be lost and property may be destroyed.

This work is going, to identify the Western or European proactive methods of resolving conflict in such a way that conflicts are not allowed to take place at all. The best way to resolve conflict is never to allow conflict to occur at all. It is to be known that, to be proactive, is to act in advance so that ugly situations do not occur in the first place.

This work is going to embrace the use of both primary and secondary historical methods in arriving to the fact that western proactive measures when strictly followed, will never give room for the occurrence of conflict at all. With this, peace, security, understanding, cooperation and harmonious co-existence will be the order of the day between and among human beings.

The idea of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is about the search for, and application of, "non – conventional" peaceful methods of setting disputes and resolving conflict situations using the least expensive methods, and in ways that satisfy the parties, as well as ways that preserve relationships after a settlement might have been reached.¹

The Alternative Dispute Resolution methodology is specially meant to serve as an alternative to the official conventional means of settling disputes, mainly through litigation and the courts, but with preference for non-violence.² The idea of engaging in the principles of western proactive methods of conflict resolution is to promote the use of non-violent approaches to conflict. When conflict occurs, effort should be made immediately to resolve such conflict. This quick resolution of conflict will help in no small way in making the conflict not to escalate and go out of hand. When conflicts are allowed to rage, persist and escalate, it may result to severe consequences such as the destruction of life and property. Conflict, when not resolved may give a permanent scar in the life of man. In order to avoid the above, it is necessary for man to embrace certain proactive measures which will help in making sure that conflicts do not occur at all.

Proactive measures in conflict resolution evolve the preference for peaceful settlement of disputes in line with the prescribed values of the community. It is important to note that every society is acquainted with certain proactive conflict resolution and transformation methods which are prescribed

by the institutions as identified by that society.

There are wide ranges of non violent methods of managing conflict available to the conflict transformation world. These methods are available at the individual, family, groups, community and international levels. One of these non-violent methods is the “proactive methods of conflict resolution.” This method entails the systematic pattern of preventing the occurrence of conflict in the first instance.³

The proactive methods establishes the fact of solving and avoiding the occurrence of conflict through observing certain behavioural norms which will altogether ensure that disputes do not take place at all. When all people in the community (Society) observes proactive measures, such that they operate in such a way where they do not allow conflict to occur, the society will be free from conflicts and peace will reign supreme.⁴

Through proactive methods, there will be no conflicts at all. This is because, being proactive is the art and act of following certain community based principle which establishes measures which one will apply in order to ensure that conflict do not happen and parties do not engage in conflict at all.

Ordinary, when individuals, parties, groups communities, and states do not engage in conflict, peace and development will be associated with such an individual, parties, groups, communities or states.

Conflict is defined as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups⁵. When people are attracted by two different motives and visions and they vigorously aspire to attain these visional interests, conflict may occur. In this stance, when two interests cross roads, it often results to conflict which if not well handled may generate more distinctive and unfriendly dispositions. At the above level, property may be destroyed, lives may be lost and the environment may be endangered⁶.

Truly, it is a known fact that while conflict is inevitable in the life of man, violent conflicts are anomaly and are totally avoidable, preventable and not inevitable. Violent conflicts are very dangerous, destructive and deadly. Individuals, parties, communities and states should as much as possible detest violent conflict in its totality. Violent conflict or armed conflict is the resort to the use of force in the pursuit of incompatible differences amongst people or among opposing parties, groups or states.

Individuals, groups and communities are constantly defending their interests, goals and aspirations. Each of these groups is in the forefront of protecting these interests with all the powers and resources within her disposal and reach. In the course of establishing and protecting these emphasized interest, each of the parties may inadvertently step on each other's toes, which invariably may result to conflict and its ugly consequences⁷.

It is the incessant and unremitting quest and pursuit of basic interests by different individuals and groups that create room for aggression, scramble hatred and conflict.

Western Proactive Alternative Conflict Resolution Methodologies

These are the Western acclaimed proactive conflict resolution patterns. These are methods that promote the use of non-violent approaches to conflict. It embraces methods which when ordinarily followed will totally bring conflict to an end. When these methods are strictly adhered to it will not create the atmosphere for conflict to occur. They are proactive patterns and therefore do not create room for conflict to occur at all.

It should be important to note that these methods are not ordinarily peculiar to western parts of the world alone. Other races

also practices or combines these methods in order to ward off crisis and conflict. The practice of these methods, generally enthrone peaceful co-existence, harmonious interaction and friendly relations which are devoid of approaches that will breed conflict and crisis. The proactive measures are as follows:

Good Governance as a Proactive Measure.

In order to avoid, conflicts, there is need for a good government to be in place so as to guarantee good administration to the people. When the government is effectively and efficiently run, the people will be happy. Good governance involved the running and administering the affairs of government in such a way that the governed will enjoy the dividend of governance either in a democratic setting or in a well organized quasi civilian or quasi-military administration. Government and governance are created for public good.

Those who run the affairs of the government should endeavour to facilitate the provision of good infrastructural facilities and other social amenities which will be beneficial to the people. Those running the affairs of government should ensure that the

constitution is maintained, law and order are kept, the three arm of government are relatively separated and well funded for the effective operation and administration of the government. Here, accountability and transparency should be the watch word of governance. Free press, free verile civil society, respect to the fundamental human right, proper education, good health care system, proper transportation system, environmental safety, proper interpretation of the constitution and the supremacy of the rule of law.

Good governance entails that democratic government is most appreciated than despotic, military and autocratic administration. Good governance indicates that those at the helm of the affairs of state should be sensitive to the plight of the people and should be willing and ready to respond and to provide good democratic formations, results and dividend. With the above, there will be good and cordial relationship between the government and the governed or between the rulers and the ruled⁸. Thus, there will be no room for crisis and conflict between people and between individuals. This is indeed, a positive proactive pattern of checking the occurrence of crisis and conflict as there will be no need for

scuffle/conflict between individuals and between people.

Presence of good leadership

This is a proactive measure of resolving conflict; leadership is the ability of an individual position to exert positive influence on their members or followers. Leaders are generally seen as people who formulate sound and good policies which help to steer or pilot the people rightly and justly. Good leaders articulate clear vision, formulate and establish achievable goals capable of driving the people to the right direction. They are acquainted with good management skill, self confidence, positive decorum, knowledgeable in all wise and armed with clear mission and direction.

In all ramifications, good leadership is the vision and expectation of every society. A country with good leadership attains development with ease. Good leaders are visionary in nature, innovative, strategic, inspiring, objective, realistic, decisive, confident, organized, directed, accountable for their actions and highly ethical in their administration and drive.

Good leadership evolves the capacity and capability to make and take decisions even under pressure and provoke an

outcome which will positively come to the benefit of all and sundry. They are trustworthy, resilience armed with effective and efficient communication skill geared toward enhancing the empowerment of their followers.⁹

Good leadership is characterized with the ability of the people who assume the mantle of power with the purpose to enhance and to facilitate development, progress and direction. It entails the art and science of influencing and championing the obedience, cooperation, confidence, respect, trust, reliance and faith of members or follower with the intention to achieve positive expectation and desirable goals.

A country, state or society with good leadership enjoys peace, security and development. In this vein, there will be no room for conflicts as everyone including the leaders and the lead are generally enjoying the presence of proper administration and good leadership. Thus, conflicts are avoided and are not allowed to happen in the first stance.

Effective Communication

This is one of the cheapest proactive and non violent methods of preventing and ameliorating conflict situations. In the contemporary times, effective communication has become a vital tool and a key strategy in conflict management and conflict prevention world.

Communication entails exchange of information. It is the maintenance and sustenance of relationship through keeping the windows and doors of interaction and inter-association alive and healthy. Communication involved the presence and continuation of sharing due information about a conflict situation between and among parties or groups. It concerns the process of exchange of views and ideas within a certain concept and among the groups or parties associated with the concept¹⁰.

Communication is the process and methods to decipher, share and exchange information between and among persons, groups, parties and organizations in conflict or dispute situation. It entails an established process of effectively discussing issues, talking about feelings, speaking up and showing adequate concerns about certain situation which has turned conflictual or that is about to turn conflictual and opening up on the possible

avenue for dialogue, negotiation and resolution¹¹.

The role of communication in conflict prevention and crisis management stems from the fact that most conflicts have to do with perceptions, assumptions, stereotyped and attitudes, which have been developed by conflict parties vis-à-vis others¹².

With effective communication, issue would be well understood and proper clarifications made. Unfortunately, most conflicts occur as a result of the inability of the any of parties or both parties or groups to have a comprehensive access to information regarding the reality of the facts. Again, most conflict play out on an ordinary assumption, presumption or on mere perception. Some other conflicts are born out of an ordinary misconception, misreading of attitude, misplacement of facts, misinterpretation, misrepresentation, misapplication and general misunderstanding of priority.

When these happen, facts, realities and truths will be blurred, smeared, hidden or completely not come into play. Then crisis and conflicts will manifest.

With effective communication, true situation of events and issues will be known by the parties involved. There will be proper understanding of the realities on ground and

this will guarantee open discussion by the parties. Thus, such openness will definitely table the issues and resolution will begin which will give way for the management of the conflict.

When parties loose grip of communication, individuals and groups to a dispute will face the risk of galloping and wallowing into more crisis and deepening the conflict. Salt will be added to injuries and instead of resolution, the conflict will be worsened. Unfortunately, friendship will be lost, unity will be thrown into the dust bin, harmony will be very far away and peace will be a tall dream. As a result, lives may be lost, property may be destroyed, insecurity will be the order of the day and development will be far away from reality.

In this stead, communication is invaluable for conflict prevention in the earliest instance and a welcome element for conflict resolution and management.

Mediation

This is a situation where parties in dispute meet with a mutually selected third party who must exercise neutrality and impartiality to the dispute and draw the parties into negotiation and settlement of their dispute. The mediator who stands as a third party

intervenes into the dispute by strongly negotiating jointly acceptable resolution of the issue which must be acceptable by all the parties in the conflict.

In this case, the mediator meets with the parties in the conflict where they will engage in deep discussion and at a selected neutral venue. Here, the mediator and the various parties in the dispute will explore new grounds and other varieties of solutions which will bring the issue into resolution.

Mediation is the act of intervening and mediating into conflicts between parties with the intention and purpose to identify solution and bring about reconciliation.

Mediation is the interventions of a third party to mediate into cases through the parties retain control over the outcome of and result of the mediation. Of course, the third party may exert some sort of inducement with the intention to achieve results. It is a voluntary process and a common skill which many people have. Unfortunately, many people do not know that they possess this quality of mediating into conflicts amongst parties and resolving them amicably.

The mediator has the responsibility of creating a positive atmosphere and an enabling environment for parties and groups

to subject themselves into sessions of dialogue which ultimately will lead to resolution of conflicts and many a times such mediations will responds quickly by not allowing conflicts to occur. This is a good proactive methodology and pattern of conflict resolution and management.

Mediation is extra-ordinarily helpful and ideal in any environment and in other conflict resolution spectrum. Its role is enormous and classically productive as it makes way for conflicts to be resolved and settled before it escalates and goes out of hand.

To this stead, the use of mediation as proactive conflict resolution and conflict preventing approach should be imbibed by individuals, groups, parties and nations. This will help never to allow conflict to occur and when conflicts occurs, the principles of mediation will facilitate fertile environment for the immediate resolution of conflict and crisis even before the conflict begins.

Traditional and Cultural Activities

Traditional and cultural activities play prominent roles in the conflict resolution and conflict prevention arena. Long held traditions and cultures which are rich promote the human spirit, community life, togetherness clustering of groups, including

neighbours in such ways that conflict is downplayed.¹³

In many villages and communities in Nigeria and in Africa in general, there are traditional and cultural festivals and activities which are celebrated either annually, biannually or triennially.

These ceremonies and festivities have rules and regulations which must be followed systematically by the members of the community. Cultural festivals such as the new yam festivals, fishing festivals, hunting festivals, masquerades, dances, wearing cloth (manhood) ceremonies, initiation rites, coronations into certain cultural institutions, puberty festivities, road and market cleaning cultural ceremonies, wedding and marriage ceremonies, death, burial and mourning rites etc. These cultural ceremonies and traditional festivals are totally community based and indigenously inclined.

Communities held tenaciously to their traditions because it has over the years formed their part or way of life. From far and wide, citizen travel back to their communities to witness and actively participate in these ceremonies and festivities. These activities help to bring communities and their people together and facilitate strong cohesion,

interaction, communication, cooperation, harmony and builds ties of friendship and unity.

In many communities, during the months, weeks or days of these cultural ceremonies they are often referred to as periods of peace, reconciliation and love. By these periods, no one is expected to engage in any scuffle, quarrel, fight, misunderstanding, argument, squabble, disputes, altercation, wrangle, and loud noise etc.

These are regarded as taboo and should not take place at all. Within these periods, all disputes, crises and conflicts between individuals, families, groups and parties etc are resolved and settled. This is their way of life which were passed and transferred from generation to generation. This is indeed a worthy development and should be internalized at the state and national levels. With this, issues and conflicts between parties are resolved effectively and as a proactive methods, these rules forbidding people from engaging in conflicts within the periods of the ceremonies and festivities will be strong proactive approach to conflict resolution and prevention.

Negotiation and Dialogue

Negotiation is an act of arriving at an agreement through discussion and conversation relating to two parties. Through negotiation, parties in conflict come together and dialogue on their issues. The essence of negotiation is to arrive at an agreement which will be accepted by the parties. In the course of the negotiation, an understanding will be reached after each party might have tabled their views and opinion. At the end, agreement will be reached which will be binding on all the parties involved. The binding factor of negotiation is based on mutual understanding and mutual agreement.

Dialogue takes the form of conversation or other form of discourse between two or more parties, individuals or groups. Dialogue is done through verbal discussion and conversation geared toward arriving at an agreement by the participating parties or the conflicting groups. Through dialogue, conclusion will be reached on an issue where their opinions differ and their views varies.

Negotiation and dialogue are key element to the peaceful resolution of conflicts which certainly many arise among groups and parties.

Observably, it is advisable for parties to come to negation table and dialogue the issues and

disparities which exist among them. When this is done, differences and gaps would be properly filled as the opinions and views of each of the parties will be understood and agreements reached and solutions arrived at.

Consequently, instead of engaging in conflicts, parties and groups should embrace the concept of negotiation and dialogue. This will facilitate good friendly relation, cooperation, harmony and general peace. Negotiation and dialogue are favourable proactive method of resolving conflicts and preventing the occurrence of conflict.

Covenants, Agreements, Pacts and Accords

Covenants are agreements or pacts entered into by two or more individuals groups, parties or nations to either participate or engage in ties according to their interest and agreement. It involves two parties entering into certain agreement or deed which is acceptable by both parties and which they must keep in accordance to the dictation and content of the covenant. It is in form of a strong oath or an unfailing promise taken by two or more parties which they must keep. Many a times, covenants are characterized by attainments which must take place in the future by the two or more parties and each of

the parties must keep to their side of the pledge.

An agreement is an understanding undertaken by two parties in order to follow a specific course of conduct. It is a general understanding and pact which parties accept to adhere to. Agreement is the result of the acceptance and adherence of parties to a certain decision and choice of opinion which will be binding on them. Agreement is a strong understanding reached by parties which helps to settle conflicts and facilitates peace and cooperation among individuals and groups.

Pact is an agreement binding on two or more nations or groups. It is an agreement of law undertaken by parties that are binding on them. Such pacts are formal agreements which must be followed as it is accompanied by the force of law. The essence of entering into pact is to ensure that rules or directives are kept so that parties will be peaceful and harmonious. As a result, unity, faith, cooperation and interaction are maintained and sustained.

Accord is an agreement undertaken by two or more individuals, groups parties or nations. These two bodies are bound to abide by the rules as stipulated by the accord. In the same

vein, pacts are agreement between two or more parties which are in conflict and by which satisfaction, will prevent the extension of the controversy or conflict. It is a concurrence of opinions and agreements which must be entered into by two or more parties with the view to strengthen relationship and to achieve the purposes for which the pacts are signed.

In order to avoid conflicts and for the settlement of conflicts. It is advisable for parties to enter into accord and develop strong agreements which will be binding on the parties involved. When nations or parties enter into accord and sign pacts and agreements, peace, friendship, cooperation and closer ties are reached.

The consequence of parties or groups entering into agreements, signing accords and establishing pacts are simply to establish deep and intergroup relations, concord, understanding and the satisfaction of the interests for which these covenants, agreement, pacts and accords are created or formulated.

Litigation/Adjudication

This is another western alternative and non violent method of conflict resolution and management. This process involves the use of the court in conflict resolution process. The litigation and adjudication, pattern emphasizes the choice of the parties in dispute opting to resolve their matter in the judicial court of law. This adjudication process takes place before a magistrate or a judge in the court of competent jurisdiction. In this wise, the parties to the conflict will seek for legal counsels (lawyers) who will, as it may, represent them and their interests throughout the duration of the case, until judgment is given.

Consequently, the judgment given by the magistrate or judge is absolutely binding on the parties in the disputes. In the same vein, the judgements as passed by either the magistrate or the judge will receive authenticity and enforcement agencies (police, army or other para-military organization through this way, conflicts which would have ordinarily lead to loss of lives and property or into other severe crisis would have been summarily resolved and taken care of.

Generally, those who seem not to be satisfied with the stipulations, decisions or judgements of the court are ordinarily allowed to appeal

on the judgement. In this case, the case will be taken to a higher court of appeal where the matter will be re-examined and re-adjudicated. However, decisions reached must be building on the parties involved. This will be the case until the matter reached the apex court or the Supreme Court whose judgement would be the final judgement on the matter. The court is generally seen and regarded is the last hope of the ordinary man.

However, its peace is only relative. This is because litigation tends to destroy trust, love, respect and other forms of confidence between parties. It increases suspicion, and the bitterness of litigation lingers on for a long time after the judgement must have been given.¹⁴

The issue with litigation and adjudication is that matters that ends in law court seem to destroy relationship trust and cordiality among parties and groups. Again, litigation promotes hatred and deepens the gap between individuals, parties and groups, as judgement obtained through courts end in Winner-loser condition. Here, the winner wins all and the loser loses all. This is truly frowned at by parties and groups.

However, adjudication and litigation is one of the Western alternative dispute resolution

approaches which are embraced by many parts of the world. Despite its shortcomings, it is a sure way of averting and resolving crisis and conflict bound issues. All the above strategies form very strong basis and foundation as well as the panacea for western proactive peace and conflict resolution methodology. Such that, all these various methods are indeed vital and ideal for individuals, groups, parties and states etc to adopt them as a sure proactive way of resolving and managing conflicts.

These proactive methodologies are for better than meddling and dabbling into conflicts as its ugly consequences are better imagined than felt.

Conclusion

This paper, in an inexhaustible manner, looked into certain Western proactive conflict resolution methods, which if followed would help humanity to build a better world, devoid of crisis, rancor and conflicts. Individuals, groups, parties and nations should subject themselves to the use of these proactive methods of resolving and managing conflicts. These methods creates positive avenue for controlling, managing and resolving conflicts and making sure that

conflicts do not even occur in the first instance.

It is true that conflict is fast becoming an everyday occurrence in the life of man and that conflicts had become one of the inevitable characteristics of man in his environment, however, man should as much as possible fine-tune himself into identifying as a practical way of resolving his problems before it turns conflictive and violent prone. Generally, it is better to prevent conflict from taking place at all than to manage, control or to resolve the conflict. This is in line with the popular saying; that "Prevention is better than cure".

End Notes

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