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**FULL PAPER**

**BUILDING SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN AFRICA: NIGERIA IN PERSPECTIVE**

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## **BUILDING SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN AFRICA: NIGERIA IN PERSPECTIVE**

### **ABSTRACT**

Out of forty-eight countries in Africa, more than half have some type of internal conflicts such as tribal disputes, ethnic disagreements or war. Many of these conflicts are based on tightly-held religious, economic, social or political dispositions. Most African societies have forgotten that they belong to one land, one soil, and one community created to live together, but now they have separated, disconnected, and distanced themselves from one another because of greed, desire and power. This greed is somewhat caused by abject poverty and self-interest. Both regional traditional and non-traditional conflicts have also increasingly become a global concern. To improve Africa's economic prospects, the World Bank calls for better government and fewer conflicts, more investment in people and diversification of economic potentials. This paper examines some conceptual styles of conflict, their transformational process, community capacity building, reconciliation of active violence, and the practical application of promoting positive experiences especially in the Nigerian society.

**Key words:** Peace building, Internal conflicts, Sustainable peace, Conflicts Capacity building, Reconciliation, Violence, Nigeria, Africa.

**Introduction:**

The African conceptual systems of conflict are metaphorical in nature. It is now a universal knowledge that Africa profiles the highest statistics of violent conflicts in the world. Based on Ofuho (1999), for years the treatment of conflicts in Africa involving national armies resolved around conventional mechanisms that have excluded the traditional approaches that are now in greater demand in the contemporary world, particularly in Nigeria. Moreover, one can understand the complexity of issues by comparing them with relatively familiar ones around the globe. Renowned scholars of non-violent, problem-solving areas, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa, to name a few, have structured difficult conflicts in terms of building projects, creating programs, supporting people to attend schools, building roads, gardens and riddles. In his acceptance speech of July 19, 2007, Chief Luthuli said: "It is idle to speak of our country as being in peace, because there can be no peace in any part of the world where most people are oppressed." Drawing the parallels between the lives of these peacemakers and noble peace prize recipients, they used commentary speech, poetry, photographs and narratives to connect their stories in search of peace (Ofuho, 1999).

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) report on May 31, 2000 on Africa's economies 'in reverse,' there is too little infrastructure and development. Another finding by the World Bank also reported that many African countries are worse off now than they were at the time of their independence in the 1960s. In fact, the total combined income of 48 countries in Africa is little more than that of Belgium. The BBC further reported that the education of children needs to be a priority. Two thirds of rural Africans lack adequate sanitation. This is the time to transform conflicts into peace building by listening and practicing civility. Hence major changes are still needed for Africans and, in particular, Nigeria to embrace peace through the transformation process.

**The Problem:**

In Nigeria, more than seventy percent of the population came from poor families. "Yet, politicians collaborated with the military in a stealing spree, messing up much wealth to win elections; thereby, they became involved in looting," said the former Aviation Minister. Chief Mbazulik Amechi (a.k.a. "The boy is good"), published by the Nigerian *Guardian Newspaper*, October 6, 2010. We understand the game, but there is a distinction

between the concepts of conflict that precedes a dispute. However, not all conflicts give rise to a dispute because dispute is a product of unresolved conflict. This happens when human beings are challenged to evolve new mechanisms that are suitable for their survival, and to resolve different types of disputes becomes unavoidable.

Nigeria is concerned about the fact that for more than half a century and, especially since the end of cold war, there has not been peace in Africa. Indeed, Africa has been torn apart by extremely intense conflicts which have resulted in thousands of deaths. Today's predominant pattern of conflict in Africa is proving resistant to the available and accepted tools of conflict management. What Bob-Manuel (2000) sees, as needed, is a new range of flexible and adaptable instruments that can take the more subjective, complex and deep-rooted needs and interests that underpin these types of conflicts? This thinking is the justification for the study conducted by Bob-Manuel in the "Culture and Peace Education" course at the European Peace University in Stadtschlaining, Austria in 2000. It is also noted that the deterioration of African values, especially in Nigeria, was because the original African values have been replaced by foreign ones, and these changes introduced systematic problems because they were unable to adapt to the new system of political power. This premature political transformation has led to different ethnic groups struggling for dominance in the new system. Years back, African countries used various conflict resolution styles and approaches.

Most of these approaches were predominantly local but effective. Conflicts were between families, communities, villages, tribes, elders, women, and leaders. Traditional methods were applied and people were ready to intervene to make peace. If we are not more creative about ways of transforming through imaginative discourse, there is a high probability that much of the African wisdom will not be heard and the Western world will impose our learning in ways that will almost certainly result in accelerated destruction. While the causes of war and peace and violence, and the conditions for peace and justice are at the heart of peace and conflict studies, Nigerians should not fail to understand and address the innovative ways to transform their thinking and ideological belief factors, and deep challenges to identity and belongingness. Over the years, Nigeria's contributions to peace, at the domestic, regional and international levels, have been on an ad hoc basis. This is not good enough for the country in a knowledge-driven world, according to The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution report of 2005.

### **Conceptual Styles of Violent Conflict:**

It is not a new concept to say that disputes are inborn in human beings. The challenge is that it is impossible to encapsulate the commonalities in the reasons underlying on our continent and in our country Nigeria, in particular, notwithstanding the different causes of conflicts. Some may argue that conflict is not a bad thing, but that depends on how society moderates and manages conflicts. Societies, with different cultures, have developed the tools and strategies (call it traditional or foreign) for managing conflicts. How some people may manage conflict depends on how they see conflict, types of people in conflict, the remote cause of conflict, and situations people find themselves during conflict, and how people deal with conflicts differently. Obviously, the Biafra-Nigerian war of the 1960s, the Angolan civil war of the 70's, the anarchy in Somalia in the early 90's, and the rebel movement around the Mano River have provided Africans with a diverse character of the conflicts we experience and the range of measure that have been taken to settle disputes. According to some African leader's reflection on conflict, they said that the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at one time was described as Africa's world war, given the involvement of many African armies. This shows a collective concept. Again, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the 20 years North/South civil war in Sudan culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005, and the recent development in Zimbabwe, in this decade, are all different facets of the "African Tragedy."

Notwithstanding the contexts, the variety of causes and the magnitude of the tension of conflict, it is possible to encapsulate the African communities for reasons underlying conflicts. Each of the aforementioned Africa conflicts was caused by one of these factors: relating to alienation and circumscribed political space; exclusion of the monopoly of political power; land disputes; uneven distribution of resources primordial identities of ethnicity; misconception of religion and regionalism; marginalization and unequal access to the public resources (such as oil, land, mineral flora and fauna); and irregular distribution and access to public goods and services, whereby some communities are denied full access to these mentioned benefits, thus leaving them in poverty. It was also noted that the lack of nation-building projects contributed in some part. While there are a few leaders who succeeded to create nations of the state boundaries they inherited, many citizens were excluded at these undertakings.

Conflict can also be seen as a destructive power, especially when we see conflict as a process where groups of people are defining their own position. On the other hand, conflict can be seen as a source of creativity and a constructive power when differences are respected and people are brought together in a collaborative process to build their futures. The recognition of concept is important in conflict transformation because it helps in establishing a basis for communication, using shared concepts.

Studies have revealed that the conflict rhetoric of leaders of the major Western powers, such as the United States, Britain and France, have been studied on how violent contents (social, political, religion and economic) dealt with mundane disputes among fundamentally like-minded groups. The aforementioned world powers employ many of the metaphors that nonviolence activists embrace when dealing with conflicts. These activists understand and expand the sphere of comic conflict resolution with ingenuity and reflections instead of norms of the black and white juxtaposition. Yet, they search for a more peaceful and essential vibrant world.

Another search for a peaceful settlement in Africa is the example of the neighborhood system of negotiation. This method is participatory in nature, adaptable and flexible for all parties, and most of the time successful due to its elemental simplicity. It starts with discussions by individuals within the social context on an emerging dispute. The circumstance of the situation is the result of the social context.

For example, it affects a condensed family or extended family, immediate neighbors or a larger neighborhood, or a combination of family and different parties of a state. It can also be a smaller or a larger organization such as a religious or educational group. Unlike litigation and binding arbitration, and instead of directing the discussion towards apportioning of blame or spite, it is pointed towards a solution of win-lose. While in a 'win-lose' situation, judges and mediators make discussions based on rules. The reason for this traditional method looks forward to the future, for improved relationships, not only between disputants, but also in the whole community that is involved. Now, how does one transform peace to meet the demands of this shrinking world and to reduce conflict in the continent of Africa and especially, Nigeria?

### **The Power of Transforming Conflict into Peace Building:**

Conflict transformation, as practiced in any society, can lead to a more profound and shared understanding of the causes of conflict, resulting in promoting a sense of

belongingness that restores peace and builds relationships. For the understanding of this paper, conflict transformation is described as a constructive social change, meaning “the building of right relationships and social structures through a radical respect for human rights, and non-violence as ways of life,” (Lederach, 1995).

While Bush and Folger called conflict transformation as an interpersonal level that aims less at settlements and more at individual transformation through the process of empowerment and recognition (Lederach, 1995). These two scholars viewed conflict transformation as a transformative mediation approach. The word “transformation” has so many meanings to so many people in different cultures. For example, people transform an orange or apple or mango fruit to a form of juice, called orange juice or mango juice or apple juice. In chemistry, biology and physics, for example, scholars entertain many changes of transformation. Other transformations occur when each day starts with morning, afternoon and night. Sometimes the weather changes to cold, windy, mild, hot, rainy, sunny, or snowy.

Human beings go through a transformational process before birth as well as when growing up. Some people assume that life is energy while other assumes that one may need the help of other types of energies to run and strengthen the change process. Howbeit, the outcome of this change or transformation may have more energy, power, and capacity to build other projects and services. This means that the human body, vitality and mind, have a certain kind of power, and we are using this power to work, let it be cooking, sports, swimming, leading, serving, and studying. This is because all are related with the same energy of life. Similarly, this energy gives us only limited benefits as human beings.

Africans therefore, must face odd things while living life, such as living with anger, envy, dissatisfaction, and desires based on material things. Sometimes we feel that this is not life and it’s not good enough for our lives. Then, we begin to feel some kind of hidden reality. In order to achieve good results, we must first transform ourselves from within. This is called a spiritual process, meaning one does something very differently, consciously and unconsciously, for a change. To reach the epic of change in Nigeria, President Jonathan of Nigeria gave a declaration speech on September 18, 2010, which was reported by *The Nigerian Vanguard Newspaper* at the Eagle Square. In his own words he said,

Let the word go out from the Eagle Square today that  
Jonathan as president in 2011 will herald a new era of

transformation of our country, an era that will end the agony of power shortage in our country. Let the word go out from here that I will be for the students, teachers and parents of Nigeria, a president who will advance quality and competitive education. Let everyone in this country hear that I shall strive to the best of my ability to attain self sufficiency in food production. He continued to help me in these tasks effectively; I will re-train, revamp and motivate the civil service.

Of course, he ended his speech with a powerful poem indicating that “We will fight and we will fight for our rights”. Nigerians should realize that the power which leads us to transform is our being and its direct contact with our ‘Spiritual Being or the creator.’ Some of us have to change our life-styles because some events changed our overall situation. We need to be in our real sense of reality before we can reduce some violent conflicts in Nigeria. The only one that affects change is the leader, with the support of his/her followers. President Jonathan said also that “Our country is at the threshold of a new era; an era that beckons for a new kind of leadership; a leadership that is uncontaminated by the prejudices of the past, a leadership to change ...”

Transformational mediation is perhaps the best and certainly most popular, of the situational approaches to the mediator’s role. It is popular in community mediation settings and has also proved appropriate in the United States by serving the U.S. Postal Services ambitions and successful approach to managing employee grievances. Transformational mediation aims at empowerment and recognition. Employment in this context refers to strengthening each party’s ability to analyze its respective needs in the conflict; thereby, making effective decisions, while recognition refers to improving the capacity of the disputants to become responsive to the needs and perspectives of the other. Some have argued that the concept of reconciliation is profoundly Christian, while others find evidence of significant mechanisms in many cultures.

### **National Commitment and Priority:**

The building of peace needs commitment at every level. Peaceful politics are possible only with the willing consent and active engagement from all groups within a society. Fisher and Patton (1991) reveal that one of the most serious global problems facing the

world as it lurches into the new millennium is how to manage destructive and protracted conflict between groups with differing identities who are interacting within the same political system. Based on this statement, the Nigerian society expects the formation of structures, the development of systems, and the ongoing activity of the people of all kinds. The Nigerian society needs creative vision, productive skills and cohesion of thoughts that these activities and developments are possible. They must involve the constructive, non-violent conflicts that will inevitably arise from social and political relationships. Nigerians must develop and understand the skills required to be able to tackle the tasks of any kind.

Some other ways to achieve these tasks include professional training workshops, dialogues, capacity building workshops, and adapting new styles of leadership. To become a peace builder in a society where violence, hatred, mistrust and antagonism have become the norms, where inter-communal relationships and structures are fractured or exclude certain groups, a society where the rule of law and democratic processes have been broken down, intensive training workshop has proven to be effective, educating members of the communities. In addition, training has been found as the most vital means of supporting effective organization and action, by multiplying the numbers of people with the awareness and skills to act judiciously.

Research shows that trainees gain a new kind of awareness and framework for understanding different events and contexts, and this enhances their capacity to think, observe, analyze, synthesize and assess, and also to make decisions, over time. Conflict needs creativity and creativity needs conflict. The potential of constructive conflict is to produce a positive, personal and social change (Deutsch, 2007). For instance, an effective peace leader should utilize internal skills of self-awareness, using inner peace, skills of analysis, drawing a map of power relationships, and skills of group networking, and organizational skills. To work for conflict transformation at any level involves those who have been the subjects of structures of domination discover and develop the power to participate in what affects them. Some African countries that are practicing democracy must enact democracy at all levels of public life, be it local national or international, working in ways that increase participation in order to help people in all sectors of the society. Again, all Nigerian organizations, including agencies, ministries, private and public sectors, should look at how they are functioning and at their development, structure and processes. It is therefore for government employees' to deepen their understanding and skills to improve their effectiveness.

Training workshops are a small contribution to the educational processes that can also support the transformation of attitudes and perceptions, and the management of resources. Workshops work best when they are seen as part of ongoing programmes and relationships of cooperation for change.

The fact is that conflict and the responses to them increasingly involve a heterogeneous range of state and non-state workers at all levels, local, national and global, should be associated with peace keeping policies and practices in Africa and elsewhere (Berman and Sams, 2000; Mbabazi et al, 2002; Mekenkamp et al, 1999). The exact words of Axworthy (2001 p. 23), as reflected after his term as a foreign minister in Canada, are that: "Actualizing the concept of human security requires all actors--states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and business--to act responsibly."

### **Capacity Building Process:**

One of the categories of conflicts has been the failure of the nation-building project, in some parts of our African continent. For the Nigerian government to succeed in transformation, it must embark on capacity building programs. Capacity building development, like sustainable development, encompasses a wide range of aspects including the human, technological, organizational, financial, scientific, cultural and institutional. Capacity building is the process through which national governments and local communities develop the necessary skills and expertise to manage their environment and natural resources in a sustainable manner within their daily activities. Reasons behind these include strengthening the capacity to achieve sustainable livelihoods, planning and implementation, using the multi-disciplinary approach; emphasizing on technology change and innovation, emphasizing on building social capital through social regulation and learning; and developing skills and performance of both individuals and institutions.

To transform is the literary meaning of to "change life." Change is a complex situation because humans resist change, and this can cause some to quiver just from the word alone. People fear the unknown outcome because they don't want to take the risk. At the same time, a willing individual can turn transformation into a heartfelt, positive experience. If one recollects from your old school days, there were different occurrences each year, such as a new class, a new teacher, new classmates, new classrooms, new courses, new books, new friends, and new neighborhoods.

Overwhelmingly, there was just the comprehension of change that forced the ability to conquer or win each year's activity. If one should accept fear or apprehension, one can help gain a kind of friendship with it, at the same time pushing one to move forward. Let us look at how a simple transformation can improve life.

Based on experts recommendations, there are five ways to compact change: be open minded and maintain a positive mind for the potential that lies ahead; stop the worry and seek serenity in nature; encourage inner ability to rid the struggle and amplify the release of daily struggles to shed the barriers that stress tends to cause, motivate and concentrate in challenges that arise from the work; and utilize five senses of cognizance ranging to a higher power.

### **Creative Approach to Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation**

A number of questions have been raised for discussion to creative conflict resolution. These questions are:

1. If creativity requires conflict, under what conditions of conflict is creativity likely to emerge?

One creative function of conflict resides in its ability to arouse motivation to resolve problems.

2. Do creative solutions emerge only after extensive time and effort are focused on the problem, or are there conflicts that permit solution in a relatively short time? Of course, not all problems are profound, and not all conflicts are deeply enmeshed in difficult personal, sociopolitical and economic conditions. But in an embittered dysfunctional family, also involve prolonged creative effort; Gruber (1990) confirmed that such profound intellectual problems were addressed by Darwin and Einstein. As a result, this requires extended time and effort before reconciliation takes place.

3. What are the differences between creative individual work and creative collaboration?

From scholarly research findings such as the one conducted by Gruber (1990), it was revealed that an individual is not at a disadvantage acting alone, compared to a collaborative group of people. Unless this individual working alone has access to the different styles to construct a reality of the problem he/she is dealing with. If this individual could not have all the resources to solving problems, it would be more difficult, if not impossible to effect positive change. If the collaborative group should

team to resolve any conflict, each bringing in his/her own knowledge concerning the problem; sharing information and constructing a valid picture of the reality, chances are they will be able to resolve some problems better than the individual working alone.

In general, the collaborative effort, compared to an individual working alone, provides more resources, more diversity of ideas, and more social support in working out creative solution for the problem. In addition, individuals, as compared to collaborative work , does not require the skills and attitudes involved in effective cooperation, which include trust, perspectives, communication, empathy, and control of egocentricity. Collaborative work is apt to be more creative, if there is an effective cooperation, unlike the individual working alone. Another issue is for disputants to make changes in their thinking. Research shows that constructive resolution of conflict often requires that conflictants be able to see old issues in new ways.

Other scholars, such as Zartman et al (1996), who wrote on negotiation, argues that genuine conflict resolution and/or problem solving always involved some implicit or explicit agreement about the notion of justice. It was asserted that this agreement will govern the disposition of areas in conflict. Conflict resolution is aimed at enhancing freedom and justice and maximizing autonomy, that appeared a considerable emasculation of the radical and transformation promise within the conflict resolving community in the Unites States and other nations. Some of these experts have made so many attempts to provide quick fixes to a range of tractable and intractable disputes. It was also reported that some of these methods of conflict transformation reduces stress and supports the adaptation of social, individual and cultural systems. Let us re-examine other essential ways of making peace and transforming conflict. These include:

- Transformation should aim at channeling the energy conflict constructive, nonviolent, rather than destructive and violent acts. This generates positive change.
- Conflict transformation happens when violent conflict ceases or expressed in nonviolent ways, thereby changing social, economic, political, military and cultural conflicts.
- Conflicts can be transformed through socio-political processes, by parties acting alone, by interveners and other parties acting together, including judicious advocacy and political intervention. For example, all agencies, political decision-

makers, social movements, religious organizations, elders, community leaders, men and women of all ethnic groups should be involved.

- Conflict transformation process can take place at any state of escalatory cycle. At the first sign of conflict or trouble remain unaddressed, then the transformational process, may take form of an early warning.
- The next phase of conflict transformation could apply the following: conciliation or intervention, mediation and collaborative problem-solving process.

The foundation base of Conflict transformation occurs in our homes, community, national and international. All aims at peace building, while peace -building strategies are based on Gareth Evans (1993), representing all those processes that addresses the underlying causes of violent conflicts and crisis. This means that preventive measures are put in place, meeting basic needs such as security and safety, shelter, belongingness and love and recognition of identity, and self-worth (Maslow, 1970).

Most civilized societies spontaneously develop effective national and international rules, making dispute resolution mechanisms, and cooperative, cultural, social and humanitarian needs, and to become effective global citizens. The knowledge of hybrid alternative dispute resolution (ADR) is very essential as a way to conflict transformation.

Again, it has been emphasized that there is a strong correlation between poverty and conflict. Based on studies, fifteen of the twenty countries in the world have been involved in major violent conflicts, and over half of all major civil conflicts during the past fifteen years. The World Bank, however, identified six basic elements in a reconstruction and peace building strategies (Holtzman, 1996). These strategies are as follows:

1. Restore open and free communications.
2. De-centralize community base investments
3. Repair key transportation and communication network
4. Reintegrate displaced populations
5. Jump start the nation's economy
6. Demobilize and retrain professional citizens
7. Link to other possible investments
8. Rebuild trust of the people

The above mentioned strategies help the government to understand how to overcome past mistakes, and at the same time enable them to do accurate diagnosis of problems to help generate new kinds of inactive frameworks. There should be a strategic understanding between collaborative analytical problem-solving workshops (CPAS), and specific peace building processes for the society. There should be a combination of agendas for peace together with an agenda for development. There should be a linkage between Human Security, and Security Council summit preceding an agenda for peace.

### **Conclusion**

In order to combine these agenda, the linkage with the CAPS methods should be used in the development and conflict resolution genre, in order to achieve transformation of peace. The discussion method should identify and analyze the problem, join in shaping ideas for solution, influence the other disputant, and create a supportive political environment (Kelman, 1996). This approach, if appropriately addressed, provides a critical backdrop to deeper understandings of dynamic conflict. It is also important to note that for development to be successful in peace building, the society has to accept changing images of their parties and that of their adversaries.

Finally, the trick is to find out how to transform conflicts before they escalate. If it takes a village to raise a child, based on an African adage, it will take everyone to solve a nations problems and transform or make positive changes for the good of all. All universities, colleges, peace building intervention centers, local, regional, national and international organizations, all have a part to play in relation to peace building; and using preventive diplomacy and other traditional mechanisms. This is a strong onus of responsibility on bringing peace in Africa and Nigeria in particular. We need to develop more attention to start addressing these problems before they go critical and disastrous. Remember the words of Reardon (2001 p. 103), "Conflict is a part of all our lives; yet few of us have skills to transform conflict from a painful destructive process to one of significant learning and constructive change." The key to the transformation conflict is to build strong equitable relations where distrust and fear were once the norm. This is a challenge for peace and conflict transformation studies. The question remains, how can we work together to make peace for our nation, children, and children's' children, yet unborn.

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