

MITIGATING CONFLICTS ESCALATION AND PROMOTING PEACE RESOLUTION IN YORRO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: ROLES OF CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA

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DOI Link: <https://doi.org/10.70382/bjhss.v9i6.045>

ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that social interaction is threatened by unavoidable conflicts. While numerous factors endanger conflict, its management and mitigation has defied formal process in many times. In fact, in Yorro LGA of Taraba State, formal set of rules, legislations, police system, and judiciary are prominent strategies employed to mitigate conflicts and ensure peaceful coexistence of inhabitants without prioritizing activities of religious bodies such as Christian Association of Nigeria, Taraba State Chapter. However, the formal conflict mitigation process seems not to be yielding expected results as tension and mistrust still persist among the inhabitants, whereas there is paucity of evidence on the roles of religious bodies, especially the Christian Association of Nigeria, Taraba State Chapter in mitigating conflicts in the area. This paper maintained that conflict is neither positive nor negative as it is connected to diverse characteristics of our

Introduction

Conflict is usually conceived as an inevitable part of man's life as it surfaces whenever incompatible actions take place. That is, when values, viewpoints, and opinions of two or more people clash, conflict will emerge. This explains why many people perceive conflict as entirely negative event with no positive aspects. Some characterize it as dysfunctional or destructive, while others see it as a catalyst for change, innovation and productivity. This dual perspective arises from the notion that wherever individuals coexist in a community, conflict is likely to occur.

It is not surprising that Devi (2012) defined conflict as a

thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes at social systems and structure, whereas its mitigation determines the effects. In line with other scholars, the paper argued that CAN has engaged in initiatives aimed at preventing crises and building peace, including interfaith dialogues, community mediation, and partnerships with various organizations, especially in conflict-prone areas like Plateau, Jos, Kaduna, and Sokoto. In order to ensure effective conflict mitigation and promote peace resolution, the paper canvassed for involvement of Taraba State CAN chapter to prioritize activities like interfaith and collaboration, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, advocacy for peace, relief and solidarity, capacity building, economic development integration, and dialogue for peace among others. The paper recommended engagement through dialogue, enlightenment on tolerance and engagement with government and other relevant organizations to promote peace resolution in Taraba State. It was concluded that conflict mitigation and peace resolution sustainability lies in the hands of Taraba State CAN chapter. This is because any kinds of conflicts can be better approached through formidable religious body like CAN.

Keywords: Conflict mitigation, conflict escalation, peace resolution, Yorro LGA, Christian Association of Nigeria.

Social circumstance where two individuals compete for a particular set of resources simultaneously. This can occur at any level- social, religious, regional, national or international. Throughout history, societies, social groups and individuals have disputed and competed against one another over scarce commodities and resources such as land, money, political power, and ideology. Groups have even engaged in conflict and aggressively sought to defeat or suppression opponents to gain control over their resources and commodities. However, human societies, social groups and religious bodies have equally intervened in managing, averting, or resolving conflicts with a view to mitigating conflict escalation and promoting peace building. Atoi and Ajiji (2024) noted that religious bodies have long ago formulated ways of ensuring peace through scriptural texts, dogmatic traditions and doctrinal teachings. In this sense, human beings seem to get natural instinct to keep peace from religious ideologies. Although, some believers have equally orchestrated large scale violent conflicts in the name of religion, but different religious traditions contain so many value systems that have the capacity to resolve conflicts and promote peace at different levels of the human society.

The existing body of literature confirms that the nature and causes of conflicts and the strategies or mechanisms for managing them are deeply rooted in the culture and history of every society, community, or their religion practices. The strategies and mechanisms

for mitigating conflicts are in many important ways unique to each society. For instance, Baxi and Gallanter cited in James (2010) reported that in India, Panchayat conflict mitigation strategy is used; while China uses Mediation Committees and Afghanistan employs Jirga mitigation mechanism. These comparative social facts may lend credence to support the philosophical position of cultural relativists that the nature of all social phenomena, including conflicts and their mitigation are relative culturally and religiously specific (Harris, 2018). According to Mwaniki (2017), there is increasing realization that effective conflict mitigation provides opportunity to prevent violence and destruction from occurring, as it is dependent among others on local strategies and mechanisms developed on the basis of traditional or religious practices towards mitigating conflicts.

In communities like Yorro in Taraba State of Nigeria for instance, formal set of rules, legislations, police system, and judiciary are prominent strategies employed to mitigate conflicts and ensure peaceful coexistence of inhabitants. In other words, most of the conflicts in Yorro local government area of Taraba State are being handled without prioritizing activities of religious bodies such as Christian Association of Nigeria, Taraba State Chapter. In fact, the researcher's visit to the study area revealed that community people still have disagreement over land issue, farmer-herder crises, fracas as a result of border and boundary as well as mutual blame among the ethnic nationalities in the area. The afore-mentioned points have caused series of conflicts among the settlers of Yorro with resultant effects of killing, maiming, destruction of properties and displacing multitude in the said environs.

In addition, Yorro local government area has been fraught with tension and mutual blame between the Mumuye and Fulani ethnic nationalities. The Fulani, as migrant pastoralists, have historically laid claims to autonomy over land holdings, which has sparked conflict with the Mumuye and other established ethnic groups in the region. The Fulani feel they are falsely accused of kidnapping and cattle rustling, and they also complain about being denied access to traditional cattle routes. This has led to a crisis where community members, particularly the Mumuye and other ethnic groups have fled communities in Yorro area, displacing many individuals. The Fulani with their nomadic lifestyle and dependence on cattle herding, often come into conflict with settled agricultural communities, such as the Mumuye over land use and resources (Smith, 2017). In the case of communities in Yorro, the Fulani felt their autonomy and traditional rights were being infringed upon, leading to accusations and suspicions. As Smith (2017) notes, land disputes are a common source of interethnic conflict, especially in areas with diverse ethnic groups and competing land use. The Fulani claims of cattle rustling and kidnapping further escalated tensions, as these are serious crimes that often carry significant social repercussions.

The Mumuye on the other hand, felt threatened by the Fulani presence and perceived their actions as menacing to the community. As a result, kidnapping became rampant, fueling mutual mistrust and exacerbating the conflict. This dynamic is not uncommon in areas with a history of ethnic tensions, as kidnapping can be used as a tool to assert power, seek ransom, or retaliate (Williams & Jones, 2020). The Mumuye's decision to flee highlights the severity of the situation and the breakdown of social cohesion in the community. However, the formal conflict mitigation process seems not to be yielding expected results as tension and mistrust still persist among the inhabitants, whereas there is paucity of evidence on the roles of religious bodies, especially the Christian Association of Nigeria, Taraba State Chapter in mitigating conflicts in the area. Though scholars like Atoi and Ajiji (2024) averred that religious bodies can play an essential role in conflict mitigation by acting as mediator, promoting dialogue, and addressing the underlying causes of tension and crises. For O'Brien (2018), religious bodies could be of help in rebuilding peace, facilitating peace resolution and supporting the peaceful coexistence of diverse ethnic groups. As a further study in this direction, the current study analyzed, synthesized and juxtaposed the activities expected of Christian Association of Nigeria, Taraba State Chapter in conflict mitigation and peace resolution in Yorro local government area of Taraba State, Nigeria.

Meaning of Conflict

Conflict has been observed to be in existence in all human social spheres including the local community. It could be described as all forms of opposition, disagreement, friction between two or more parties and it manifests in the forms of arguments, protests, demonstration, aggression and other destructive behaviours (Owens, 2015). While conflict occurrence has been observed to be inevitable and ubiquitous in any community setting, the strategies for mitigating it have remained topical issues and matters of concern to individuals, groups, scholars and religious bodies (National Open University of Nigeria, 2019).

Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing. According to Anih (2018), conflict is a part of life, but it becomes unhealthy when it is between people rather than about idea. Conflict is bound to occur as long as there are people dealing with fellow people, making decision or having meeting. Ekpu (2018) opined that conflict is neither positive nor negative as it is the result of diverse characteristics of our thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes at social systems and structure. Thus, Ekpu explained that it is the way one handles and mitigates conflict that will determine its effects. Conflict could be seen as an energizer of development if properly curtailed by people and the conflicting parties involved. Conflicts have negative outcomes when the affected individual exhibits a feeling of defeat

and demoralization; they also have positive outcomes when better ideas are produced, they force people to clarify views.

Idrissou (2013) defined conflict as the incompatibility of ideas, beliefs, behaviours, roles, needs, desires, values, and so on among individuals. In this sense, Bens (2017) conceived conflict as the tension that is experienced when a group of people feels that their needs or desires are likely to be denied. This agreed with Owens (2015) who postulated that conflict occurs whenever incompatible activities occur while Abduraheem (2014) argued that it could mean strife, controversy, discord of action and antagonism. Thus, in a related survey, Adeyemi (2018) found that in the Nigerian society, conflict occurs from time to time, stressing that conflict is the art of coming into collision, clash or be in opposition with one another. This view was in agreement with Sessa (2016), and Canavan and Monahan (2021) who asserted that conflict situation is one in which the parties involved are unable to iron out their differences.

From the definitions above, it evident that conflict has to do with disagreement between two or more parties; and such disagreement cannot be ironed out by the parties involved to reach an agreement. This inability is usually manifested in one form of protest or the other such as strikes and other disruptions of planned activities. This explained why Ejiogu (2017) perceived conflict as mutual hostility and all kinds of opposition or antagonistic interaction including disagreements or controversies about ideas, values, and ways of life. By implication, if conflict lingers for longer time, it may pose a serious danger to the parties involved; and it is more dangerous if not mitigated on time.

However, scholars have identified different categories of conflicts in terms of whether they occur at the micro-micro or micro-macro levels. That is, conflict is differentiated based on whether the conflict is among community groups or between community groups and outside government, private or civil society organizations (Grimble & Wellard, 2017). Micro-micro conflicts can be further divided as taking place either within the group directly involved in a particular community (e.g. a group of farmers or herders), or between this group and those not directly involved (e.g. between the group of farmer and those entering the forest to fetch fuelwood). Simply put, the types of conflicts could be understood in terms of intra and inter micro-micro conflicts and micro-macro conflicts (Ejiogu, 2017). Besides, conflicts could occur in any dimension but the appropriate strategy for its mitigation cannot be underestimated. As stated by Rubin (2014), conflict can arise in virtually any social setting, be it between or within individuals, groups, communities or nations; and such conflict can be mitigated in a number of possible ways. Adeyemi (2018) described conflict mitigation as internal mechanisms used by the various authorities in resolving conflict. That is, a measure must be put in place to control and stepdown the waves of conflict.

According to Eunson cited in Owolabi (2018), there are many possible causes of conflict, some of which also cause aggression. The causes are not limited to but include scarce resources, harsh economy, adversity, perceived differences, biological, health and environmental factors. For Dewantaro (2016), in every conflict, there are three main issues that are of concern for the conflicting parties, namely the substantive, the emotional, and the pseudo-substantive.

Table 1: Issues of Concern in Conflict

Substantive Issues	Emotional Issues	Pseudo-Substantive Issues
• Resource • Duties • Policies • Values • Religion • Ideology	• Need for power comes from the need to control and influence. • Need for approval – comes from the need to be liked. • Need for inclusion – comes from the need to be accepted in a group • Need for justice – comes from the need to be treated correctly, fairly, and equally. • Need for identity for example autonomy, self-esteem, affirmation of personal values, etc.	• The main emotional issues that can manifest into substantive issues.

Source: Dewantaro (2016)

Christian Association of Nigeria

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is a prominent umbrella organization uniting various Christian denominations across Nigeria, playing a vital role in promoting unity, peace and cooperation among Nigerians. As enshrined in CAN's mission and objectives, it revolves around connecting people to Jesus and promoting unity among Christians, with the motto "That they all may be one" (John, 17:21). Its objectives include promoting understanding, peace, and unity; acting as a liaison for member churches; and serving as a watchdog for Nigeria's spiritual and moral welfare. Josef (2021) observed that CAN and its various chapters have consistently engaged in interfaith collaboration and promote peaceful coexistence by addressing national challenges. The author stressed further that CAN is a front burner advocate for peace, condemning violence and urging collective action against conflicts and terrorisms in Nigeria. In addition, as a vibrant religious body, CAN have been a prominent role in addressing national issues like bad governance, insecurity, food insecurity, injustice, and extreme economic conditions, and support for collaborative leadership for Nigeria's peace and prosperity (Mohsen, 2019). Thus, CAN is a strong religious body that plays a significant role in promoting unity and addressing national issues, thereby impacting Christians and broader Nigerian society.

Towards Mitigating Conflicts: Roles of Christian Association of Nigeria

Conflict mitigation is a kind of intervention or measure designed to reduce conflict or in some instances to increase insufficient conflict. It is a process whereby relevant bodies such as community leaders or religious bodies design plans and implement policies and procedures to ensure that conflict situations are mitigated effectively. This depicts the global perspective towards the diverse roles that religious bodies play in preventing crises and promoting peace. Yake (2015) observed that religious authorities frequently serve as moral guides and mediators, even though they may be constrained by secular governments and legal systems. That is, religious bodies play a supporting role in peace initiatives, with the UN and other organizations taking the lead, in more secular societies (Anthony, 2020). This is supported by Aemro (2018) that religious leaders lead peace initiatives in Nigeria, even though they frequently work with official interventions worldwide. Perhaps this explains why CAN engages in initiatives aimed at preventing crises and building peace, including interfaith dialogues, community mediation, and partnerships with various organizations, especially in conflict-prone areas like Plateau, Jos, Kaduna, and Sokoto. Deacon (2021) reported that CAN and its various chapters consistently advocate for peace in violence-prone communities, urging members of the communities to support peace talks and avoid actions that escalate tensions. The author further acknowledged that CAN at the State levels usually provide relief items and express solidarity with affected communities, which demonstrates its commitment to addressing humanitarian impacts of conflicts. Additionally, Odumusu (2019) concurred that CAN is committed to emphasizing unity and mutual respect among Nigerians of different faiths and backgrounds, which calls for collective efforts to build a peaceful and prosperous Nigeria. The author acknowledged numerous peacebuilding efforts of CAN towards Christian-Muslim relations through facilitating interfaith discussions in conflict-prone regions in Nigeria. Thus, CAN as a religious body gives required support for building a peaceful Nigerian society.

The assertion above explains why CAN's efforts boost a broader commitment among Nigerian religious leaders to promote peace, stability and harmony, often in collaboration with Muslim counterparts and other stakeholders. Daniel (2020) maintained that one of the pivotal roles of religious institution is to create social solidarity which is regarded as a societal glue, as it provides harmony of attitude, developed ideas and excellent habit among people for unity and common purpose. In one hand, this explains why CAN participates in and advocates for inclusive interfaith platforms to foster mutual understanding and peace, thereby addressing challenges like deep-seated mistrust and economic disparities. On the other hand, it recognizes the need for ongoing capacity-building for religious leaders to serve as effective peace mediators. Besides, economic supports provided by CAN is being acknowledged as a device to

integrate economic development programmes into dialogue efforts so as to address underlying socio-economic factors fueling conflicts (Imaekhai, 2019). To this end, by offering multidimensional approaches towards conflicts mitigation with active involvement of various CAN chapters, it has played a significant role in handling crises across nooks and crannies of Nigeria.

Ensuring Peace Resolution through Christian Association of Nigeria

Peace resolution encompasses various approaches to addressing conflicts and achieving harmony. That is, it is a multifaceted approach involving non-violent strategies like dialogue, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration to de-escalate tensions and achieve sustainable outcomes (Michelle, 2021). In other words, it involves producing solutions agreeable to all parties, focusing on underlying interests and needs rather than positions, and improving relationships. For Mohamed (2021), peace resolution connotes peace building, which is a long-term effort to create sustainable peace, by addressing core societal and state issues bordering on reconstruction, development and governance reforms. By implication, it is a mixture of politics, diplomacy, negotiation, mediation, and dialogue aiming to solve specific armed conflicts. Hence, peace resolution is a collaborative process seeking mutually agreeable solutions, which involves a neutral third party that facilitates negotiation to ensure avoidance of violence and ensure equitable treatment that addresses grievances by upholding dignity and rights of all involved.

These definitions and perspectives highlight the complexity and multifaceted nature of peace resolution, emphasizing the need for adaptable and inclusive approaches. According to Anthony (2020), religious institutions in their various capacity mediate, reconcile ethnic clashes between herder-farmer old conflict in Benue, Niger and Kaduna or intervened into political crisis as mediator in reference to what transpired in Nigeria during election process. Gbagero (2021) affirmed that in Northern Nigeria, CAN and other interfaith organizations have been instrumental in advancing peacebuilding and harmonious cohabitation as their initiatives help to ease tensions, promote understanding, and create connections across racial and religious divides. The author maintained that the institutions address the root causes of conflict, encourage communication and tolerance, and support socioeconomic development in order to promote peace resolution in Northern Nigeria. To this end, CAN has a big role in promoting peace resolution and national reconciliation, as it controls norms, beliefs and societal values in accordance to religious theorem. Simply put, peace resolution tends to be attainable when conflicting issues and parties are addressed through activities of CAN in relation to contextual state.

Conflicts Mitigation and Peace Resolution: Roles Expected of CAN Taraba State Chapter

From the foregoing, it is evident that Taraba State CAN chapter has a lot to do in mitigating conflicts and promoting peace resolution in the state. As stated earlier that roles of CAN include but not limited to interfaith and collaboration, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, advocacy for peace, relief and solidarity, capacity building, economic development integration, and dialogue for peace among others. It is important to emphasize that conflict reconciliation can be better promoted through the activities of CAN-Taraba State Chapter. There is no doubt that CAN will make community members to respond to conflict based on biblical principles as they are called to maintain “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Simply put, as community of believers, CAN should make them understand that they are to actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither. That is, they are called to forgive others as God, through Christ, has forgiven us and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences (Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12; 7:12; Eph. 4:1-3, 32; Phil. 2:3-4; Ephesians 4:32). From biblical perspective, they are also called to keep short accounts with one another (Ephesians 4:26); to take responsibility for their own contribution to the conflict (Matthew 7:3-5); to go show our brother his fault (Matthew 18:15); and to seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23,24). Perceptively, people tend to respond in similar ways (Barry, 2016; Matt, 2017).

Additionally, the CAN chapter in the state has to be involved in a rigorous dialogue exercise as it fosters communication network towards physical coexistence among diverse society. As observed by Shehu (2021) that the objectives of dialogue include to build channels of understanding and forum for listening to others. This explains why dialogue is a reflective form of communication, changing one’s perception through internalizing thoughts where considerations are regarded as strengths. For Mohsen (2019), dialogue should be geared towards promoting peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and tolerance among people of diverse faiths. Thus, dialogue must be employed as tools for addressing misconceptions and preventing communal and religious conflicts. Ojo (2021) reported that the Holy Bible also implores the simplicity of dialogue as mutual understanding between nations. In Mat 5:25, Jesus taught how to be humble in listening to others, to act in accordance to how one would want to be treated and to settle differences while one travels together. However, the holy Bible command mankind to be good, being kind to other faithful who are neighbours regardless of their religious inclination as being righteous and being among the ones in the Kingdom of God in the Exodus:20. Again, Biblical textual passages also encourage good neighbourliness devoid of hospitality with non-Christians as elucidated in John 14:16, Matt:5:17 and Matt: 22:40. In 1st Thessalonians 5:21. The Bible says: Prove all things and hold fast to that which is the truth Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord

is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength...you shall love your neighbour as yourself (MK 12:28-34). Again, the Bible says: Blessed are the peace makers for shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5-9). For whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good, they must seek peace and pursue it (I Peter 3:10-11). Try your best to live in peace with everyone. Try to be holy. Without holiness no one will see the lord (Hebrews 12:14).

Recommendations

Based on the discussion above, the following recommendations are suggested:

- ✓ Engagement through Dialogue: To advance respect and understanding amongst inhabitants of Yorro community, CAN ought to organize and actively take part in peace-related conversations and enlightenments. By doing this, tensions between various conflicting parties and communities can be reduced and conflicts can be mitigated.
- ✓ Enlightenment on Tolerance: The state CAN chapter should organize programmes to be aired on social media, local television, and radio on tolerance, peace, and diversity. This should further replicate in various religious centers through sermons, religious instruction, and community outreach programmes.
- ✓ Involvement with Government and Others: In order to promote peace resolution, religious leaders should work with civil society organizations and government agencies. Together, they can support initiatives like mediation and early warning systems that aim to prevent conflicts.
- ✓ Youth Empowerment Schemes: The State CAN should create and support programmes that give young people access to education, skill development, and employment opportunities because they are frequently the target of recruitment into conflicts. Youth who are active and empowered are less likely to be drawn into violent situations.

Conclusion

From the going, it is obvious that conflict mitigation and peace resolution sustainability lies in the hands of Taraba State CAN chapter. This is because any kinds of conflicts can be better approached through formidable religious body like CAN. Therefore, it is expected that CAN executive members will interface properly with communities that are in conflict situations, including Yorro local government area of Taraba State for quick conflict resolution.

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