

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT THROUGH CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

One issue that has received tremendous attention in our contemporary society is Conflict Management. This cannot be unconnected with the fact that, the society in which we live is experiencing great changes. Conflict itself is a causative factor of change and changes are the high points of conflict resolutions. There is therefore, nothing more constant than change in society. The dynamics of interpersonal and inter-group relations lead to such changes from which issues arise, resolution of which, in turn, lead to further changes. This is how waves of change occur in specific social units generally in the realization of organizational goals.

Some early sociologists like Herbert Spencer, according to Otite and Ogionwo (1985), predicted that, all societies in the world should be progressing along one path towards a state of political restraints, peace and lack of internal conflict. The present condition of our societies does not give evidence to support this view. At all levels of social life, in the twenty-first century, social conflict appears to be more profound and much more complex in nature. All aspects and institutions of society thus, experience one form of internal conflict or another while there are also inter-institutional conflicts. It is not difficult to perceive one form of conflict as continuous and endemic while terminal resolutions suggest that it can be eliminated from human social relationship.

Society's energies and efforts have therefore been concerted towards the management of social conflict. Little wonder therefore, it has become the basic subject of contemporary discourse in society. One particular means of managing social conflict can be by citizenship education and to plunge into this discussion, it is better to provide proper illumination for understanding the concepts of conflict and citizenship education in society.

SOCIAL CONFLICT

Perhaps, to provide an appropriate definition of social conflict only amounts to tracing its sources and elaborating on its nature. This is because, an appreciation of its nature is far much better than the advancement of mere statements of definition. Conflicts, which may be of various kinds, are principally either endogenous or exogenous in nature. One major source of social conflict in society is the issue of equality and balance in the distribution of scarce material resources among and within societies. As societies are constantly interacting by way of social relationships, the tendency for individuals and societies to be locked in disagreements over the control of the scarce material resources becomes quite manifest. Social relationships exist between, for instance, the priests and members of their congregations, workers and management, teachers and students as well as between parents and children. Each partner of a social relationship enters into such relationship in pursuits of certain personal interests, thus, invariably, the interests of the two partners are constantly in conflict.

Differences in the social environments of members of society as shown by the diversities in their norms and values can be accepted as one major source of social conflict in human relations. Thus, given the understanding that, people have different interests and values in society, it is logical to argue that, conflict in social relations is inevitable.

In the pre-colonial era, the entity now known as Nigeria was occupied by different ethnic communities, empires and kingdoms which according to Okoro (2002), operated different administrative structures based on differences in language, religion, values, norms and belief systems. These communities were however, brought together by the colonial masters in order to consolidate their colonial rule. The Nigeria of today is therefore a conglomeration of distinct groups and communities with different interests and values, a situation in which conflict among members or the disparate communities is inevitable. Similarly, the introduction and imposition of foreign values on the indigenous cultural values through western education brought significant differences in the social relationship between

the colonial masters and the natives. This created a polarized situation, which became very evident and subsequently led to nationalist movements that clamoured for political independence and self-rule.

The attainment of political independence by Nigeria however, has not ended social conflict in the post independence era, in fact, these conflicts have remained the major hindrance to achieving significant heights in socio-political and economic development and as such, they have remained elusive. The task of coordinating the efforts of individuals and organizations be streamlining them through well-articulated strategies, which is the main crux of management, has persistently been problematic. This can be traced partly to diversities of interests and the peculiar differences of the constituent groups of society. The indicators of conflict situations in society are the incidences of armed robbery, drug abuse, involvement in occult activities and acts of violence resulting in the destruction of public property, truancy, and prostitution among other anti-social behaviours of members of society. The continued emergence and re-emergence of these anti-social behaviours suggest that, the various institutions for the management of social conflicts in society are indeed failing in their role of effecting desired changes as well as minimizing or controlling the frequency of the occurrences of social conflicts. This discussion therefore takes us to the point of examining the concept of citizenship education as an instrument for managing social conflict.

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

It is perhaps necessary to start the discussion in this section by examining the functions which "education" serves. It is important to admit that, education has different objectives for different situations. Accordingly, Gesinde (1977), asserts that, the society expects education to produce rational, skilled, enlightened and independent citizens. Essentially, the primary objective of education as contained in the National Policy on Education (1981), is to give all students, opportunities to acquire appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical, in order that they might live useful and productive lives and contribute meaningfully to the overall development of their communities. This is in keeping with the national objectives, which are the building of:

- (a) A free and democratic society
- (b) A just and egalitarian society
- (c) A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- (d) A great and dynamic economy; and
- (e) A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

Shertzer and Stone (1996), classified education in terms of its function and thus identified three areas to include, developmental, differentiating and integrating functions.

Basically, the perception in this definition is that education should be an instrument for transforming or moulding individuals into good citizens of their societies and for equipping individuals for leadership roles.

Sule and Okam (2001), while analyzing the concept of education, maintained that, it conjures a variety of ideas including instruction, training and teaching which are scrupulously pursued for a better society. This definition gives credence to the previous ones made and supports the view that, education is all about transforming the society through the transformation of individual members.

On the other hand, a citizen is the enfranchised member of a state or an inhabitant of a country as opposed to alien (Hamilton et al, 1961), stated that in the United States constitution, a citizen is a native or naturalized person who has the right to vote and of course, be voted for and one who is entitled to protection in the pursuit of his legitimate private interests. Citizenship however, is the status of a citizen with all its attendant duties, rights and privileges. In the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, chapter II, section 24, the duties of every citizen are as follows:

- (a) Abide by this constitution, respect its ideals and its institutions, the National Flag, the National Anthem, the National Pledge, and legitimate authorities;

- (b) Help to enhance the power, prestige and good name of Nigeria, defend Nigeria and render such national service as may be required.
- (c) Respect the dignity of other citizens and the rights and legitimate interests of others and live in unity and harmony and in the spirit of common brotherhood;
- (d) Render assistance to appropriate and lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order; and
- (e) Declare his income honestly to appropriate and lawful agencies and pay his tax promptly.

Citizenship education is therefore, the acquisition of knowledge regarding the status of a citizen and his full rights, privileges and obligatory duties. This means that, a citizen has to be taught to recognize and appreciate his duties for good citizenship. This understanding leads us to the consideration of citizenship education in the management of social conflict.

THE ROLE OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

As has been indicated in the preceding sections of this paper, the existence of social conflict is inevitable in social relationships and our societies appear to lack effective methods of managing conflict situations. Thus, Mallum (1994) contended that our present social and economic predicament is to be traced to poor supervision and leadership in both private and public sectors. Supervision and leadership in organizations are all about articulating individual or group and achieving organizational goals.

To stem the incidences of social conflict in order to achieve meaningful success in our war against anti-social behaviours, conflict should be evaluated and understood through citizenship education.

Incidences like violence, ignorance, corruption, impatience, poor environmental hygiene, unwillingness to fulfill obligations and duties, illness both mental and physical, malnutrition and other social ills that can significantly affect and set back all kinds of social development are manifestations of certain levels of conflict. These anti-social behaviours portray the fact that the culprits are not in any way appreciative of the values and principles of good citizenship.

Their duties have conflicted with their dispositions. Oniyama (2000), posited that, to be a good citizen, an individual ought to enjoy certain rights. Ubioworo and Avwata (1997) asserted that these include, the right to life, the dignity of the human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, private life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, peaceful assembly and association, freedom of expression, freedom of movement and freedom to own property.

Societal efforts directed towards meeting the needs of citizens in this direction are often tense and marked by continuous bargaining, disagreements, exploitation, frustration, compromise, rancour and incompatibilities. In spite of these, the society is not fragmented into mutually exclusive pieces, entailing the existence of some sort of consensus, at least enough to prevent total breakdown.

One important way by which social conflict can be minimized and consensus enhanced a prelude to national development is the adoption of a sound citizenship education program.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ADOPTION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AS A WAY FORWARD IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

- (1) Citizenship education program must assume both formal and informal positions in order to produce enduring and meaningful impacts in the lives of participating youths. This brings into focus the role of the home and the issues of parents, who must, themselves, be good citizens.
- (2) Citizenship education program must incorporate into its curriculum, much of the diverse socio-cultural, political and economic interests and aspirations of the different members of communities.
- (3) The concept of citizenship can only be appreciated by those who enjoy relative levels of comfort. Therefore one major way by which social conflict can be minimized lies in

social organization's ability to provide food, shelter and clothing which constitute the basic things of life, to its individuals and groups. When issues pertaining to these are not properly addressed a situation of dissatisfaction, confrontation and aggression ensues resulting in anti-social behaviours. However, where the above methods fail in the management of social conflict, social control methods can be brought into citizenship education program to stem social conflict and the following can thus, be adopted:

(a) **Physical Punishment:** In human societies, and particularly in our society, people have considerable faith in the efficacy of physical punishment to minimize anti-social behaviours and the control of conflict situations when all other methods fail.

(b) **Expulsion:** This takes a number of forms, the most suitable of which is perhaps, exclusion through failure to include. Failure to include implies non-participation in affairs, which directly concern the individual and in which he would normally participate. This is an important means by which citizenship education can manage conflict in society.

(c) **Extermination:** In some types of social organizations, the rejection of a deviant member takes the form of extermination. The death sentence passed on deviant members of society is the most extreme method in managing conflict, yet it exists in very many societies since it is considered to serve as a deterrent to others that might be tempted to commit similar crimes.

(d) **Economic Sanctions:** This can be incorporated into citizenship education program where individuals who exhibit behaviours that show deviation from accepted standards are denied the supply of goods and services. However, by a show of good conduct, an individual may be awarded an increase in the supply of goods and services. A system of citizenship education, which adopts the use of rewards and punishments, uses economic sanctions, which include economic penalization and economic intimidation.

(e) **Psychological Sanctions:** This method which is considered quite common and widely used, has a stock of signs of disapproval and approval that are derived from the culture of members. Such signs include, reproach, disdain, division, taunt, jeer, shame and slight. These can form the crux of citizenship education and, in cases of non-conformity by individuals, they can be applied.

Odhe and Olaoye Williams (1994); posited that, an individual member of society has the following duties or obligations to fulfill, in which case, if adequately performed can check the occurrences of social conflict:

- (i) Loyalty to the nation will bring about submissiveness
- (ii) Obedience to the laws of the land
- (iii) Upholding the national political culture;
- (iv) Protection and preservation of public funds and fight against the misappropriation of public funds;
- (v) Helping to enhance the power, prestige and good name of the country and to defend the country and render national service as may be required
- (vi) Respect for the dignity, religion, rights and legitimated interests of other citizens
- (vii) Make useful contributions for the advancement; progress and well-being of the community where one resides;
- (viii) Ensuring the proper upbringing of one's children and
- (ix) Rendering assistance to appropriate and lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order.

These constituents are the lofty ideals of citizenship education for which if properly imbibed and performed dutifully will enhance the management of social conflict. As indicated earlier, the performance of these duties depend exclusively on the exercise of the state's responsibility to the citizens. In the circumstance of failure, it is pertinent that these duties may not be effectively carried out.

CONCLUSION

Conflicts, when they occur, are usually resolved in one way or another. In some cases, particularly in less developed systems, conflicts of interest are settled informally while in advanced system, they are largely settled within institutionalized rules and more formal procedures such as legislatures. Nigeria, which is a developing nation, has of recent experienced quite complex conflict situations that undermine its effort for sound and sustainable socio-political and economic development. The management of these conflicts has not been quite effective and in view of this, the country has witnessed the heights of anti-social behaviours.

Citizenship education, which should stem the tide of social conflict, has not achieved much in this, thus, the agitation for its methods to be re-examined and properly re-positioned for the challenges of managing social conflict in the twenty-first century. There is the need to move beyond enforcement of performance of duties by the citizen to that of asserting the responsibilities of the state to the citizen.

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