NON- FORMAL EDUCATION STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT MEDIATION AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PEACE IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper presents Non-Formal Education strategies for conflict mediation for sustainable peace in Rivers State. It is on record that several communities and clans in Rivers State have experienced conflict situations that led to the destruction of lives and properties. This situation is not welcome development, as no meaningful progress can take place in an atmosphere of rancor and violence. Meanwhile, Nigeria has great faith in Education as education has been described as an instrument par excellence in achieving her established institutions of society, education is accepted universally as a panacea for social ills and development. In the light of the foregoing, the paper prescribes non-formal education strategies for conflict mediation for sustainable community peace. Such strategies include; peace education conscientization anAd dialogue. The paper also prescribed seven steps for conflict mediation for sustainable peace which includes, identification of the causes of the conflict, analysis of the conflict, search for options, setting options in order of preference, team planning, mutual execution of plans and evaluation of actions. The paper posits that if the above strategies and steps are carefully applied sustainable peace would be achieved. The paper concludes that with increase in government allocation to adult and non-formal education, establishment of conflict resolution centres, to train and retrain mediators, conflicts will be reduced in our communities, states and nations.*

KEYWORDS: Conflict Mediation, Non- Formal Education Strategies, Sustainable Community Peace.

INTRODUCTION

Adult and non-formal education is a special type of education which prepare individuals according to their needs and that of the society in which he lives. Since adult education develops specific aspects of human personality for the welfare of his society, its use for reconciliation and restoration of peace in our communities and nations becomes inevitable. Nigeria at present is witnessing ethnic conflict, and insecurity in all the regions. Boko Haram are destroying lives and properties in the North. Kidnapping and armed robbery in the south-East and south-south etc.

The situation of Nigeria and many other countries, calls for urgent intervention and medication, hence this paper focuses on prescribing adult education strategies for conflict mediation for sustainable peace and development in communities in Nigeria.

Concept of adult and non-formal education.

In the views of Nzenri (2006), non-formal education is a reliable tool for inculcation of social action. Non-formal education is a learning strategy that offers ideas, knowledge and skills

outside the conventional schooling process (Ofogwuard Omoruyi in Omooruyi and Abey-Fashae 2015).

According to Osofa (2001), adult and non-formal education provides change in information, knowledge, and understanding, leading to skill acquisition and desirable attitude. Omooruyi and Abey-Fashae (2015) maintains that adult education is a sure means of providing people with the orientation that would promote the understanding of themselves, circumstance and best ways of improvement. This is the essence of the prescription of adult education strategies in equipping conflict mediator with the skill and knowledge required to resolve the numerous conflict in the country.

Adult Education and Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a natural human phenomenon which may occur when persons or groups come together. Given the fact that human knowledge is limited, and human precepts are never directional, one of the results of social interaction according to sociologists is conflict.

As individuals and community members, we cannot avoid interaction with one another. In as much as we cannot avoid interactions, we can not avoid conflict. Conflict on its self is not a problem but what constitutes problem is the way we handle conflict.

Conflict arises as a result of individual perception on issues of interest which sometimes leads to disagreements and division. At this stage if we employ or utilize the popular saying that we disagree to agree, then, there will be no problem. Often times conflict degenerates to clashes usually characterized by arrogant languages, insults, threats and intimidation between the parties or individuals involved.

When clash of interest or views occur within an individual, it is called intra-conflict when it occurs between persons or group of persons, it is called interpersonal or inter-group conflict. When this scenario is between communities, it is communal conflict etc.

In Rivers State, as in other parts of the Nation, there had been records of conflicts. From the famous Ogbakiri crises which almost swept all the villages in Ogbakiri clan, the case of Rumuekpe clan, the recent destruction of life and properties in Ibaa clan, Omoku, Etche, to the present ravaging in Omudioga community. The presence of conflict in community means there is no peace and when peace is absent in a place, there will be no development. Where peace is sustained, the members of such community will come together to plan and find solution to their common problems or development needs of the community.

Conflict resolution is a recurrent event in many communities, states and nations. The resolution of one conflict in some cases, give rise to another. This could be as a result of the method employed in resolving the conflict. Adult education as a discipline, prepare and equip citizens with necessary skills, knowledge and attitude for all situations and circumstances through its programmes such as peace education, dialogue and conscientization. It is in the light of the danger posed by conflict in the development of the communities, states and nation that this paper advocates for the use of peace education, dialogues and conscientization in resolving conflicts in our communities and nation. It is believed that the use of peace education, dialogue and conscientization will not only help conflict mediators, but will result to sustainable peace and development.

Peace education

Peace education is seen as educational activities which is given to individuals to promote and encourage peace in the areas or situations of conflict and crisis. According to Dupuy (2011) "there is no uniform concept of peace education". Scholars and authors have made attempts to present their views to suit their background, learning and their society. Peace education basically develop in the individuals skills, attitudes and knowledge which produces tolerance, care and respect. In the views of Schmidt (2006) peace education result to empowering people with skills, attitude and knowledge to build, maintain and restore relationships at all levels of human interaction. It develops positive approach toward dealing with conflicts from personal to the international. It helps to create safe environment both physical and emotional that nurtures individuals. Peace education creates safe world based on justice and human rights and build sustainable environment and protect it from exploitation and war.

Oduaran (1996) commenting on peace education, identified four types of peace education which includes criticism of war, liberation, a learning process and as a life style movement. The last of the four requires that people need to adopt a change of their life style such that human life should be valued and protected from violence and destruction. This is the aspect of the education of peace that affects conflict resolution; and mediators are to stress on it to ensure sustained peace in our communities.

UNESCO in Ekewuame (2004) presents the culture of peace as all about the value, attitude and form of behavior that reflect respect for life, for human beings and their dignity and for all human rights, the rejection of violence in all its forms and commitment to the principles of freedom, justice, solidarity, tolerance and understanding between people, groups and individuals.

In this sphere, peace education directed through the mass media, public places, churches or mosque, personal contacts etc, will bring about change of attitude on the perpetrators of violent activities.

Concept of community dialogue

Dialogue is a process of finding solution to problems by mutual reasoning of all parties involved in a disagreement. In the community, there arises disagreements which needs to be addressed if the community must move forward. One way of handling disagreements and conflicts in community is dialogue. A dialogue is discourse or negotiation between two or more persons or individual to create a better understanding of issues concerning them. Community dialogue is therefore the process of identifying and analyzing possible solutions to community problem through joint efforts of all stakeholders within the community. The process involves interaction and communication of information between parties with the aim of reaching a consensus on issues of common interest. The rules are expression of view on the subject matter. Parties are expected to listen to each other as to get insight into the subject of contention.

Usually the parties in a dialogue are advised to ask questions and free their minds. The reason is to clear doubts, which if not addressed may cause a recurrent experience of the situation. They must also bear in mind that it requires give and take. (a little to the right and a little to the left).

Concept of conscientization

The use of conscientization in appealing to the conscience of the parties in conflict is very necessary.

There are three basic approaches in the application of conscientization in education namely: learning, values and power. Learning is defined as an approach, both to knowledge and to life that emphasizes human initiatives. It encompasses the acquisition and practice of new methodologies new skills, new attitudes and new values necessary to live in a world of change (Bonkin, 1979). Learning is viewed as the outcome of series of activities which results in permanent change of behaviour. There two kinds of learning namely; maintenance learning and innovative learning. The maintenance learning is the acquisition of fixed outlook, methods and rules for dealing with known and recurring situation and applied for problems solving and processing information. It is crystal clear that most of the concepts that feature in the definition of maintenance learning are conscientization prone and core to conflict mediation and sustained peace.

Concept of sustainable peace

Every human settlement needs peace to move forward. Societies and communities only develop in the face of peace. When there is no peace in a community or country there is bound to be retrogression as against progress. Peace brings a state of harmony and cooperation and there will be no violence, conflict and fear. According to Umaru and Shama (2013) peace refers to the absence of war or other hostilities and includes freedom from quarrels disagreement and strife. Every community seeks to maintain relative peace and come to a state of social equilibrium in which new disputes are resolved without resulting to violence or war.

The oxford advance learners dictionary presents sustainable as gradual growth of something, so that it becomes more advance and stronger. Sustainable community peace therefore would mean achieving advanced and permanent peace in the community, resulting to societal peace, harmony and social justice without compromising the potentials of future existence. Conflicts resolved through dialogue produces a permanent peace, as disputants are conscentized to toll the way of mutual peace.

Prescription for conflict mediators

As pointed out earlier, conflict is a normal occurrence in human settlement. What constitute problem is not the conflict but the ways the conflict is handled. It is a truism that some of those who claim to be handling or resolving conflict as mediators end up warsting the situation. This paper prescribes seven steps for conflict mediation, which if taken will result in sustained peace in communities, state and nation. The steps are as follows:

- Identification of the problem or causes of the conflict
- Analysis of the conflict (team, leaders information)
- Search for options
- Setting the options in order of preference
- Team planning
- Mutual execution of plans
- Evaluation of actions
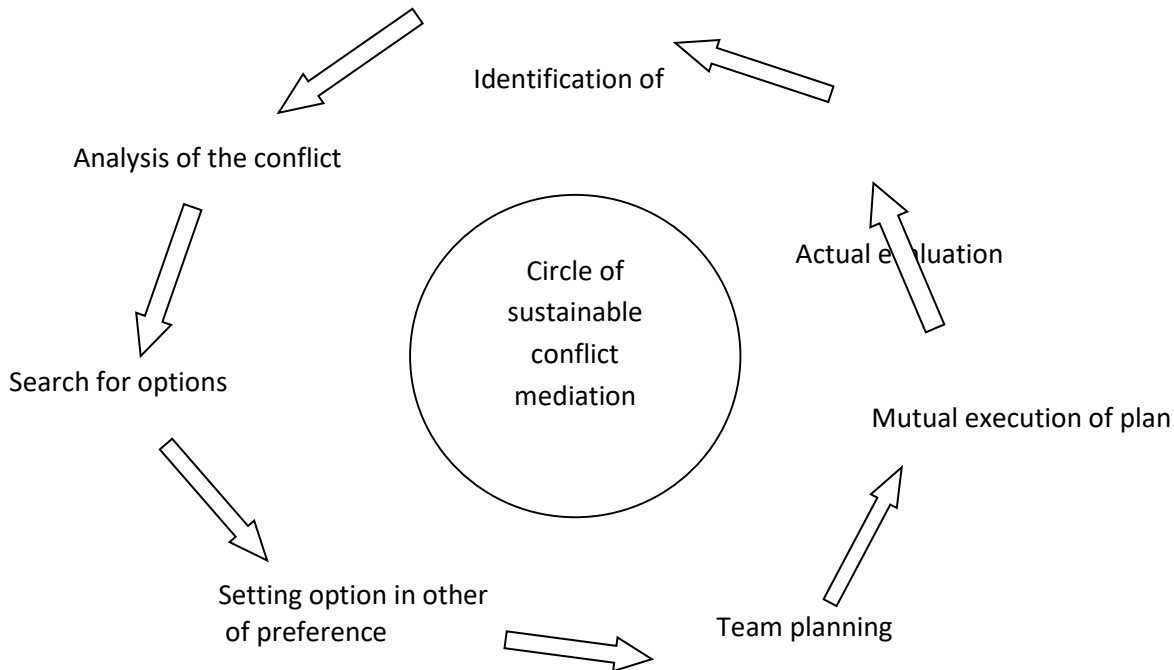
Adopted from National Aids Commission Malawi 2007

The first move a conflict mediator has is to identify the causes of the problem. This stage is very important but very difficult and delicate. This is because the parties in conflict are usually reversed until they ascertain the position of the mediator. They are always suspicious of every action of persons or groups outside cycle. In their suspicion they ask questions to know who is behind the action of the mediator. Indeed, the mediator needs to assure the parties in conflict of their sincerity of purpose in all discussion and information. It should be noted that the mediator have a role to break down the wall of differences and barriers between conflict groups to help them resolve their differences.

Besides the causes of the conflict, the mediator needs to identify the power structure of the community and the leaders of the teams in conflict and other influential individuals. After the identification of the team leaders and influential individuals in both sides of the conflicts, the mediator should begin to deepen the investigation by meeting with the team leader and other segment separately. The separate meetings possibly outfit the place or seat of the conflict. Explanation needs to be made and trust traditionally built on both parties. The mediator gathers the facts in the information received from the segment from the two parties.

Based on the issues presented by the different groups and individuals in the two groups, the mediators then brings the leaders and influential individuals together for interaction and analysis of the situation. Upon the success of the deliberation with the leaders, the meeting could be expanded to include more members of the conflicting groups. From the expanded meetings options from the groups should be outlined. The mediator ensures that all possible options or positions concerning all burning issues are presented by the two disputants.

In mediation, especially when it has to do with conflict, the party usually point out several issues which need to be given attention to handle, remedy or resolve the issue. At this step, the mediator scales the options in their order of preference as may be indicated by the parties in

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dispute. After setting the options in their order of preference, the mediator seeks for team or mutual planning of how to achieve the desired peace or reconciliation. Team planning involves the active participation of the leaders of the two disputing parties and the conflict mediator or facilitator. All the issues labeled by the leaders and representatives at the preliminary sections are deliberated upon with the view to finding lasting solutions to the problems. To make the solutions sustainable, the planning must include a larger population of the representatives to the two parties.

The next step is to mutually execute all plans and options. All parties to the conflict including the mediator have a role to play in the realization of the plans. Joint action is needed if the options and plans will be sustained.

The last step is the evaluation of all actions from the step of identification to the execution of plans. Evaluation here is necessary to be sure that no party retains any grievance after the resolution of the current conflict.

CONCLUSION

Most of the people involved in conflict resolution are not mediators in the real sense of it. Moreover, their approaches have not yielded the desired result. The quest for sustainable peace in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria in general, can be achieved to a great extent if Non-formal education strategies for conflict mediation are employed. The paper therefore conclude as follows;

1. Both the state government and local government Areas should allocate more funds to adult and non-formal Education.

2. Conflict mediation should be included in our school curriculum at all levels of education.

3. Government should establish conflict resolution centres.

4. Mediators should be trained and re-trained in conflict management using the non-formal education strategies.

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