



COUNSELLING AS A TOOL FOR PROMOTING PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper highlights the usefulness of counselling as a tool for promoting peaceful co-existence. In every society, people are bound to live together irrespective of differences in terms of beliefs; gender and ethnicity. Crises such as domestic violence, ethnic conflicts, ethno-religious conflicts, and land/boundary conflicts are common in Nigeria as a result poor management of the nation's diversity. It is therefore necessary to explore ways by which counselling could serve as a tool of promoting peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. Counselling is a helping relationship which focuses on modification of human behaviours and thus professional Counsellors provide some services in order to promote human development. This paper therefore highlights ways by which counselling can be employed in conflict prevention, management, resolution, and transformation. It discusses concept of conflict, types of conflicts and counselling as a tool of conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation. It is suggested that, governments should established counselling centres or units in local government areas as applicable to medical and health services.

Keywords: Counselling, tool, promotion, peaceful co-existence

Introduction

The societal organisation of man makes him a unique creature. As people live together as member of the community multifarious challenges come his ways. The challenges could be social, religious or economic. Peace is a relative word. It is generally described as absence of conflicts and stability of human mind. Galtung (1996) noted that peaceful environment is one in which all elements of physical, psychological, and structural violence are resolved, and environment that lacks peace usually experiences conflicts.

Concept of Conflict

Where ever there are people of different diversities and with different interests there is likelihood of conflict. This is because human beings have different background, interests, and worldviews which could degenerate into aggression and violence (Ogaba, 2006). Conflict generally entails struggles, competitions, rivalry for objects to which individuals and groups attach value. The objects can be materials such as scarce resources, land, employment, promotion in public service and creation of new state or locality or non-material such as culture, language and religion. Lack of peace in a given society is an indication of misgivings among the members of the society. Peace is a necessary prerequisite for development to strive in any human society, because without peace human efforts cannot be properly coordinated.

Concept of Counselling

Counselling is a helping profession which focuses on provision of assistance by a trained counsellor to a chart or a group of clients who required the services of a counsellor. Counselling

aims at correcting behaviour especially behaviour that are detrimental to human and sound development. At times people take action that will be harmful to themselves without the knowledge of it most especially in conflict situation. Counselling creates awareness on the harmful effects of irrational behaviours/actions. Since conflicts are common occurrences in the society especially. Counselling creates opportunity for individuals to recognise that conflict is a natural part of life and that it can be resolved peacefully by helping them develop awareness of their own unique responses to conflict, to understand the diversity with which others respond and the skills to joint problem-solving. (Garner, 2008). It is based on this assumption that this paper discusses counselling as a tool for promoting peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

Types of Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria has over 350 ethnic groups, the country has 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja is the capital. In order to promote grass root development, the country was sub divided into 774 Local Government Areas. Overtly, the human nature in man still affects the country to witness and experience series of conflicts and crises ranges from domestic violence, ethnic conflict, ethno-religious conflicts, militancy, kidnapping, suicide bombing, and land/ boundary disputes. The incessant conflicts have contributed in no small measure to the state of underdevelopment in Nigeria. Each of the conflicts leads to loss of human lives, wanton destruction of properties and consequent underdevelopment (Albert, 2012).

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence also known as family violence is an issue of global concern. Specifically in Nigeria and Africa in general it is viewed as a deviant behaviour. However as globalization crept in, it is now viewed as a criminal act. An example of domestic violence is a situation in which a man subjected his wife to physical injury as a result of disagreement. Schwab (1998) described domestic violence as any form of violence against any member of a household or family by one of its members. Usually, women and children are the victims and men are mostly the perpetrators of family violence. Domestic violence is a complex global problem that results from biological, social, and cultural factors. It cuts across age, race, religion and socio-economic boundaries (Abikoye, 2011). Domestic violence, if not well handled can degenerate to inter-personal conflicts which can equally lead to inter or intra- communal conflicts.

Ethnicity Conflicts

Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups. Ethnicity is the state of been belonging to an ethnic group. The efforts of the past administrations in Nigeria after the independence were to reduce ethnic conflicts and bring development to the nation through states and local government areas. This aimed at minimise ethnic colouration and promote national development. Despite the efforts of governments at federal level, ethnic identities are still dominant in many states and local government areas. This is always a source of conflict. For instance during the ethno-religious crises in Sabon-Geri, Kano, Zango-Kataf crises in Kaduna, Bauchi riots, Onitsha reprisal attacks, Zaki Biam crisis, Owerri massacres, Aguleri-Umuleri crisis, Sagamu (Oro) crisis and several other ethnicity crises. The conflicts left many dead and properties destroyed, while many people displaced and thousands others migrated to their places or states of origin.

Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Nigeria as a diverse society is populated by different ethnic nationalities with different religious affiliations. Ayinla (2010) described ethno-religious conflicts as threats which have potential capacity to inflict physical, emotional or psychological injuries on people and properties. Ibrahim and Jubu (2001) noted that the causes of ethno-religious conflicts differ from one environment to another, especially in Nigeria. In Nigeria it is obvious that ethnic religious crisis are the manifestation of conflict rooted in the struggle for power among the Hausa-Fulani who are mostly Muslims and the Biron and other minority in Plateau state that are mostly Christians.

Another source of ethno-religion crises is the religious intolerance. According to Ekweife (1993) when any religious group or sect claims monopoly of religious truth and practice, the tendency of the members of that group is to ignore the truths contained in other religious faiths. In this regard, the inability to recognize and accommodate the beliefs and truths in other religions is one of the major sources of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Many Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have been demonstrated a mind-set of religious indoctrination. The hostility between Christians and Muslims in Numan town of Adamawa state is an example; even the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria could also be placed under this instance. Badmos (1993) explained that inciting members of an ethnic or religious group has gone beyond paid advertisement to press conference and to book publication. It has been observed that most ethno-religious conflicts broke out, as a result of inciting statements either through religious sermons or publication by different ethnic and religious groups (Ayinla, 2010).

The electronic and print media also contributed to the outbreak of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria. Majority of the media houses do not practice professional (peace) journalism in their production and presentation of news. In most times, sensational news carried by print and electronic media brought about reprisal attacks in the country. Bashir (2002) noted that the press on many occasions had fanned the ember of intolerance through junk journalism and sensational headlines. Mass media reports, news analysis and features are capable of playing positive or negative role in the relationship among different religious group, especially between Christians and Muslims depending on the intention and orientation of the journalists concerned. For example, the disparaging remarks made against Prophet Muhammad by the *This Day* Newspaper on the context of the Miss World beauty pageant led to violent protest in Kaduna City in 2009 (Ayinla, 2010).

The negative roles of the elites also contributed to ethno-religious conflicts. The elites represent essentially capitalists who depend on the state for survival (Joseph, 1999). The capitalists explored religious and ethnic diversities to subjugate the less privilege in the society. This act is mostly common in the Northern part of Nigeria where there are Alimajiris (the alms seekers) that visit the houses of the capitalists in order to meet their needs.

Land/Boundary Conflicts

As man procreates and migrates the idea of communality becomes a reality. The act of living a community life gave recognition to acquisition of land for agriculture and other purposes. In a bid to acquire land, boundary conflicts manifested and became unresolved issue among man. Boundary dispute is a source of crises in different communities, local governments, and states in Nigeria. This led to the establishment of Boundary Adjustment Committee by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Militancy

Youth militancy in Nigeria is peculiar to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It began as communal agitations in 1980s against the multinational oil companies over the ecological devastation, neglect arising from crude oil pollution due to oil production and spillage. Frustrated youths and people of the Niger Delta took up arms against oil foreign companies and their allies (the state) based their agitations for employment, governance at federal level and inadequate infrastructure (Raji, 2012). The administration of the Late President Yar'Adua granted amnesty to the militants and designed post-amnesty programme for the repentant militants. Though, the successor of the Late Head of State, President Goodluck Jonathan carried on the amnesty programme but people viewed that the death of President affected the sincerity of implementation of the programme.

Kidnapping

As the militancy began to lose its face as a result of the amnesty programme, the militants designed another illicit and cruel way of making money through 'kidnapping'. According to Mejabi (2012) is domestic terrorism as it entails most of the characteristics and objectives of terrorism in its intent and purpose. Kidnapping is not peculiar to a geo-political zone but more rampant in the Delta-Eastern region of Nigeria. The contemporary economic hardship, poverty, unemployment, religious fanaticism, greed, poor governance, and exorbitant life style of the political leaders are regarded as some of the bane of kidnappings in Nigeria (Mejabi, 2012).

Concept of Counselling

Idowu (1986) described counselling as a specialized concept which is all-embracing. Pappen (1972) described counselling as a person to person relationship in which one person helps another to resolve an area of conflict that has not been hitherto resolved, in order for the individual to become independent person capable of resolving his/her conflicts. Counselling is regarded as core of the heart of guidance. Counselling is concerned with feelings, attitudes, and emotional disposition of the clients. In the same vein, Makinde (1993) explained that counselling is designed to provide an interacting relationship where a professional assist clients to better understand themselves and their environment with a view of making appropriate decisions. Blocher (1974) described counselling as :

A professional practice of helping an individual to become more fully aware of himself and the ways in which he is responding to the influences in his environment. It further assists him to establish some personal meaning for this behaviour and to develop and clarify a set of goals and values for future behaviour (p.4).

According to Ipaye (2004), counselling is a helping relationship; it is a moulding, a reconstruction and rehabilitating process; it is a self-revealing relationship, and it is both preventive and curative of mal-adaptive and self-destructive tendencies. Its focus is on the individual even when such an individual is within the group.

Counselling as a Means of Conflict Prevention

Conflict can be broadly classified into intra personal and inter personal conflict. Intra-personal conflict is the conflict within an individual. This type of conflict affects the mind and remains intra if an individual does not communicate with another person. The causes of intra-personal

conflict may arise from domestic issues, socio-personal, economic, educational concerns etc. Counselling as a human relationship emphasises promotion of understanding, emotional stability and effective interpersonal relationship among member of the society. Salovey and Mayer (1990) described emotional intelligence (EI) as the ability of an individual to monitor his/her feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use the information to guide his/her thinking and actions. Counselling is of the view that if an individual understands and monitors his/her feelings and the emotion of others, the individual will be able to identify and understand the good and bad aspects of others. This can then promote mutual understanding and harmony. Peaceful coexistence starts with communication and ends up in communication. Counselling is an interpersonal relationship between the counsellor and the counsees with the aim of facilitating growth, development, and positive change through an exercise of self-understanding (Idowu, 2004). Communication is the premise of counselling like-wise conflict. Once there is misinformation there will be a misunderstanding. It is better for individuals to jaw-jaw in order to avoid war-war.

Counselling for Conflict Management

Situations that demand interaction among human beings can sometimes generate conflict. The emphasis should therefore be on management of conflicts in order to avoid crises. Thus, conflict management could be simply put as the interventionist efforts toward preventing the escalation of an on-going conflict (Gerald, 2010). In another vein, Miller and King (2005) succinctly explained that conflict management refers to the measures that limit, mitigate and curtail a conflict without necessarily solving it. Many techniques have been identified and employed in conflict management among which are coercion, mutual agreement and containment (Ezirim & Ifesinachi, 2009).

Conflict management should not be viewed as a simple, linear or structured process, but an act which involves different plausible techniques. Conflict management should be the responsibility and concern of every individual, the government, conflicting parties, non-governmental organisations, members of the academia, and different centres of institutions. They all have roles to play in conflict management. Counselling service is the most important aspect of the guidance programme and it is relevant to conflict management and resolution. Counselling service is aimed at helping the individuals to effect positive changes in their behaviours thereby acquiring ability to enhance their functionality; live a more productive and self-satisfying life. Counselling activities involve the use of a variety of approaches in one-to-one or group interaction in order to assist the individuals to understand their needs, and relate effectively with others (Adana, 2004). Effective counselling promotes cooperation, consensus, and peaceful co-existence within and outside the individual environment.

Counselling for Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution requires intervention of skilled but powerless third-parties working unofficially with the disputing parties to foster new thinking and relationships. The counsellors like professional peace scholars examine the causes of conflict and identified creative solutions that the conflicting parties could adopt in resolving conflicts. Ronald (2001) noted that counselling is related to dispute/conflict resolution. He posited that as an intervention strategy towards enhancing effective human relations, it can be described as part of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) which comprised a wide variety of techniques usually adopted in resolving disputes instead of legal procedures. Stanley and Young (2008) described Alternative Dispute Resolution Counselling (ADRC) as a scientific procedure of resolving conflicts within clients.

Based on this observation, Counselling as a tool could be embedded in ADR in resolving conflicts.

Counselling for Conflict Transformation

Transformation is a new emerging concept in the field of peace studies. The concept embedded the two earlier concepts of management and resolution. Conflict transformation is explained as a process of engaging with and transforming relationships, interest, and views. It is designed to put an end to continuation of violent conflicts (Hugh, 2004). Therefore, counselling which is also explained as a process of modifying human thoughts and feelings through scientific interactions of skilled personnel can bring about peaceful interactions and co-existence.

Conclusion

Human mind are so flexible that they need to be shaped and reshaped regularly in order not to be preoccupied with unlawful and criminal tendencies, when an individual is ill he/she is referred to the hospital for medical attention, thus whenever a human mind is at cross road or disturbed the best place to direct such mind is counselling centre to seek the assistance of a counsellor who is an expert in handling human concerns. In this regard, counselling can be employed as a tool for promoting peaceful coexistence in the society. Men are created to live and interact with one another; during their interactions there is bound to be friction due to human nature. However, whatever disagreement, sanity is expected to play because of the status of man in creature realm. A situation where two conflicting parties find it difficult to maintain agreeable point, third party who is less in power but scientifically competent to intervene can be sought. Most of the intra and inter-personal conflicts result from poor diplomacy at communal and state levels. It is based on this premise that counselling is advocated as a tool for promoting peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the presentations in this paper, the following recommendations are made to engender peaceful co-existence in Nigeria:

- Counselling services should be made available at all levels of education in Nigeria.
- That government should established at least a counselling centre or clinic in each Local Government Area in Nigeria, to sensitize, educate and enlighten individuals on the need for peaceful co-existence.
- Counselling should be an important component of peace education in institution of learning.
- Professional counsellor should be encouraged to establish counselling centres in order to prevent intra and inter conflicts and promote peaceful co-existence among different interest groups in Nigeria.

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