

# AFRICAN PROSPECTIVE ROLES FOR RECONCILIATION OF VIOLENCE AND ITS CONFLICTS RESOLUTION

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## Abstract

*Africa as a continent has over the years been bedeviled with all kinds of armed violence, conflict, insecurity and civil wars. This contributes to human suffering and instructing poverty across the continent. This topic is dynamic, but the need is great, since reconciliation is among the most difficult challenges facing the unity of African future. Prevention and reduction of violent conflicts has become a key priority not only for African governments, but also for the Europeans and the rest of the world. Violent conflicts in Africa have left out the continent in a state of devastation, political instability and socio-economic stagnation. The purpose of this paper is to x-ray the roles which African leaders play and will play in reconciliation of violence towards bringing about a peaceful Africa future. This paper proposes and hopes that the contents can be of practical assistance in implementation of appropriate reconciliation process and approaches which all in turn support and strengthen appropriate democratic structures. The paper adopts the analytic method and concludes that traditional conflict resolution techniques such as mediation, reconciliation and negotiation as employed by Africans leaders in the past and present in conflict resolution. This offers great advantage for peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationships. Subsequently, these emerged a clarion call for African solution to African problems, with foreign intervention to play complementary roles. Apparently, the future of Africa lies on the implementation of agreement resolution upon reconciliation apparatus.*

**Keywords:** Africa, Reconciliation, Conflict Resolution, Agreement, Violence, Peace

## Introduction

All over the world, the quest for sustainable peace and security has continued to bother the minds of all stakeholders—international organizations, governments, security

agencies, NGOs, grassroots organizations, communities etc. This challenge has assumed higher momentum in the context of the post-cold war period which has unleashed major transformations in global balance of power and the structures of attaining global peace. This is not surprising because everybody is affected by conflict in its various ramifications and at all levels of society – ranging from micro – to macro – levels (Deutsch and Coleman, 2000). By micro-level conflict, we mean the conflict generated by personal and communal difference and clash of interest. On the other hand, macro-level conflict refers to the conflict that conflagrates to or between wider society/societies. Violent conflict in African has left a trail of devastation and gratuitous destruction decimation and impoverishment of the civilian population, environmental degradation, institutional decay, political instability and socio-economic stagnation. African is a continent wrapped up in conflicts the root causes of these conflict can be traced to such factors as extreme poverty of the majority of the population, marginalization of the young people, unequal sharing of resources, social and economic disparities, denial of freedom of expression and lack of participation and democratic structures (UNESCO, 1998). In the traditional African society, conflict may generally exist whenever or wherever incompatible events occurred and may result in “win-lose character”. The resolution, transformation and management of conflict may however produce win-win situation. Truth is a covenant logo that disputants or parties in conflict must not miss. In contemporary African society, nobody cares about the truth. If Africans have to put the falling apart together, their original values must be revisited and African future will remain progressively.

Conflict is as natural as the concept of peace contrary to the global or universal conception. African has particular ways of conceptualizing conflict. The resolution, transformation and management of conflict may also produce a win-win situation. Conflict is a mechanism through which goals and aspirations of individuals and groups are articulated, creative solutions to human problems are sought and collective identifies are to be developed. Many of the conflicts, now called “new wars”, are more internal (civil, intra-state), non-conversational and culture sensitive. However, analysis of the root causes of conflict has to emphasize shared understandings of the past, present and future contexts. Efforts to prevent and contain internal conflicts in African have recently moved beyond governments and intergovernmental organizations. Armed ethnic conflicts, civil wars, violence and the collapse of government represent the greatest challenges to peace, security and stability in the continent. These threats have become more pronounced and indeed have taken in a scale, intensity and frequently that has defied even the imagination of the greatest science fiction author. This has pushed many Africans calling for African solution to African problems. Since the end of colonial rule, the retrogression of many African countries has been traced to conflicts and the failure of sextant resolution mechanisms to address the root causes of discontent injustice and socio-political exclusion. African has earned a negative niche as the region of civil war, lawlessness and dictatorships.

### **Conflict: A Conceptual Analysis**

Conflict takes various forms and dimensions in African societies: it is significant to note that conflict is difficult to define from the perspective of the Africans. It seems to be part of excitement for networking relationship, whether negative or positive. Consequently, conflicts are in the magnitude of range, rift, misunderstanding, family and market brawls, skirmishes and wars, public insurrections and assaults. In an incompatible stage among nation-states every part involved seeks to achieve certain objectives, such as additional or more secure territory, security, access to markets, prestige, alliances and the overthrow of an unfriendly government (Omofosho, 2004). Conflict resolution Miller (2003) posts that conflict resolution is “a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict”. The settlement process is not especially designed to change the quality of the relationship between the societies. The stability of a political settlement ultimately depends on surveillance by the parties themselves, in keeping with their deterrent capacities, by outside powers and by international organizations. Conflict settlement is not a negligible achievement in a violent and destructive relationship with escalating potential.

In fact, conflict resolution can be often build on political settlements, in so far as these involve a negotiating process in which each side pursues its interests and in which they are able to reach agreement on many outstanding issues through distributive bargaining in which power as well as international norms play a role. But conflict resolution, particularly if we think of it within an interactive problems-solving framework, thus, reconciliation in this view is a consequence of successful conflict resolution. It comes at the process with time. Reconciliation is obviously continuous with and linked to conflict resolution and it certainly is not an alternative to it. But, whereas conflict resolution refers to the process of achieving a mutually satisfactory and hence durable agreement between the two societies, reconciliation refers to the process whereby the societies learn to live together in the post - conflict environment. Moreover, negotiation of the others is also important to each party in a violent conflict as a protection against negative elements in its own identity (Kelman 1999). In so far as the other can be demonized and dehumanized, it becomes easier for each party to minimize guilt feeling for acts of violence and oppression against the other and to avoid seeing itself in the role of victimizer, rather than only the role of victim.

Thus, in protracted identity, conflicts negotiation of the others is not a peripheral, marginal element of each party identity that can be easily discarded. My argument is merely that, from an “objective” point of view, negotiation the identity of the other is not a necessary condition for preserving and indeed enhancing the core of one's own identity. However, for conflicting parties to arrive at a point where they can be free to relegate negotiation of the other to the periphery of their own identities and eventually discard it requirement to the hard work of reconciliation. What is control to that work is the growing assumes that the other is not a threat to one's own identity. In that process of assurance, the conflict or role for reconciliation play a vital role. Parties in a conflict in

which both sides perceive themselves as victims are helped to deal with the dilemma of abandoning some elements of identity, without threatening the care of their identity by the reciprocal nature of reconciliation. Changes on the part of one group make changes on the other's part more attainable. But, this view suggests that the process of reconciliation received a certain amount of "negotiation" of identity, including negotiation of the conditions for reconciliation, which turn on such issues as truth, justice and responsibility. It is my contention that reconciliation especially in cases which neither party is prepared to adopt the role of perpetrator – cannot be achieved on the basis of purely objective criteria of truth, justice or responsibility anchored in historical scholarship or international law; but required some degree of mutual accommodation in the course of negotiating the conditions for reconciliation.

### **Importance of Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution provides an opportunity to interact with the parties concerned, with the hope of at least reducing the scope, intensity and effects of conflicts. During formal and informal meetings, conflict resolution exercises permit a reassessment of views and claims as a basis for finding options to crisis and to divergent points of view. Conflict resolution in the plural societies can be quite complex, principle because of the determinate effects of culture and language symbolism. According to Airuch and Black (Onigun & Albert, 2001), "it is quite dangerous to relegate culture to the background in conflict resolution". Although, culture is a marker of social differences, it should be regarded as an obstacle to conflict resolution in multi-ethnic/multicultural societies. Conflict resolution performs a healing function in African societies. It provides opportunity for the examinations of alternative positive decision is to resolve differences. Failure to resolve conflict over access to commonly valued scarce of socio-political situations, has the high potential of degenerating into genocide or fratricide as it occurred among others. In fact, there is no conflict that communication is not required to solve. Conflicts most times escalate to violence only when communication between disputant fail or has broken down. What is vital is that African should not abandon its traditional ways of resolving conflicts through familiar and trusted communication channels. Since conflict usually emanate from interaction within a social context, depending on foreign methods alone to manage local conflicts may sometimes seem like using a sequence peg to full a round hole.

Some practitioners find that conflict resolution has its roots in labour mediation that took place between management and labour unions during contract negotiations. The concept of the conflict resolution tends to refer to a particular set of skills and processes such as mediation, arbitration and negotiation. Conflict was originally used to mean "strike at another, to fight with an enemy or to do battle with an opposing force". Today it equally means to be antagonistic towards others or to be in sharp disagreement with others. The ability to successfully manage conflict within oneself and between people reduces antagonism, disagreement and hatred. How a person manages his inner conflicts has a great impact on how he lives and relates with others. A person, who manages inner

conflict well, tends to transfer his ability and emotional strength to his associates.

In the understanding of Mitchel and Banks (1996), conflict resolution refers to:

An outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries, and process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved.

In all this, one understands conflict resolution to imply that conflict is bad hence it is something that should not be encouraged. Best (2005) putting these ideas together, concludes that:

In principle, conflict resolution connotes a sense of finality, where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in a true sense of it. Some conflicts, especially those over resources, are permanently resolvable. From the point of view of needs, conflict is resolved when the basic needs of parties involved have been met with necessary “satisfiers”, and their fears have been allayed.

### **Democracy and Reconciliation**

With starting point for this proposal paper is a conviction that the best form of post-conflict government is a democratic one. This is not so much a principled stand as a pragmatic one. Winston Churchill famously expressed a similar pragmatism when he remarked: “Democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time”. It may not be perfect, but in an imperfect world it is the best option available. As universal human right become increasingly accepted as the core principles of governance, democracy becomes more and more clearly the most effective way of implementing those principles. Democracy is a system of managing difference without recourse to violence. Differences (of opinion, belief, ideology, culture etc) are a natural part of every society. And conflict arises from such difference. Rather than eradicating or removing differences or excluding some groups who differ within society, democracy functions as a process through which differences are brought out, acknowledged and dealt with in a managing conflict. This process of conflict management involves debate, argument, disagreement, compromise and cooperation, all within a system that permits opposing points of view to coexist fairly without recourse of violence. Of course, sometimes democracy fails, but evidence from around the world suggests that it succeeds more often than the alternative. Most violent conflicts in the world now originate as intra-state conflict, that is, they begin as internal struggles within a state-civil wars, internal oppression of minorities, uprisings, ethnic or religions rivalry, perceived resource inequities and so on as opposed to the previously prevalent pattern where they originated most often between separate states. In generally, the resolution of intra state conflict requires not new or reformed government structures that have not eradicated the difference over which the conflict was fought, but rather structures that are

designed through a negotiation process, to manage those differences peacefully. Reconciliation is the process for doing exactly that while democratic compromise produces the solutions regarding the issues in conflict, then reconciliation address the relationship between those who will have to implement those solutions. Again, we return to the point made above, we promote democracy and reconciliation for pragmatic reasons. There is a moral case to be made that reconciliation is the right thing to do. But, there is also a powerful pragmatic argument to be made. Positive working relationships generate the atmosphere within which governance can thrive, which negative relations will work to undermine even the best system of governance. Reconciliation though is not easy, is the most effective way to address those relations.

### **The Role of Culture in Peace Building**

Having said this, we cannot ignore the role that culture can play in enabling people to resolve their disputes and to strengthen the ties that bind them together. People derive their sense of meaning from their culture. What does it mean to be human? What is – or ought to be – the nature of human relations? These notions feed into the attitudes and values that we choose to embrace, which in turn determine how we interact with each other. Cultural attitudes and values, therefore, provide the foundation for the social norms by which people live (Malan 1997) through internalizing and sharing these cultural attitudes and values with their fellow community members and by handing them down to future generations, societies can-and do- re-construct themselves on the basis of a particular cultural image. In order to re-establish social solidarity in war-affected communities, a key step would be to find a way for members of these communities to “re-inform” themselves with a cultural logic that emphasizes sharing and equitable resource distribution. This, in fact, means emphasizing the importance of reviving progressive cultural attitudes and values that can foster a climate within which peace can flourish. I can identify five (5) prospective role or conditions that may help groups in conflict arrive at the difficult point of revising their identity so as to accommodate the identity of the other. One might also think of these as indicators of reconciliation, or steps in a process of reconciliation. They are both indicators of movement toward reconciliation and conditions for further elaboration can be found elsewhere (Kelman 2004)said:

- 1. Mutual Acknowledge of the Other's Nationhood and Humanity**, which involves acceptance of the other as an authentic nation and inclusion of the other in one's own moral community.
- 2. Establishment of Patterns and Institutional Mechanisms of Corporation**, including various people-to-people activities that are genuinely useful to both parties and based on the principles of equality and reciprocity.
- 3. Confrontation With History**; which does not required a joint consensual history, but does require admitting the other's truth into one's own narrative.
- 4. Acknowledgement of Responsibility**; expressed in both symbolic and material terms.
- 5. Development of a Common Moral Basis for Peace**; allowing for a peace that both sides perceive as consistent with the principles of fairness and attainable justice.

However, the challenges facing the organization are quite old and deep – rooted. In fact, it was the failure of the OAU to effectively merge these old challenges, especially the proliferation of violent conflicts throughout the continent that gave birth to the formation of a new organization that could act decisively to halt the downslide. Furthermore, the realization that intrastate conflicts have transnational and international ramifications, in terms of the surge of refugees across borders and in the general disruption of social and economic activities across the affected regions may have convinced the African Head of States on the necessity of a new organization that would be empowered to deal with the dynamics and emerging challenges of violent conflicts across the continent. From a broader perspective, the AU was created to facilitate the achievement of other great objectives. These objectives include the following:

1. To promote peace, security and stability on the continent.
2. To promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good government.
3. To work with relevant international partners in the eradication of preventable disease and the promotion of good health on the continent.

### **Principles of Conflict Resolution in Traditional African Societies**

In the re-colonial days, there were many principles guiding conflict resolution in the traditional African societies. Those who want their conflict to resolve must have confidence in the tribunal that would resolve the dispute.

#### **Truth**

This is the major significance of conflict resolution. How would the other opponents know that there will be no partiality? Both disputes must be truthful. the mediator, arbitrator, judge must also be truthful, the presence of the ancestral forces is a factor, some may collapse or forced to say the truth because of the ancestral forces. The mediator, judge and arbitrator must be well prepared because truth is not static. Truth is also a covenant logo disputant or parties in conflict must not miss. For one of the conflicting party to have come to the tribunal, it means that party is ready or agreed to settle or resolve dispute.

### **Methods Engaged in Resolution of Conflict in Africa**

The methods of performing conflict resolution in the traditional African societies are as follows: mediation, reconciliation and negotiation. It also includes employing extra-judicial devices and usage of legal maxims to persuade or convince the disputants about the implication or otherwise of their behaviour. These methods have been effective in traditional African society.

#### **Mediation**

Mediation is an old method of conflict management surrounded by secrecy. It involves non-coercive intervention of the mediators, called third party either to reduce or go beyond or bring conflict to peaceful settlement. Olaoba, described mediation as a method

of conflict resolution that had been so critical to traditional society. The mediators usually endeavoured that peace and harmony reigned supreme in the society at whatever level of mediation. This is also usually coupled with the dictum of no victor no vanquished as buttressed by the maxim (Isurmona, 2005). If we apportion blame to the guilty person we must do the same to the other party in conflict, mediators are sought from within the communities or societies of the parties concerned.

### **Reconciliation**

This was the most significant aspect of conflict resolution. It is the end product of adjudication. After the disputants have persuaded to end the dispute, peace was restored. This restoration of peace and harmony was always anchored on the principle of give a little and get a little. This idea buttresses the idea of the disputing parties to give concessions. A feast was usually organized to confirm the readiness of the conflicting parties towards reaching points of compromise (ibid). At least, as characteristic of African traditional society, conflict resolution method is the use of arbitration. The reconciliation function is practiced by an authority figure that mediates between conflicting parties but is empowered to make binding judgments. The purpose is not to render a judgment in law but to reconcile the conflicting parties and its norms. The relationship between the authority and the community is cushioned by community representatives who advice authority (Williams, 2000, pp. 22).

### **Negotiation**

Negotiation, “the secret is to harmonize the interests of the parties concerned”. Thus, even when the conflict involves a member against his or her society, there is an emphasis on recuperation and reinsertion of errant member back into its place in society. The recovery of a dissident member can just as well be seen as the restoration of the harmony and integrity of the community, as the assertion of value consensus and social cohesion, so that the management of the conflict favours the concerns of both parties.

### **Settlement, Conflicts Resolution and Reconciliation**

Although, there are obvious continuities between conflict settlement and conflict resolution, they can be conceptualized as two distinct processes of peacemaking, with a primary focus at the level of interests and at the level of relationships respectively, let me compare the two processes in somewhat fuller detail. Conflict settlement can be described as a process yielding an agreement that meets the interest of both parties to the extent that their respective power positions enable them to prevail. In other words, the terms of their agreements are heavily determined by the power they can bring to bear in the negotiations. It should be observed that in all civilized societies of this world today, there is growing resort to the peaceful settlement of disputes. The image of violence presented by the media is not as such a true reflection of the dominant method of getting conflict situation. There is an enormous amount of peaceful and non-violent settlement of disputes taking place at various levels and in many communities all over the world especially in Africa. It is the intention of the paper to offer some recipes to those on

mediation that they may find reasons to do a critical appraisal of their performances. The suggestions may equally serve as resources for capacity building for further engagement in the provision of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

### Suggestions

Before we can do the right thing in a confrontation of conflict situation, we must first be the right kind of people or person and should possess the right prerequisites. In the light of the above opinion, we should put the following suggestions for those on mediation.

1. **We cannot follow exactly same procedure for all situations:** You cannot use one method for every conflict. Though there are principles that are timeless and firm, yet, the application of this principle may be flexible. Some people by nature are more sensitive than others. You simply cannot speak to them with same force as others. Be wise and be sensitive to the “matters of the moment”.
2. **Focus on issues and solution:** Never confront someone or attempt settling a dispute if you are not genuinely interested in finding a solution. Do not say things in a conflict just for the sake of saying them. Do not vent. Be a true peace maker and seek for peace as your primary goal.
3. **Do not escalate matters:** the rule of thumb is to lower tensions (the conflict) to the lowest possible level. Keep clam, lower your voice and reassure every one of your intentions and sincerity. Affirm common goals, be humble and work towards a realistic solution.
4. **Do not let your emotions run out of control:** make sure the mind is in the driver's seat, emotions have a habit of driving recklessly. Let your mind regulate the heat of your sentiments and the emotional of the moment like a thermostat regulates the temperature.
5. **Do not bring up the past conflicts:** It is so important to have a sense of closure with past conflicts. So the mediators should not encourage or allow the people to build up a supply of weapons to bludgeon someone with. For instance, one can recall the past misgiving against him by saying – “this is like the time you did such and such a thing to me...”, “and I still cannot believe you did that thing” etc. in this notes that, God expects us to forgive others in the way that He forgive us – He does not require us to keep re-asking for forgiveness.

### Findings

Based on the findings or research of African situation and suffering of violence and conflict resolution, it seems to believe that African identity will not recognized among African people and there is no future in dwelling on the past and present. On this note, if the prospect roles and application of methods are taking care of, the African future will remain progressive in terms of development, conflict resolution, reconciliation and peacekeeping continent. Africa leaders are not proactive in terms of prefunding solution for better African future. In reference of this findings, this paper is of great needs for peaceful co-existence to Africa people and beyond.

### **Recommendations**

This paper recommends that reconciliation and conflict resolution is a complex term, and there is little agreement on its definition. This is mainly because reconciliation, conflict resolution is both a goal – something to achieve – and a process or means to achieve that goal. A great deal of controversy arises from confusing these two ideas. This paper focuses very firmly on the process and the prospective roles for African reconciliation on violence and conflict resolution. The goal of reconciliation is a future aspiration, something important to aim towards, perhaps even an ideal state to hope for. But, we hope and believe that the roles or tools offered here will be useful in other different contexts. Reconciliation is an over-arching process which includes the search for truth, justice, forgiveness, healing and so on. At its simplest, it means finding a way to live alongside former enemies – not necessarily to love them or forgive them. Politics is a process to deal with the issues that have divided us in the past. The fact is that, conflicts now assume transnational and international dimensions that has elevate the need for greater collaboration and cooperation among countries in conflict management, especially through the platforms provided by international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU). To this end, this paper is an attempt to prospect the roles that could lead African to reconciles on violence and conflict resolution, and recommend of the opinion that indigenous conflict management techniques should built upon traditional communication systems incorporated in a new approach to conflict management, if the African union is desirous of impacting meaningfully on regional peace and security.

### **Conclusion**

Each people, race or identity group has their own ways of doing things especially as they concern conflict resolution. The need of conflict resolution in our society and African at large is crucial. While in Europe, for example, the police are an agency of crime detection, several African societies relied on oath-taking and divination in pre-colonial times. Moreover, the essence of dispute settlement and conflict resolution in traditional African states include to remove the root-causes of the conflict, reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely, to preserve and ensure harmony and make everybody involved in the resolved conflict happy and be at peace with each other again and this required getting at truth, to set the right milieu for societal production and development, to promote good governance, law and order, to provide security of lives and property and to achieve collective well-being and happiness. These are different from what does obtain today where nobody cares about the truth. If African has to put the falling apart together, her original values must be revisited. The (AU) African Union involvement in conflict resolution in Africa has been reviewed as clearly stated in this paper and the fact speaks for itself. There is no doubt that all steps are bold initiatives. However, the challenges have been identified and must be addressed to ensure effectiveness in its peace-keeping operations. Poor and corrupt leadership in African has impoverished the continent. This has made it difficult if not impossible for AU to adequately finance and organize peace

keeping operation on their own. The UN needs to assist more to ensure that AU will become effective in its peace-keeping operations in Africa. A lasting solution to Africa's conflicts has to come from within Africa herself. In addition, African conflict resolution needs to involve regional and sub-regional organization and powers. Perhaps, the events in Somalia and Rwanda have thought us a lesson, in this regard peacekeeping or conflict resolution should not be a monopoly of the military, but should involve many facets of society, including politician, civil society and humanitarian organizations.

Peacekeeping remains the most important and effective means through which to respond to conflict. Africa is showing encouraging signs of taking control of its on future, using its own assets and demanding its own solutions. Without peace and stability, it is impossible for development to occur. Since the end of colonial rule, the retrogression of many African countries has been traced to conflicts and the failure of extent resolution mechanisms causes of discontent, injustice and socio-political exclusion. Africa needs to invest hugely in conflict preventions, resolution and management in order to move towards the desired goal of integration, political stability and economic growth. There is nothing new or extraordinary about conflicts in Africa. Just like in other parts of the world, conflicts are inevitable as long as human relationships. As a matter of fact, lack conflict, they say, only signifies the absence of a meaningful social interaction. On its own, conflict is neither good nor bad. Some conflicts are actually necessary for positive changes to occur in society, like in South Africa, for instance, where conflict was necessary to bring an oppressive apartheid regime to an end. What makes a conflict bad, most of the time is the way it was managed or resolved.

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