Strategic Conflict Transformation in Northern Nigeria: Ngos Making the Process Work

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Abstract

This article addresses the question of what role Non-Governmental Organizations played in managing ethno-religious conflict and why strategies employed in the process have improved relative peace in Northern Nigeria. The study argues that NGOs' peace initiatives in Northern Nigeria have promoted peaceful coexistence and also inculcate culture of peace among conflictants. First, by employing strategic expertise and creating room for participatory peace talk, second, by training, sensitization and advocacy on preventive measures; and third, by aiding peaceful conflict solution through facilitative peace agreement. NGOs in making the process work have exhibited capability and creativity that elucidates the complex interplay between disputants, NGOs practitioners' and other stakeholders towards facilitative mediation, negotiation and interfaith dialogue aimed at ensuring social change. The fact that NGOs both conventional and interreligious have played an important role in managing violent conflict in Northern Nigeria, the Interfaith Mediation Centre case, in particular, has illustrates how NGOs' role perception resulted to support from key actors, particularly religious leaders, community leaders, youth and women leaders, and authorities as well. The study generated data from documents obtained from the interfaith Mediation Centre in combination with interviews with officials of the Centre in respect of conflicts. The data described and analyses reason why NGOs peacebuilding become instrumental in improving peaceful coexistence. The article, thus, in its findings has provides an insightful information on this emerging trend in Nigeria, by highlighting how NGOs make a difference in dealing with violent conflicts ravaging the Northern Region of Nigeria through voluntary intermediary role.

Introduction

The Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 has prompted series of conflict flash points in all regions of the country. On the one hand, the heterogeneous social structure of the country coupled with politics of identity has been the major challenges creating setback for country's socio-economic development. Since 1999 the Northern Region of Nigeria had experienced repeated outbreaks of violent conflicts over religious differences, ethnicity, politics, resources and fear of domination. On the other hand, the ever growing injustices, increasing manipulation of religion, ethnicity and violent character of social relations has resulted to gruesome mismanagement of resources, lack of good governance and corrupt practices. It is as a result of these complex situations; gross unemployment of youths, poverty and lack of education, various groups resort to use of violence, insurgency and armed conflicts manifesting itself in ethno-religious conflicts, political violence and act of terrorism. Given this highly multifaceted current situations, various actors from both local and international alike emerged with initiatives to limit the

menace from degeneration. Ever since, government efforts to tackle armed conflicts emerging from social group conflicts, especially ethno-religious conflict have remained fruitless. Therefore, debates about government's capacity, neutrality, impact and commitments are ongoing among scholars and practitioners. This article focuses on the important role NGOs played in dealing with ethno-religious conflict, peacebuilding and strategic conflict transformation in Nigeria. It analyses why NGOs become involved in voluntary intermediary conflict solution through facilitative mediation, negotiation and interfaith dialogue. The study also examined how NGOs best approached ethno-religious conflict and why strategic conflict management mechanisms these actors used dealt with violent conflicts of ethnic and religious divide.

Expert and scholars have viewed NGOs as distributional organization engaging in philanthropic work, environmentalism, civic awareness campaign and in addressing other negative economic consequences. From this perspective, NGOs are seen as movement

oriented entities led by certain ideals. They exist due to the existence of social needs from the society. According to Shigetomi (2002), NGO is an organization with the following characteristics; non-governmental, voluntary, altruistic and philanthropic in outlook. This is because, in developing societies in particular, NGOs do provide relief to the socially and economically weak members of the society. Therefore, this article will use the above explanation to refer to NGOs and their activities where "Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have to be counted among the most vivid and relevant phenomena of our time"(Norbert Gotz, 2008). In similar vein, NGOs are considered development partners promoting the wellbeing of the poor, their security as well as ensuring peaceful coexistence among people for sustainable development. As broadly defined NGO is an independently decision making organisation free from the government wishes, which is non-profit, voluntary, solid and continuing entity, altruistic, and philanthropic (Shigetomi, 2002). Lewis, & Kanji, (2009) also see NGOs as membership of community-based organisation or people's organisations working as intermediaries with other entities or communities from outside; usually known as grassroots support organisation. This definition is narrower in perspective, considering organisations aiming at promoting social, political or economic goals of the society for change. Another definition states that, NGO is an organisation initiated by private citizens and received no government subsidies, or organisations initiated by government receiving government subsidies (Lai, 2008). Non-government organisation, to other scholars is "an organisation (maintained primarily at the grassroots level) that is dedicated to the design and implementation of social and economic development programmes for the emancipation and empowerment of the poor"(Habibur-Rahman, n.d.).

According to Krahmann, (2005), "nongovernmental organisations are one of the largest groups of non-state actors engaged in security. They are typically defined as voluntary, nonprofit organisations that operate at the national, regional, and global levels". As such, there is no clearly and generally acceptable definition of NGOs. But definitions used in this article acknowledged two important terms associated to the concept of NGO. These are voluntarism and non-profit making. The terms are representing the far more realistic and original NGOs intended to deal with major difficulties associated to lack of good governance and insecurity. This implies that, NGOs are those organisations operating not for government and not for profit making as well. The working definition of NGOs in this article is fundamentally referring to NGOs not been established to serve the government, or serve as part of government and their motive is far beyond commercial objectives. The organisation is driven by private citizens and completely remains independent of the state.

NGOs are of different types, depending on environment they are operating and the nature of their operations. The growth and importance of NGOs everywhere is connected to their social, political and economic functions and performance. As volunteering organisations, their presence entails capacity to serve individuals to improve their condition of living willingly. This shows that NGOs are characterized by their uniqueness as non-profit making organisation and voluntary as well. As noted by Pempelani, et al, (1996), "NGOs as volunteerism in organisational form are agencies people join out of personal interest to participate in some social programme. NGOs do indeed involve some awareness of a cause, shared interests and motivation to do something about a social situation". In this regard NGO symbolises only an organisation of private citizens active on social issues, independently of government and not for non-profit making activities. Their activities are mainly for human development and human security in areas related to sustainable development, health, education, human rights, democratization and responding to emergency situation in an effort to fulfil vital role in areas where state and its agencies cannot effectively handle. The typology of NGOs has greatly helped in given clear picture and understanding of NGO as Local NGOs (LNGO), International NGOs (INGOs) and Government created/sponsored NGOs (GONGO).

Research shows that there are different approaches and strategies employed by NGOs towards conflict resolution and management as demonstrated by contributors in the field of contemporary conflict resolution. It is clear

that conflict attracts responses from both the state and non-state actors all over the globe. The role of UN in conflict situations and other regional bodies like ASEAN, AU, EU and ECOWAS has been more popular in the late 1999s which primarily recognized the role of force in peace keeping operations. Various researchers observed that, states are ineffective in dealing with violent conflict and has blamed for prolonging the period of conflict in some other countries (Haruna, 2012; Milligan, 2013). As a result, the role of NGOs and INGOs in conflict has become paramount as alternative actors in conflict resolution and peace-building. It is against this background that, research conducted on the role of different actors in conflict indicated that NGOs' role is considered effective due to its political neutrality and openness, acceptability, approaches and styles during conflict management (Bartoli, 2009; Chaster A. Crocker, 2009; Saunders, 2009). The state approach in particular, has been criticized as partisan whose interest tends to escalate the conflict thereby creating factions, disloyalty and lack of commitments. The argument here is that third party in conflict situation is no doubt active but its involvement will either resolve conflict or perpetrates it. Since most conflicting parties are not capable of resolving their differences on their own then external influence or intervention is paramount. On the other hand, NGOs as non-partisan third party in complex emergencies has maintain and exhibited neutral view in the role they play in conflict management as oppose to any subjective views associated with other actors like the state (Umar, 2006). It is not exceptional in the northern region of Nigeria either. NGOs as volunteers usually consider important aspects of conflict management process such as mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, interfaith dialogue, peace education, early warning, early response and conflict prevention, conflict resolution workshops and effective communication.

In Nigeria, like other developing countries, the involvement of NGOs in helping the poor is significantly investigated by some scholars (Ostien, 2012; Ringim M. A., 2012). Part of it demonstrated how NGOs increasingly became active and also involved in conflict management in Northern Nigeria. Even though there have been some studies on NGOs' impact on conflict management in northern part of Nigeria, a thorough investigation is yet to be undertaken. Violent ethno-religious conflict has significantly ravaged the region. As such, finding evidence of positive role of NGOs in conflict management is worthy of exploratory research. A systematic and rigorous investigation into the matter is important to fully understand the role played by NGOs in conflict management to increase our knowledge.

Research Methodology
This study is a qualitative study that selects two representative NGOs that plays a vital role in conflict management. Due to persistent conflict and increasing third party intervention, Kaduna and Bauchi states were select for the study.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources using two methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The semi structured interviews were used to collect data from three major sources, namely, leaders/officials of NGOs, leaders (community and religious) of conflicting parties, and members of the society. Data from interviews were used to register the opinions of stakeholders as regards to NGOs' involvement in conflict management in Northern Nigeria and its outcomes between 1999 and 2012. Beside the interviews, focus group discussions were conducted to collect the opinion of the common members of the society.

The secondary data were used to supplement the primary sources. It comprised relevant published and unpublished text obtainable from NGOs offices, governments and other sources during the field work. Other documents include press statements, annual reports, and newsletters.

Data collected were analyzed based on the research questions and analytical framework. The data have been treated applying the method of textual analysis using thematic content analysis. Qualitative data analysis is essential in dealing with the meaning of themes and behavior, beliefs, ideas and practices associated with individuals, groups and organizations. As such, it helped greatly in the analysis of political and social realities on the field which further enable the researcher to deal with the topic. This

study is concerned with activities of NGOs in conflict management, therefore using thematic analysis method is appropriate. Coding and categorization of data were divided into themes, NGOs activities, common people views and effectiveness of strategies used in other categories in the investigation.

Understanding the nature of conflicts

In conceptualizing the nature of conflicts we are referring to phenomenon of incompatibility and disagreements among people. Thus, the vast majority of such conflicts are inter-groups; between members of different ethnic groups or between followers of different faiths. Ethno-religious conflict in particular has been inexorably occurring and reoccurring over the years in Nigeria as a whole, but the northern part of Nigeria has been the most affected. On different occasions people suffered its devastating impact which can be seen in the socioeconomic life of the people. Ethno-religious conflict is understood here when identity groups seek to obtain some benefits, values or goals through violent means using religion. The group could be motivated either by ethnic, ideological or political goals with a wide range of varying objectives. Thus, conflict of this nature most have viewed as undesirable and negative in human life. Most of the conflicts between regions in Nigeria were directly connected to power struggles and fear of domination. The colonial legacies of divide and rule in the pre-independence period had been instrumental with tremendous impact on politics of identity between diverse groups which metamorphosed to tribalism and ethnicity in the political spectrum of the country (Dudley, 1979). Conflict over resources, politics, religion and ethnicity has historically been the major challenges and great sources of tension in the Northern region of Nigeria. The pervasiveness of heterogeneity of religion and ethnicity is at the apex of competition between social groups which since independence remain vital source of conflict in all the three sub-region: Northwest, Northeast and Northcentral. Ethnic polarization and religious bigotry in the region has resulted in occurrence and reoccurrence of different conflicts leading to intense confrontation and persistent troubles. Conflicts identified by

recent studies in the northern region of Nigeria are; political conflicts, ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts, communal conflicts, settler-native conflicts and conflict over resources (Muhammed, 2012). The conflict has given rise to perpetual insecurity and instability leaving thousands in a state of fear and hopelessness. While the period of military before 1999 have witnessed some sort of these conflicts, the ever growing number of violent conflicts in the Northern Nigeria have escalated to an unprecedented level after 1999, when Nigeria returned to civilian rule. It was this period that, major violent conflicts erupted in almost every state of the 19 states of the north.

NGOs in managing complex emergencies

Focusing on how to manage or resolve these conflicts has provided stimulation and activity that creates coordinated efforts among NGOs to get involved in managing the menace for the good of the people. This is in response to complex emergencies that highlight important role other actors can play to mitigate conflict in divided societies. Krahmann (2005), for example states that, NGOs are one of the largest groups of non-state actors engaged in security and contributed directly and indirectly in offering services such as humanitarian aids. The NGOs' role and process of conflict management has exhibited mechanisms by which third party organizes and facilitates peace process in order to ensure stability and progress. It is a new trend in the world today and it is becoming increasingly clear that, NGOs' role in conflict management is now wide spread over times and acceptable among societies. This particularly is due to the fact that, NGOs have demonstrated their ability to take on functions that states have failed at or ill-suited to manage (Krahmann, 2005).

The efforts and style of NGOs in dealing with conflict varies from situations, parties and issues in conflict. Many studies emphasized on the important of transformative and reconstructive peace-building initiatives coordinated by NGOs to explain mechanisms involved, including; mediation, negotiations, reconstruction, reconciliation as well as humanitarian aids (Evans-ken, 2003; Ku, C. & Brun, J, 2003; Okumu, 2003; Ringim M. A., 2012; Schloms, 2003; Taulbee, 2003). Generally, third party intervention is about the

intermediary effort of actors such as individuals, state, or organizations into managing disagreement between parties or disputants. It is meant to improve relationships to a considerable structural change and also to create peaceful agreement through voluntary and concrete action (Jacob Bercovith, Victor Kremenyuk, 2009). NGOs as new actors in conflict management is associated with track two unofficial efforts that NGOs exhibited in dealing with conflict by directly involving themselves in processes of conflict resolution and peace building including everything from mediation between disputants to establishment of training centers (Krahmann, 2005). It is thus that states at all level and their institutions have to recognize NGOs as effective and instrumental actors in facilitating systems of conflict management, early warning, mediation, and peace education. A crucial aspect of this new development, NGOs involved in conflict management most to adhere with the fact that conflict management does not have to be based on winning or losing but based on solutions that support human development and structural transformation. The goal of third party intervention approach particularly track two unofficial efforts has pointed ways NGOs can play an important role in managing conflict as social practice for human security and development. And also can be done at micro level based on measures set out at the local community levels.

For example, Paffenholz (2013), establishes the fact that in recent time, there has been a recognition of local actors in peacebuilding and such development has brought in massive rise in peacebuilding initiatives and projects in support of local actors in practice. Local NGOs (LONGOs) operating at the grassroots are the examples of local actors in peacebuilding and their functions are wide spreading all over the world. Scholarly attention has pointed out how NGOs involvement in conflict management helps significantly in dealing with difficult long-term conflict, especially, in the developing countries. These could be social groups conflicts; such as ethnic, religious and other intractable conflict bedeviling the peaceful coexistence of humanity. In his book *Ending Wars,* Cochrane (2008), pointed out that third parties like INGO and LONGO have often played constructive role micro

intervention to facilitate and enabled the direct parties reached political alternative to end violence. Thus within this context, third parties can be viewed as significant actors and being an indispensable element in the difficult process of curbing violent conflict. Many studies have found that, NGOs had played a significant role mitigating conflict as voluntary actors for transformation and peace-building in conflict zone areas. While some operations are international, others are local where management of conflict is coordinated by NGOs as third party in order to build peace among disputants. This is because sometimes NGOs are found to be more useful in dealing with local issues For instance, Bartoli (2009) asserts that, NGOs involvement in dealing with conflict depends on their credibility, capability, parties confidence on the NGOs, their good relationships with the state due to some level of legitimacy, and the ability to deliver in the peace process. Other studies have substantiated the argument by showing some degree of success where NGOs involved in mitigating conflict. The result of those findings came from studies of some African countries, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Yugoslavia and exhibited positive role of NGOs in conflict management (Evans-ken, 2003; Konteh, 2006; Ku, C. & Brun, J, 2003; Okumu, 2003; Schloms, 2003; Taulbee, 2003; Umar, 2006).

NGOs Peacemaking: Inter-faith based Conflict Management and Transformation
"The value of peace is emphasized in the teachings of all the major religions currently practiced in the world" (Keown, 2007). This is true because as an example, the Abrahamic religion of Jews, Christianity and Islam are well known for their call for dialogue, peace and forgiveness in order to emphasize the need for peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among believers. Studies by Daniel Philipott, Canon Andrew White, Immanuel Lowilla and Paul Mojzes have indicated the role of religions and the use of its scriptures to facilitate interreligious peacemaking as the case may be in Kashmir, Israel, Palestine, Iraq Sudan and Macedonia. The studies not only explained the contribution made by religions but highlighted in details the role NGOs played using interreligious approaches to manage conflict between groups

divided along religious lines (Cox, 2006; Lowilla, 2006; Mojzes, 2006). For example, the work of LoWilla and Mojzes on South Sudan and Macedonia has given an important role interreligious approach played in managing conflict between divided societies through institutional arrangement in Macedonia where religious differences affected the society. The South Sudan case also has indicated key role faith based NGO played in organizing problem-solving workshop and conferences which enlightened people in understanding the need for peaceful relationship. Thus, the conference was able to achieved illuminating mutual understanding between conflicting groups to the extent that, important lessons learned have opened up ways through which inter-faith dialogue is reached.

Though not only NGOs are visible in the activities of inter-faith dialogue, the overgrowing participation of NGOs in conflict management in Africa, South America, Europe in the Nordic and Asia have indicated new trends since the end of cold war as to how conflict is managed. Thus, the eventual increased in NGOs' participation and involvement in complex emergencies in the twenty-first century has widen the need for peace and culture of peace to ensure progress and human security in most parts of the world. The responsibility to protect and movement for prevention of conflicts has increasingly become a cause for concern thereby making peace the greatest means for sustainable development. There are various arguments that conflicts are with numerous aftermaths such as loss of lives and property which have been a set-back for large scale humanitarian assistance conducted by NGOs, particularly in the war zone (Krahmann, 2005). This is where the effects have largely undermined activities related to response to complex emergencies and also rendered so many communities homeless and in state of fear. It has further instigated the feeling and thinking that NGOs are also needed in becoming part of the movement for promoting peace and conflict transformation. Although approaching conflicts are not new in the traditional ways of state interventions and intergovernmental organisation efforts from the international community, but the role of NGOs has become new in recent times in conflict management. What is new and unique is their resort to

interreligious approaches. This comprises facilitated mediation and negotiation, facilitated interfaith dialogue and peace education as strategies for action in dealing with conflicting parties. Thereby creating enabling environment for sustainable peace and ensuring mutual respect. NGOs' ability to interact with various parties and strategically mapped out possible decisions as intermediary has been a positive contribution in the way NGOs handle conflict that are complex in nature. Skills used and mechanisms applied during peace process are essential through which strategic conflict management are reached using religious techniques that are workable. Assessing NGO conflict management efforts need rigorous understanding of ways through which NGOs' strategic actions permeate possibilities of issuing baseline prospects for conflict management, areas within which proactive measures pave ways for managing conflict, the method of conflict management itself and agreement provisions (Melin, 2009).

Harris (2007); Herbert (2007); and Wilkes (2007), show in their works the usefulness of several crucial issues which are at stake in religious mechanism and technique to manage conflicts. While they identified situations and means by which people of faith use in dealing with conflicts, they elucidate some recurring features of religion capable of transforming relationships in social structure based on the culture and social environment in which religious flourishes. The efforts of religious men according to these studies have addressed issues related to religious war in an attempt to establish lasting peace. Another study of interfaith actors in peacemaking, peacebuilding and social change show that NGOs as intermediaries have succeeded in their bid for bringing positive change in the way conflict affected life of individuals. The use of neutral grounds and objective principles in their approach also have contributed to their ability to mobilize people in dispute and convince them to map out peace agreement that may facilitate cooperation and reconciliation (Tsjeard Bouta, 2005).

NGOs' Conflict Management Styles and Increase Activities in Northern Nigeria
Understanding conflict and its effective management is one of the fundamentals of human peaceful coexistence. While conflict

situational, attitudinal or behavioral means to invoke the incompatibility of interests, values, ideologies, needs between individuals, groups and states in the international system. Conflict management, on the other hand, is action based efforts towards reducing, limiting and containing further escalation. Thus, 'conflict management behaviors are regarded as a matter of preference, and the outcome is dependent on the selection of the most appropriate mode of conflict management behavior'(Ryals, 2010). Teng, (2008), in his work on conflict management in East Asia observed that not only the United Nations in the post-cold war play an important role in conflict management but other actors such as, individuals, groups and organisations. As such, NGOs' behavior in conflict management is what clarifies their styles and strategies in dealing with conflict. There are various ways in which NGOs' activities can be enumerated in peace process. John Lederach's work about NGOs' role in conflict management has described NGOs' strategies in terms of styles and tactics (Paffenholz, 2013). This and other works bring us closer to understanding the dynamic of NGOs' peace process and the reality of their mechanisms in mitigating conflict. In essence, NGOs' conflict management styles and the choice strategic plan help them to be more acceptable as well as determining the type of outcomes conflict management process will produce. Therefore, the mechanism and type of work private citizens do appear significant in determining what strategies actors' intent to implement in the peace process (Schloms, 2003).

The prevailing conflict situations in Nigeria have demonstrated the failure of state strategies to end the ravages of violent conflict in the country (Akinwale, 2010). In the northern region, ethno-religious conflict and political violence disturbs the peace of the society and also causes devastating destruction of life and properties worth billions of Naira over the years. The occurrence and reoccurrence of such conflict threatened the basis for peaceful coexistence among the inhabitants of the region. Thus, private individuals among different groups deem it necessary to intervene in order to find a lasting solution to the menace. NGOs both conventional and interfaith are instrumental and ready in their moves to make some changes. NGOs are the major players in

an attempt to deal with conflict in Nigeria, more especially in the Northern region. NGOs seem to represent the best private citizens responding to global inequities meaning NGOs are known as new actors responding to social problems and complex emergencies bedeviling people in the society. A number of studies show how systematically the role NGOs played in conflict result to desired peacebuilding outcomes. To Oliver P. Richmond, apart from other engagement in humanitarian assistance, NGOs have exhibited possibilities for more effective engagement in dealing with conflict using pacific and democratic ethos to modify behavior of actors in order to create chances for dialogue, consultation and monitoring (O. P. Richmond, 2003). Henry F. Carey (2003), also notes that NGOs are proactive in peace process via preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacebuilding where locals are polarized and unwilling to cooperate directly with each other. Therefore, NGOs are known to provide neutral services which are important in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Other studies, however, have examined how NGOs best deal with conflict management which affect its possible outcomes. But, it is obvious to note that many factors affect NGOs' choice of styles and strategies in dealing with social conflict in a given environment. First, parties involved in conflict; their readiness to cooperate and willingly join the peace process, their perception of the process and acceptability, trust on intervener and the kind of intervention meant to mitigate the conflict in earnest. Second, skill of the intervener and experiences upon which different conflict is approached. Last, the intervener behavior towards mitigating conflicts. According to (Best (2006), there are two categories of peaceful methods of managing conflict for all conflict managers; first, the proactive methods aiming to prevent the occurrence of conflict via undocumented community-based trust and trust building measures, communication, good governance and inter-party collaboration. Second the reactive methods concerning response to situations of active conflict and potential conflict which third party intervenes through mediation, reconciliation, arbitration and litigation.

The increasing emergence of NGOs in conflict resolution in northern Nigeria has direct bearing on various specific roles private

citizens under voluntary organisations like the Interfaith Mediation Centre played in resolving ethno-religious conflict. Based on the role played so far, such NGO is identified in various important engagements in areas such as mediation, faith based dialogue, negotiation, sensitization and peace education campaign and social change. For instance, studies by Auwal M. Umar, Jeffery Hayse, Richard Konteh, Murtala A. Ringim and S Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana show involvement of NGOs in the process of peace building and conflict transformation as an alternative approach to conflict management. These NGOs could both be foreign sponsored and local faith-based actors tactically engaging the communities in the game of mitigating conflict by way of restructuring their relationship and changing the existing social structure (Konteh, 2006; Ringim M. A., 2012; Umar, 2006). NGOs were able to function more fully and assist the government in averting conflict escalation or building peace. In addition, NGOs both conventional and faith based emerged with their gamut of skills and potentials for effective conflict solutions. While some were bodies created to undertake INGO project in conflict zones like Northern Nigeria, there are other locally established profoundly with the aim of dealing with conflict for sustainable peace. This development of NGOs in conflict management has offered more insightful and comprehensive knowledge regarding their emergence, proactive involvement and effectiveness to achieve their goals of ensuring sustainable peaceful coexistence. Among other roles NGOs are well known for issues related to fact finding and based line survey before embarking on any peace mission.

Managing Ethno-religious and Political Conflicts in Northern Nigeria: IMC in Focus

As studies shows NGOs' behavior in conflict management has exhibited intermediary role towards parties and the enthusiasm of changing the conflict situation agreeable to all parties. NGOs seem to be neutral, impartial, diplomatic, concessional, facilitators, and non-partisan (David Cortright, Alistair Millar, Linda Gerber-Stellingwerf, George A. Lopez, Kristen Wall, 2012; Norbert Gotz, 2008). It is obvious that IMC's involvement in conflict management is usually when disputants failed to manage their conflict due to lack of skills or will to avoid conflicts. Some time it is based on invitation to intervene. The use of coercion is not in any way in the interest or rather the processes through which IMC dealt with conflicts in Nigeria. Their repertoire of expertise and approaches are diplomatic and participatory for each party to make sense of dynamic of the situation for integrative outcomes. In different scenario, third parties like the IMC are good in adopting appropriate leadership styles, ways of understand the structure of the conflict, delve into addressing the causes, diagnose and correct misperception, encourage group discussions, attain knowledge of the conflict issues, establish a working relationship with the disputants, instill a cooperative problem-solving attitude between the disputants, facilitate creative group processes and act as decision makers to overlook problems for solutions (James A. Wall, 1995).

As described by Tsjeard Bouta (2005), in some instances religions instigate conflict where parties assumed religious tradition is what constitute the basis of the conflict, but ability to transformed the religious conflicts in peaceful relations demonstrated the need to replace cultural violence with a culture of peace using important religious symbols, values, myth and other important images that can promote reconciliation, coexistence and peace. And the uses of transformative approach always demand participants to understand how religious traditions and identities contributed to the culture of violence, while involving faith based actors and religious leaders in building peace with specific reference to religious values, traditions, texts, and myths that focuses on justice, tolerance, coexistence and peace. Thus, the transformation can deal with conflictual relationship bedeviling unity and instigating hatred between warring parties.

Discussion of findings

Generally, NGOs are more instrumental as well as direct participants in dealing with conflict situations in Northern Nigeria for years. But what makes it unique is that, NGO's approach is cooperative, integrative and non-coercive thereby employing multiple means of conflict solutions. With voluntarism, NGOs has been partnering with government institutions as well as other stakeholders in an

effort to seek their support for peacebuilding, social change and promoting peaceful coexistence. Therefore, the degree of acceptability, trust, role perception and employment of expert strategic plans in the process, NGOs has proven their effectiveness and commitment in dealing with conflict of ethnic and religious affiliation in Bauchi and Kaduna states of Northern Nigeria. One of the most effective roles played by NGOs is the ability to bring conflicting parties to sign peace agreement willingly under their peacemaking initiatives watch. Thus NGOs has demonstrated high sense of concern over societies, focusing on alternative resources available for changing people's attitudes, thinking and behavior to embrace peaceful solution of conflicts, thereby inculcating the culture of peace to enhance peaceful coexistence. While on the other extreme, practitioners from NGOs have exhibited the power of religion in dealing with the conflict through peaceful acceptable means.

The NGOs' intermediary role in promoting culture of peace among warring communities and its acceptability among government officials as well as community leaders has indicated fundamental consideration. As shown in this study, if NGOs' role is not welcomed by people affected on the basis of trust and impartiality, there will be no chances of convincing the disputants to participate in any peace talk due to lack of acceptability and mutual interest. Thus, the study has highlighted the cases of Kaduna peace declaration and Yelwan Shandam peace affirmation where integrative approach helped IMC to intervene in peacemaking with facilitated negotiation, mediation and dialogue. It also analyzed other engagements such as; training, sensitization workshops, advocacy, conflict prevention systems through early warning/early response as well as helping authorities to come up with institutions that enable people resolve their differences through peaceful means. In essence, the study reveals that people from both sides (Muslims and Christians divided along ethnic lines) in the conflicts have accepted the process and engaged in unofficial dialogue at various levels while appreciating the role of religious tradition in fostering unity. And in the end these efforts have ultimately strengthen negotiation and mediation processes to its logical conclusion.

This study also demonstrated that, in terms of strategic plans and styles of managing ethno-religious conflicts, NGO's strategies are people driven as well as a guide for win-win outcomes thereby generating new understandings of the conflict and the concern of intermediary party that facilitates management of conflict issues. In an average, NGOs' has been an important and effective role player in the management of ethno-religious conflicts in various communities they were invited or felt necessary to intervene. From the two NGOs selected as case study in Northern Nigeria, it is proven that NGOs have a valuable contribution to make in ethno-religious conflict management towards ensuring mutual trust, peaceful coexistence and conflict prevention in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, this contribution of NGOs in Northern Nigeria have also demonstrated expertise and style of NGO in managing conflicts, their strategies, and why people at various levels welcomed NGOs to intervene and deal with the challenges associated with working towards transformative social change. Thus, the study adds to the existing literature the multifaceted strategies and styles employed by IMC and CMPM in Bauchi and Kaduna states of Northern Nigeria as voluntary peace initiatives facilitated to improve peaceful coexistence and it has been profoundly respected. The investigation increases and extends our insight of the voluntary intermediary conflict solution using perceived conviction, creativity and all-inclusive mechanisms through which social change is achieved. This study represents the extent to which NGOs' peace initiatives are acceptable and shows that NGOs' expertise and styles do influenced perceptions of community leaders and their fellow members on the need to embrace collective outcomes for peace. The research findings suggest that, while NGOs' intervention process and mechanisms are perceived essential and integrative by the disputants, it has improved relationships, mutual trust and readiness for sustainable peace in Bauchi and Kaduna states of Northern Nigeria. Understanding the task of NGOs in mobilising various members of the community to inculcate culture of peace has contributed to the creativity of conflict management process that can help further our insight towards preventing and deescalating conflict.

Similarly, the use of inter-faith initiatives and training by NGOs shed more light on the need to educate members of the community to understand the impact of tolerance and respect for one another in limiting conflict outbreaks. From 1999 and 2012 in Bauchi and Kaduna states of Nigeria, this research shows that the role of NGOs through their peaceful means of conflict management has resulted in relative peace and promotes high sense of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. The experience of NGO officials and stakeholders indicates that NGOs are effective role players and their involvement in ethno-religious conflict management in Northern Nigeria improves relationships among various communities. Secondly, NGOs are found helpful in providing improvement in the way authorities in their policy making processes deal with conflict of ethnic and religious colorations. As shown by the research, the voluntary intermediary roles of NGOs in conflict management seems to be acknowledged and appreciated by governments, international communities and affected communities in the country. The interventions not only succeeded in promoting peaceful coexistence, but have inculcated culture of peace and love for one another in recent times.

Conclusion

This study explored and analyses major activities of IMC and CMPM and how their expertise, skills and styles helped in responding to ethnic and religious conflicts. As obvious as it is, the indicators of NGOs' role perception and strategic plan of action in the analytical framework shaped the way this study is organized. While in the analysis NGOs demonstrated high sense of commitments in managing violent conflicts, their integrative and collaborative approaches have earned them more acceptability and trust. It also implies that the role of NGOs in collaboration with various stakeholders may be more reliable and realistic in managing ethno-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria than the marginal response of the government Based on the literature reviewed NGOs are found to be critically important role players in initiating, encouraging, facilitating, and supporting various peace processes. And they succeeded providing expertise and moral support for

peacebuilding and conflict transformation in certain areas bedeviled by social conflict.

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