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**INTRODUCTION**

Conflict is a very important aspect of life, sometimes conflict is needed in a society or a place or even among individuals for them to know their power and their worth, and conflict is needed in a society to build diversity. The major sources of conflict in Africa are political and traditional positions, relationship issues, properties, religious few, murder cases, even jealousy and matrimonial fall-outs. Conflict can cause a lot of harm and damage to a country, society and communities. Conflict can hinder development process and success of an entire region society and even national before conflict can lead to a serious war that can linger for years example of those are great countries like Syria, Sudan and Yemen just to mention a few and the aftermath is very devastating because truth, love care and harmony can be completely lost some good example are areas in Nigeria like jos, where religions crisis lingered, benue state vs. taraba state where ethnic crisis between the tiv people of the Benues and the Jukus ethicist Of Taraba lingered resulting to year of distrust and hatred that still remains even on till this day these kinds of conflicts, the principles of equity rights and justice, which is entrenched in African customs and traditions, were upheld.

Sanctions were imposed on families and individuals who contravened the lands customs and traditions. This was mainly to prevent stealing, wilful murder, incest, abuse of elders, wilful damage to property, lying, bearing false witness, poisoning and rape. It was also largely believed that deities could inflict sanctions through accidents, sickness, death, famine, poverty, misery, barrenness and loss of children, in addition to societal exile, ostracism, fines, compensation, restitution and the rendering of apology. Long before Africa was colonized, and way beyond the advent of slave trade, African societies had institutional mechanisms as well as cultural sources to uphold the values of peace, tolerance, solidarity and respect for, and of, one another. These structures were responsible for “peace education, confidence-building, peacemaking, peace building, conflict monitoring, conflict prevention, conflict management, and conflict resolution. If these mechanisms were effective in handling and managing conflicts among the people, it was largely because they reflected the sociopolitical orientation of the African people, addressing all the social, political and economic conflicts among a people who lived a communal way of life. Thus, it was customary as well as common currency to happen upon people sitting down informally to discuss and agree on important issues.

There are various types of conflict that affect most local communities in Africa and they are as follows:

1) Inter-ethnic conflicts: Ethnic conflicts is conflict between two or more contending ethnic groups, while the conflicts maybe political,social,economic or religious. Opposing tribal or ethnic groups are mainly found within national boundaries although the inherent problems of artificial borders caused by colonialism have resulted in some ethnic groups being found in two, three or even more African countries. These conflicts are very recurrent although with less gravity in terms of the numbers of casualties, refugees and displaced persons, and the spread of disease, famine and environmental devastation.

2) Inter-state conflicts: These are conflicts between the governments and sometimes peoples of two different countries. These conflicts have been relatively few in Africa in spite of the problems caused by artificial borders inherited from colonialism and the lumping together of different nations to make up new countries at independence.

3) Liberation conflicts: Liberation conflicts are those conflicts that involve entire nations or peoples who find themselves within the territorial boundaries of given countries by colonial and colonizing arrangements. Often, these people waged war to liberate themselves when they were unable, through dialogue and the political process.

4) Civil rights conflicts: Civil rights conflicts arise mainly over issues of participation, distribution, and legitimacy in the politics and governance of nations (Lasswell 1936). In civil rights conflicts, a section of a country may wage a conflict because the people (or a group) consider the social framework as structured to exclude or marginalize them, and therefore seek to correct the situation.

The major sources of conflict in Africa were land, chieftaincy, personal relationship issues, family property, honor, murder or poisoning, and matrimonial fall-outs. In resolving these kinds of conflicts, the principles of equity and justice, which is entrenched in African customs and traditions, were upheld.

The Ijaw people in Gbaramatu kingdom are a collection of people that are indigenous to the Niger Delta in Nigeria. With a population of over fourteen million, the Ijaws are unarguably the most populous tribe inhabiting the Niger Delta region and arguably the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. In order to live peacefully and in unity among themselves, the people of Gbaramatu Kingdom adopted various means through which conflict was resolved and they are as follows;

DEITIES:

Among the people of Gbaramatu Kingdom, the deities, gods and ancestors were used as means of resolving conflicts and were invoked so as to secure compliance to peace agreements. Whenever the deities were used in resolving conflicts between disputants, there was always a tendency for the parties to obey and comply with the decisions reached because disputants were generally afraid of the wrath or punishment from the ancestors. The people generally believed that the deity and ancestors had the capacity to inflict death punishment on them in case of a failure to adhere to peace agreements. As a result, the likelihood for people to disobey such peace resolution was very low. Thus in traditional Gbaramatu kingdom conflict management system, the deities or ancestors provided a means through which the people became attached and bonded to their communities, because there was a general belief in the efficacy of their punishment should disputing parties disregard decisions and or resolution reached. It was also believed that the wrath from the ancestors and gods were severe if invoked in murder cases and other offences that could offend the gods of the land. Similarly, among the Yorubas, the gods and ancestors (the living dead) were also called upon and their spirit invoked for conflict management.

THE FAMILY:

The role of the oldest man in a traditional Gbaramatu family is significant. He is usually the most senior member of the family, and presides over matters within the family. The family unit is the first point of call whenever a conflict case arises within the family in Gbaramatu Kingdom. Whenever an issue arises, for instance in domestic conflict situation, it is first reported to the most senior member of the family or elder, usually a male. He assembles the disputing parties as well as other members of the family to his house where the conflict is resolved amicably between the parties. The scene is usually inside the family’s thatched-roofed house or outside under a tree in the family compound. There, the parties sit opposite each other on a seat made of mud at two extremes of the house. Younger people are allowed to watch the proceedings but not to speak.

However, in some cases a disputant or party to the conflict may simply by-pass family head and proceed straight to a higher authority to lodge a complaint. This is usually the case where there is either absence of a family head or one of the parties already lacks confidence in the family head.

In case of theft or if an allegation of stealing is leveled against a family member, the suspect would be summoned to the family compound where a libation will be made and the spirit of the ancestors will be invoked, and the suspect would be asked to swear by drinking a part of the gin or Ogogoro that has been offered to the ancestors.

THE COMMUNITY:

The process of dispute settlement outside the family in Ogoni is similar to the proceedings within a family except that in this case it is presided over by the Chief of the community. Where the conflict is outside of the family, the Paramount ruler of the community (His Royal Highness, Pere of Gbaramatu Kingdom) plays a very significant role, because he is heavily involved in the dispute resolution process. The paramount ruler presides over disputes within a community in Gbaramatu kingdom especially where the matter was reported to him. He and his council of chiefs mediate into a dispute and resolve it amicably between the disputing parties. However, in some other circumstances, the matter which can be domestic, land dispute, murder or stealing can be reported to the community council for resolution.

After, one of the disputants has lodged a complaint with the paramount ruler, may be over a land dispute or any other matter, the paramount ruler dispatches one of his chiefs-in- council to summon the other disputant to the chiefs palace. The council of chief resolves the matter amicably by asking the trespasser to refrain from trespassing on the other person’s property. Where the conflict is between two communities, the traditional leaders of both communities get together to try and resolve the dispute peacefully. In this case, the role of a town-crier must be stressed in the dispute resolution. He makes a call in the evening when everybody has returned from fishing to appeal to them to maintain peace while the case is being mediated by the chiefs. Violators of such call for peace is summoned before the paramount ruler of the community who cautions the person or ask him/her to pay a fine of chicken. At the end of the mediation process, the chiefs of both communities offered to the gods and goddesses to maintain peace between both communities. In some cases, disputing communities usually form peace Consultative Committees, headed by the community paramount ruler, to mediate into conflict between such community and other neighboring communities.

It is important to point out that the traditional method of dispute management and mediation is used by majority of people in rural communities in Gbaramatu kingdom and other parts of Nigeria, because it is cheaper, more accessible to the people, does not find fault and it’s usually non-violent. The procedure is non-adversarial and provides room for reconciliation and for peace to prevail. The significance and impact of traditional mediation process in Gbaramatu Kingdom may have been affected by colonialism and modernization, particularly with the introduction of the formal legal process, however most people in the rural areas still find the indigenous method a best alternative to resolving conflict rather than go through the rigors of an adversarial formal system.

In conclusion, the traditional method of conflict management involves all the process of modern mediation, except that the process is non-retributive and is aimed at a peaceful and amicable resolution of conflict between disputants. The family head presides over family disputes, while the paramount ruler mediates into conflict amongst members of the same community and disputes with other neighboring communities. It is usually a win-win situation and the goal is to heal and bring the disputing parties together. The central role of a higher authority in dispute resolution in Gbaramatu kingdom and other surrounding communities is paramount. It can handle various matters ranging from land dispute, dissolution of marriage, murder, spousal abuse, theft and other cases brought before it. Sometimes, the higher authority can approach a court to withdraw a case for resolution, particularly where the community name will be brought into disrepute if the matter is resolved formally