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QUESTION: IN NOT MORE THAN 3000 WORDS, DISCUSS THE TRADITIONAL METHODS OF RESOLVING CONFLICTS IN A NON-VIOLENT WAY IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY.

Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. Conflict can’t be avoided, even with constant preaching on peace. Personally, I believe that conflict is needed for progress.

A **conflict** is a clash of interest. The basis of conflict may vary but, it is always a part of society. Basis of conflict may be personal, [racial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_(human_categorization)), [class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_class), [caste](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caste), [political](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics) and international. Conflict in groups often follows a specific course. *Routine group interaction* is first disrupted by an *initial conflict*, often caused by differences of [opinion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion), disagreements between members, or scarcity of [resources](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resource). At this point, the group is no longer united, and may split into coalitions. This period of *conflict escalation* in some cases gives way to a *conflict resolution stage*, after which the group can eventually return to *routine group interaction*.

Conflict is seen as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. Armed conflict is the resort to the use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals.

**Conflict resolution** is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of [conflict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflict_(process)) and [retribution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Retribution_(disambiguation)). Committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of group (e.g., intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs) and by engaging in collective [negotiation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negotiation). Dimensions of resolution typically parallel the dimensions of conflict in the way the conflict is processed. Cognitive resolution is the way disputants understand and view the conflict, with beliefs, perspectives, understandings and attitudes. Emotional resolution is in the way disputants feel about a conflict, the emotional energy. Behavioural resolution is reflective of how the disputants act their behaviour. Ultimately a wide range of methods and procedures for addressing conflict exist, including [negotiation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negotiation), [mediation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediation), arbitration, [diplomacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diplomacy), and creative [peace building](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peacebuilding).

The term ***conflict resolution*** may also be used interchangeably with [***dispute resolution***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispute_resolution), where arbitration and litigation processes are critically involved. The concept of conflict resolution can be thought to encompass the use of nonviolent resistance measures by conflicted parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution. There are many examples of conflict resolution in history, and there has been a debate about the ways to conflict resolution: whether it should be forced or peaceful. Conflict resolution by peaceful means is generally perceived to be a better option.

In 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 too. **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, her original values must be revisited. Africans have particular ways of conceptualizing conflict. Traditional definitions of conflict regard it as “a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals”.

I am from **Oka-Akoko** in **Ondo State**, **Nigeria**. Below are some important things to know about my local community.

**Akoko** are a large [Yoruba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruba_people) cultural sub-group in the North-eastern part of Yoruba land, the area spans from [Ondo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ondo_State) state to [Edo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edo_State) state in southwest [Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria). Akoko land takes a large percentage of the local governments in Ondo state. Out of the present 18 Local Government Councils it takes four, [Akoko North-East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikare), [Akoko North-West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akoko_North-West), [Akoko South-East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akoko_South-East) and [Akoko South-West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akoko_South-West), as well as the [Akoko Edo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akoko_Edo) [LGA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_government_areas_of_Nigeria) of Edo State. The [Adekunle Ajasin University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adekunle_Ajasin_University), a state owned university, is located in Akungba-Akoko. A state specialist hospital is at [Ikare Akoko](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikare), while a general hospital is located in Oka-Akoko.

Akoko comprises about 40 small towns, predominantly situated in rocky areas of [Ondo state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ondo_state). The rocky terrain nevertheless, may have helped the region to become a melting pot of sorts with different cultures coming from the north, eastern and southern Yoruba towns and beyond. Akoko became one of the few Yoruba clans with no distinctive local dialect of their own. Major Akoko settlements include Oka, Ikare, Oba, Ikun, Arigidi, Ogbagi, Okeagbe, Ikaram, Ibaram, Iyani, Akungba, Erusu, Ajowa, Akunu, Gedegede, Isua, Auga, Ikakumo, Supare, Epinmi, Ipe, Ifira, Ise, Iboropa, Irun, Iye Afin, Igashi, Sosan, Ipesi, Etioro, Ayegunle and Oyin. In addition to this group, there are several other autonomous communities.

Akoko is popularly known as the home of education and has the second largest number of professors in the country, with [Ekiti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekiti_State) State taking the lead.

**Oka Akoko** is situated in the mountainous terrain of the south west. Oka, the capital city of [Akoko South-West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akoko_South-West) Local Government of [Ondo State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ondo_State), [Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria), is divided into 18 quarters and provinces with the Olubaka as its reigning monarch. Oka is home to several great men and women in spheres of politics, academy and business.

Oka is bounded in the East by Epinmi and Ipe, in the West by Akungba and Supare, in the North by Ise, Iboropa and Ugbe, in the South by Oba and Ikun. The Quarters in **Oka** include Agba, Ikanmu, Ibaka, Ikese, Iboje, Owalusin, Koruwa, Ayepe, Ayegunle, Owake, Ebinrin, Idofin, Ebo, Owase, Okaodo, Okia, Simerin and Uba. The traditional ruler of Oka is the **Olubaka of Oka** Oba Yusuf Adebori Adeleye.

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN OKA AKOKO**

In Oka land, before conflicts are taken to the King for settlement, the elders must have tried their best. The elders are members of the Chief Council of Oba. They are the heads/leaders of quarters in Oka land. This council sits once in a month, to resolve conflicts and if they find any matter too difficult for them to handle, they take it to the King. The king either decides what punishment should be given to any guilty conflict party or the guilty person/party be taken to a proper court. Also, if the king is unable to resolve any conflict, the involved parties are led to a proper court.

Methods of conflict resolution in Oka Akoko vary, depending on the nature of the conflict. For example, it is easier to resolve conflict involving two or more people within a quarter, than when different quarters are involved.

Some cases on cheating are also difficult for the elders and the Olubaka of Oka Land to resolve. So, when a situation like this arises, the conflicting parties end up taking the case to court for settlement.

When there is conflict between different quarters, elders (those that considered as really wise people) are called on to have peaceful discussion with elders from the each of the conflicting quarter, in order to reach settlement. Also, in some cases, respected pastors are called to speak with elders from the conflicting quarters, applying wisdom from God.

It is believed that when the elders of a quarter agree to settlement, the people of that quarter have no choice than to follow in the path of their elders to resolve the conflict. So, for conflicts to be resolved among quarters, the elders/pastors trying to resolve the conflict must be able to convince the elders from the involved quarters. The conflicting parties are first spoken to separately, then after, a general meeting is called to speak with the two parties together.

Recently, an old case involving the people of Koruwa in Oka-Akoko was resolved. Initially, the elders tried to resolve the conflict but they couldn’t, the case was brought before the King and the King also, was unable to resolve the conflict. Pastors were involved to help settle the conflict and using words of wisdom coupled with prayers, they were able to end the case after months had passed.

It is important to note that, during conflict resolution, the involved parties are made to swear an oath, to ensure that they don’t go back to fight after resolution. This oath is to plant fear in the involved parties and prevent them from being violent, after the peaceful and non-violent resolution.

No conflict can be resolved without the use of these two ingredients: **Language and Communication**. Just as a cook can’t claim to have prepared a delicious soup without adding salt, conflict resolvers must use Language and Communication during conflict resolution. Hence, I want to emphasise on the significance of language and communication in managing and resolving conflicts.

**LANGUAGE**

Sapir (1963) says ‘‘Language is the key to the heart of a people’’. Language is therefore conceived as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. Looking at the definition of language from the perspective of Sapir, it is very clear that language is more than a means of communication. He clearly captures the definition of language with a pair of lenses: communicative function and culture (cultural experience and expression). Sansui (2001) defines language from the perspectives of social functions and psychology: “Language is used for phatic communication, that is, as a special regulator; for ceremonial purposes; as an instrument of action; to keep records; to convey orders and information; to influence people; to enable self expression; and to embody and enable thought”. Like the Biblical twin brothers of Esau and Jacob, peace and conflict are biologically well-seated in the heart of a people. Language as an instrument of communication may be used to influence personality; to declare war, to provoke, to incite, to oppose ideas, intentions and actions, to scatter, to condemn, blackmail, insult, destroy, tell lies, claim or testify falsely, to despise, abuse and to generate violence. In another perspective, it could be used to entertain, appeal, inspire, comfort, amuse, appreciate, build, enlighten, educate, establish cordial relationship, settle disputes and make peace with people or communities; to generate peace or to resolve conflicts within and among religious, political, community, industrial, ethnic /tribal groups. Judging from the above illustrative definitions, one can deduce that the function of language is to relay stimuli from one individual to another so as to provoke reactions in the person who hears or reads the communicative signals or linguistic form. Language and communication from all the considered definitions point to the fact that peace and conflict are well-seated in the heart of man. Through communication, the heart of man is revealed but we must not lose sight of the pretensions of man. However, no matter how long lies and pretensions last they will definitely be revealed through actions and reactions; verbal and non-verbal communication signals.

**COMMUNICATION**

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995) defines communication as the process of obtaining information or expressing thought and feelings. Going by this definition, it is obvious that human beings are naturally communicators. Communication in this context refers to the process of sharing and exchanging information between personalities, groups and potential parties in a conflict situation. This implies that despite conflict situations, individuals or parties involved can still talk. Whenever it is possible to have a communication link between the two parties in conflict situations there is possibility of exchanging perceptions, assumptions, stereotypes, and attitudes, which have been built up by conflict groups vis-à-vis others. However, poor communication or the absence of communication can easily escalate conflicts between the parties or individuals in conflicts. The exchange and sharing of information can help in a great way to resolve crises and build confidence between the parties in conflicts and bring about peace. “Most of the non-violent methods of conflict management, according to Shedrack (2004), “such as collaboration, negotiation and dialogue as well as third party interventions like mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication, are largely dependent on effective communication.” In a situation whereby the parties in conflict can talk together on issues tearing them apart with the genuine purpose of finding a solution to the conflicting situations, it is envisaged that the resolution of such conflicts is at sight. The same process can also prevent crises or conflicts. Therefore, communication is a powerful and effective non-adversarial and cheap means of preventing and resolving conflicts if only the concerned parties realize it as an ingredient of peace. Negotiations can only take place when communication is made to another person that a conflict has been identified and the communicator wishes to settle it. Effective communicator is the one that can facilitate dialogue while communicating. The personality indexes and emotions play a very important role in verbal communication while other characteristics are associated with non-verbal communication. For instance, the communicator’s use of gestures will ensure active participation by complementing speech with signs, usually hands and body movements, facial expressions and occasional unique vocal sounds, constant eye contact which refers to “eye magic” as a way of sustaining and connecting interest and attention of the parties involved in conflicts. It is always very important to note that non-verbal codes are somehow culture-bound or based. This implies that mediators should be well-versed in the cultural values and practices of the parties in conflicts as regards the use of non-verbal communication. Thus, communication is invaluable for conflicts prevention in the first instance, and then for conflict resolution”.

**CONCLUSION**

Peace is a desirable condition but conflicts are inevitable in any society. Many writers have focused on the causes, operational modalities and effects of disputes or conflicts as well as the forms of conflict settlement or resolution. However, they shy away from identifying the significant role of **language, information and communication** as very essential in promoting, preventing and resolving conflict situations and also as the key factors of tracing the heart of the two parties involved in conflicts.

I believe that language, information and communication can be used to trace the causes and management or resolution (or both) of the prevalent violent conflicts in the society. Communication could be verbal, non-verbal or written. Therefore, we should consider communication as one of the non-violent methods in Western Alternative Dispute Resolution. In view of this, it should be given more attention in order to get to the root causes, information, understanding and management or resolution of the continued eruptions of conflicts or disputes in the 21st century.

Although, some people may argue that it is neither the language, information nor the communication forms that actually resolve disputes but the willingness of the two parties involved in a dispute to restore peace and the level of agreement reached. Such critics argue further that sanctions and armed forces or war could do the magic of restoring peace. The point is that non-violent methods of conflict resolution are apparently favoured as the most acceptable scientific approach to restoring peace. Frankly speaking, the ability and willingness to accept and allow peace to reign, firstly, lies in the **mind** **(thought)**; and secondly, resides in **actions**. Since there is a relationship between language and thought, therefore, communication is the vehicle for thought.

Also, it is important to note that: **Negotiation or dialogue can only take place where exchanging and sharing of information is possible. Communication, therefore, is the goal of language, as mutual agreement is the goal of conflict resolution.**

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