

THE NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF CONFLICTS

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Change is the only constant thing in human life; adults grow into old age, young people grow into adulthood to take over roles from the old; the things we use get old or out of fashion and new or better products have to be used to replace them. The quest for change, better situation of things, development, attention from loved ones or more proportionate distribution of welfare in the family or by policy makers in the community or government are therefore issues that can bring about different interests and pressures.

The desire for change, improvement or development which is a natural need of man is therefore the reason why conflict is an inevitable part of human life and therefore the need to have skills to manage both intra-personal and general conflicts so that it will not result into violent conflicts that can eventually lead to life threatening relationships and destructive consequences that threatens the continued existence and prospective development of the interested parties.

Intra-personal conflicts are conflicts that individuals have within themselves about themselves, their circumstances of birth and about generally accepting situations about their life. This may be about their stature, sex, tribe, complexion, family background, making choices of what to wear, which friends to make or where to go and so on. While some of these are not within the control of the individual, the desire for something better is a constant thing and desire in the heart that is struggled with.

Inter-personal conflicts are conflicts involving two or more people. Common causes of conflicts include desire for more attention, power/ position, money, land and boundary issues, cultural and religious values, indigene and settlers relations, water and cattle grazing lands challenges among others. Some offences may not be deliberate, but misunderstanding can arise if the offended party does not bring such to the notice of the person or people concerned.

It can be rightly said that every challenge that leads to exchange of verbal attacks can bring setback of several months into the relationship of the people concerned and exchange of physical attack can bring setback of several years into collaborative development between the parties because of the bitterness and distrust that lingers between them even after the conflict has been resolved.

People can always make choices: to talk about the difficulty, to work at the relationship or work on the problem and to grow out of the situation together or to steadily grow apart in different directions in terms of caring about one another's wellbeing and overall development interest. Relationships, family, community and national ties and interests can be kept alive only if everyone deliberately considers each others' interests.

Most religions teach the theory that God created the first man and woman and put them in a garden charging them to multiply in number and to replenish the earth. By this, the following may be deduced:

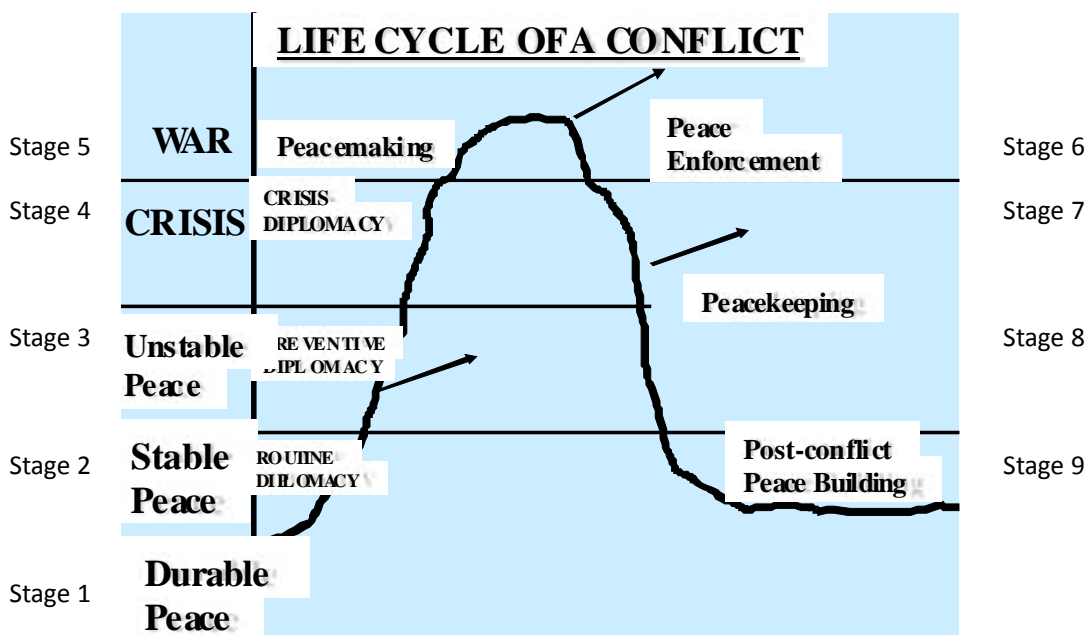
1. To multiply in number infers that all people of the earth came by procreation through the first man and woman.

2. Since, indeed, people from all parts of the earth have the same ancestry, everyone is a global citizen and there is the moral duty to put the interest of all persons at heart at all times in every decision making and implementation process.
3. To replenish the earth is a charge to take care of and utilize earth's resources in a beneficial and sustainable manner for all persons without taking undue advantage of one another.

Conflict usually arises therefore when a person or group of people desire a shift in existing arrangements or share of benefit that s/he thinks should be a fair share of what is in contention; it could be as a result of tussle for power usually where such positions confer vantage benefits.

DYNAMICS OF CONFLICTS

Conflict can be said to have a progressive dynamic nature with stages that range between seemingly durable peaceful relationship to violent altercations and war situations that has to be managed in order to arrive again at a durable peaceful state. Although the stages do not have clearly set lines in real life conflicts because offence can quickly spiral and escalate into total breakdown of peace if parties do not apply discretion in actions and utterances



The nine stages generally used to describe the life cycle of conflict is climbing up hill and descending over it as follows:-

Stage 1: Durable Peace stage: This exists when there is mutual understanding and contentment with the nature of the relationship, responsibilities and benefits due to each person. Communication between all parties is essential to sustain peaceful relationship.

Stage 2: Stable Peace Stage: Buried 'under the skin' like veins, there are desires and ambitions that are not openly declared, the unseen depth of the roots of a tree some of which are visible; the fragility of its manifesting into visible reaction and counter reaction depends on the maturity of the individuals and their ability to dialogue and reach mutually agreed negotiation.

Stage 3. Unstable Peace Stage: At this stage, verbal or physical expression of opinion or interest has become obvious; parties have started mobilizing sympathisers for each others' positions and battle lines are becoming clearly drawn. Effective communication, mediation, legal action and intensive effort to bring parties to discussion round table can still save the situation from deteriorating into anarchy and violence.

Stage 4. Crises Stage: when communication is not effective in addressing the problem, parties take extreme positions, at this stage parties have started physical attack; arms, soldiers and militants are already involved and violence have started adding to heating up of the already tense situation. Mediation can nip outright breakdown into full scale war.

Stage 5. War Stage: All care has been thrown into the winds because every effort to resolve amicably has failed. Both immediate and remotely affected parties have taken up arms or they are supporting those in the battle field with financial and material contributions; life and property are being destroyed through waves of attacks and reprisal attacks. A lot of financial resources, time and effort are committed to doing maximum damage to the other group. People who were not directly involved and mercenaries are hired to join; looters, unsolicited mediators, relief agencies and other conflict entrepreneurs have become involved.

Stage 6: Peace Making Stage: Dialogue and mediation through the intervention of local and external interest groups begin to become prominent. While the principal actors may begin to withdraw, the conflict entrepreneurs who make profit from the conflict may want it to continue. Diplomacy, dialogue and negotiation of interests are critical at this stage.

Stage 7: Peace Enforcement Stage: When external parties get involved, effort is invested in ensuring that aggression is stopped by the parties and their supporters. In case of communal clash, the police or military are sent to enforce peace, road blocks may be mounted to carry out search and arrest of those who want to perpetrate aggression, curfew is imposed and warring parties are compelled to lay down their arms.

As may happen when two people are fighting with violent aggression, those who come to separate them may hold the fighting parties on parts of their body that they would ordinarily not take kindly to. So also, 'strangers' who wade into conflict, law enforcement or peace keeping force personnel have been alleged to commit some atrocities e.g. collecting bribes at checking points, extra judicial killings, rape and so on.

Stage 8: Peace Keeping Stage: Calm has been restored, the parties are discussing, reconciliation has been made, social and commercial life is returning to normal; the terms of negotiation

between the parties are being implemented such as tendering apologies, adjusting of boundaries, providing trauma counselling and so on; but the police and other personnel are present to ensure that law and order is maintained by all parties and their allies.

Stage 9: Durable Peace Stage: Aggrieved parties have returned to pre-conflict relationship, mutual trust has been restored and diplomatic relations with re-opening of embassies is restored in the case of international relations. However, continuous effort has to be invested in positive communication and relationship building to ensure that mutual understanding is sustained and disruption of the peace is avoided.

GENDER ROLES IN CONFLICT

Although men have been more prominent and visible in most conflict situations especially in communal and trans-border/ international conflicts, it can be rightly observed that most children spend the larger part of their first 12 years in life with their mother and they hear lots of the little chats and tales that form the attitude and disposition of the soon-to-be adult about the people and world around them.

Women are therefore very important stakeholders as they play vital role in moulding the mind-set of young people about other tribes and people. History would only remind people about who robbed the other of farm lands and titles; it does not focus on resolving it. Prejudices are fuelled by tales and gossips if they are not channelled towards forgiveness and unity.

While more men are involved in carrying arms, the women are more in doing the cooking that give the men energy to prolong the battle and they also help to nurse the men when they sustain injury. The women become widows and they lose their children in violent conflicts; pressure of family upkeep is high on them when the men cannot go to work and violence makes going to market and other activities unsafe. This is why the voice and opinion of women are vital at every stage if lasting and sustainable peace is to be assured.

Children have also been known to play vital roles in violent conflicts as informants, couriers, suicide bombers and even as arms carrying child soldiers. Post conflict trauma counselling, rehabilitation and reconstruction is necessary after peace has been restored in order to ensure that the emotional, psychological and physical negative effects of the conflict on those affected are taken care of.