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**Environmental Security
and Conflict Resolution**
Module 4

PCR 851 Environmental Security and Conflict Resolution Module 4

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Unit I Conceptualizations of Conflict

1.0 Introduction

Conflict occurs when one party perceives the action of another party as blocking the opportunity for the attainment of a goal. There are hardly any objective conditions which lead to conflict as it all depends on the way the given event is perceived by the other actor(s).

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Define conflict and environmental conflict

- describe the various types of conflict
- Explain the effects of conflict.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Conceptualisation of Conflict

The term 'conflict' refers to an incompatibility in a multi-party or multi-issue situation, or a state of affairs in which two or more irreconcilable views or options are posited towards the solution of a particular problem. Conflict refers to the violent expression of incompatibility of irreconcilability. It can also be described as a state of tension which exists when one party perceives its goals, needs, desires or expectations as being blocked by another party. Conflict is the struggle over values, claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the opposing parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralise, injure or eliminate rivals.

Conflict is a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or ends (which) may either manifest, through actions or behaviours, or latent in which case it remains hidden for some time as incompatibilities are unarticulated or built into systems or such institutional arrangements as governments, corporations or even civil society.

In everyday life, we are all involved in one conflict or the other be it small (for example, a person may ignore us while we are talking) or more serious (for example, two persons behaving violently toward each other). Conflict may occur within (intra-group conflict) and among groups (inter-group conflict), communities or nations; which may be triggered by ethnic, economic, racial or religious differences; differences in attitudes, beliefs and values as well as environmental problems. Conflict does not only occur at the personal level, but also at the national and even international level. Apart from external conflicts between individuals or groups, there can also be internal conflicts within an individual.

Changes in the social environment, such as contestable access to new political positions or perceptions of new resources arising from development in the physical environment, are fertile grounds for conflicts involving individuals and groups who are interested in using those new resources to achieve their goals. Conflict can be viewed as a way of settling problems

emanating from opposing interests and from the continuity of society. This led to Park and Burgess' argument that "conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism and achieve some kind of unity even if it is through the total annihilation of one of the conflict parties". It is difficult to differentiate between good and bad conflict, since there is no measure or framework against which it can be evaluated. If the result of a conflict is positive, then the conflict is considered "good" and if the result is negative, then the conflict is considered "bad". Conflict is a conscious act involving personal or group contact and communication, together with, though distinct from competition, struggle, and contests, etc. Conflict is a normal process of interaction particularly in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce.

Although, conflict may generally exist whenever incompatible activities occur and may result in a "win-lose" situation, the resolution, transformation and management of conflicts may produce a "win-win" situation. The location of sites and facilities such as markets, grazing lands, as well as water spots for animals and pasture-routes are sources of conflicts and when these are not resolved or transformed, their negative consequences are felt beyond the immediate environment of the parties in conflict. A conflict is a dynamic phenomenon, which consists of five stages: initiation, escalation, controlled maintenance, abatement, and termination/resolution. Sometimes, the aim of an individual or group in a conflict may not necessarily be achieved but it may be subdued by the conflict through negotiated settlement.

Economic resources are scarce especially in many developing countries, such as Nigeria, and the competition for them between groups and individuals is an open source of conflict. It is difficult to establish the precise causes of conflict largely because conflicts differ from each other in terms of the combination of factors that give rise to them, and also because conflicts are social phenomena relating to human beings and do not undergo rigid scientific explanations. Conflicts generally revolve around four important issues namely - *identity, participation, distribution and legitimacy* (Stedman, 1993).

1. **Identity:** This involves the self-conception and self-definition of an individual with respect to his/her membership in, and loyalty to, a particular community, which may be defined in social, political, economic or territorial terms (Dokubo and Oluwadare, 2011). The issue of identity will establish the extent to which an individual sees himself as being a member or non-member of a community and the extent that the individual identifies with a particular community, gives that individual some psychological (if not material) gratification. Also, the perception of identity sets parameters to the extent of sacrifice that individuals and groups make for the benefit of the community (Stedman, 1993). The issue of identity has been a major cause of violent conflicts on the African continent.
2. **Participation:** This issue refers to the voluntary actions and choices that are open to the individual for making demands of government and expressing support, or lack of it, for government policies (Stedman, 1993). Participation can become problematic and can lead to conflict when individuals or groups attempt to control all available avenues for meaningful political participation to the leaving out of others. The recent pro-democracy agitation that culminated in the return to democracy in Nigeria was, in part, a reaction against the prolonged monopolisation of power by the military and a faction of the Nigerian political elite.
3. **Distribution:** The issue of distribution refers to the differential spread of and access to values and resources in society (Stedman, 1993). If politics can be defined in terms of "who gets what, when and how", then the distribution of values and resources may be said to lie at the heart of politics. The manner in which values and resources are

distributed determines the amount of justice, fairness, and equity that are attributable to a government. Conflicts that develop as a result of perceptions of inequality and relative deprivation are linked to the manner in which values are distributed in the society (Gurr, 1974). The on-going wave of violence in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria is a result of the inequality in the distribution of Nigeria's revenues which is obtained from that region.

4. **Legitimacy:** This involves the individual's belief in the relevance of the rules governing political struggle within a society (Stedman, 1993). The issue of legitimacy determines the extent to which a government is seen as acceptable or not, either by opposing groups or the population in general. Indeed, for conflicts to occur, either between groups or against the state, there must be deep-seated perceptions that the configuration of power within the country is unacceptable.

Another school of thought states that economic decline is strongly associated with violent conflicts by arguing that, the nature of politics that is associated with a dwindling economy tends to be caustic and conflictual than the politics that is associated with a growing or buoyant economy. Thus, competition for increasingly scarce resources leads to serious conflict which is usually violent in nature. The economic bases of countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia have been practically destroyed as a result of conflicts. According to a recent UN study, Africa has the largest refugee population of over eight million, excluding internally displaced persons (IDPs) with environmental factors such as flood, drought accounting for some of the refugees.

3.2 conceptualization of Environmental Conflict

The issue of scarcity of resources, resulting from the interaction of economic modes/forces and the ecosystem, or as a result of the pressures of overpopulation on shrinking resources and the implications for global (western) security, has dominated the discourse on environmental conflict in recent times (Obi, 1997:2). Environmental conflict in recent times has been associated with how struggles over shrinking environmental resources-as a result of overuse, unfair distribution, misuse or degradation - build up the stresses which trigger conflict. According to Homer-Dixon (1996:359), scarcities of environmental resources particularly cropland, fresh water, and forest are contributing to mass violence in several areas of the world. While these "environmental scarcities" do not cause wars between countries, they do sometimes aggregate stresses within countries, helping stimulate ethnic clashes, urban unrest, and insurgencies. The other strand of the environmental scarcity thesis is neo-Malthusian, which links conflict to situations in which population growth surpasses the local resource base. Rapid population growth beyond the limits of the carrying capacity of the ecosystem or "resource threshold", leads into stresses which directly or indirectly provoke conflict (Klare, 1996). Looking at the social perspective on the environment, Saurin, (1996), exposes some of the limitations of the views of environmental scarcities. Rather than seeing environmental crises or scarcities as natural (Bush, 1997:503), or the outcome of natural population increase (as if everyone had equal access to resources) it perceives the environment as being "socially constructed", as a "process rather than a form, as the result of a set of relationships between physical space, natural resources and a constantly changing pattern of economic forces" (Redclift, 1989: 79). Here, attention is drawn to the relationship between man and the ecology as resource base, and locates environmental conflict as the outcome of struggles between socio-economically defined groups for the control of resource(s) for profit, use, or distribution (Bookchin, 1992). This makes it possible for a tiny fraction of the population to control a large share of the resources to the exclusion of the majority who have to struggle for the little share left. The situation in Africa has become

worrisome in view of the failure of structural adjustment and the deepening of environmental conflict in the continent (Bush, 1997).

3.3 Types of Conflict

In our everyday life, we are involved in a number of conflicts some of which are not easily resolve. It is a usual process in human relation which exist whenever and wherever people have contact. Five principal types of conflict exist which include the following:

3.3.1 Relational Conflicts

Relational conflicts occur as a result of the presence of strong negative motions, misperceptions, poor communication or miscommunication or repetitive negative behaviours. Relationship problems frequently fuel disputes that lead to unnecessary destruction. Relational conflicts are usually preceded by a breakdown in communication like in any other conflict. Communication is the means through which people interact, exchange information and relate with one another which takes place whenever two or more persons come in contact with each other and express their ideas, thoughts and feelings. A break in this communication chain often leads to doubting the sincerity of the opposite party which eventually results to conflict. Supporting the safe and balanced expression of the perspectives and emotions for acknowledgement is an effective approach of managing relational conflict.

3.3.2 Data Conflicts

This type of conflict occurs when necessary information needed to make wise decisions are lacking leading to misinformation, disagreement on which data is relevant, misinterpretation of information, and have competing assessment procedures. Some data conflicts may be unnecessary since they are caused by poor communication between the people in conflict, while others may be indisputable incompatibilities associated with data collection, interpretation or communication. Most data conflicts usually have data solutions.

3.3.3 Interest Conflicts

Competition over perceived or real incompatible needs or goals leads to interest conflict which results when one or more of the parties believed that in order to satisfy his or her needs, the needs and interests of an adversary must be sacrificed. In interest based conflicts, a variety of interests and intentions underlie and motivate positions in negotiation which must be addressed in order to achieve maximum resolution of the conflicts. Interest conflicts could occur over substantive issues (such as money, physical resources, time, etc.), procedural issues (the way the dispute is to be resolved), and psychological issues (perceptions of trust, fairness, desires for participation, respect, etc.).

To resolve this type of conflict, parties must be assisted to define and express their individual interests in a way that all the interests could be jointly addressed. Interest conflicts are best resolved through the maximisation of integration of the parties involved irrespective of interests, positive intentions and desired pragmatic outcomes.

3.3.4 Structural Conflicts

This type of conflict is caused by forces external to the parties in the dispute. Limited physical resources or authority, geographic constraints (distance or proximity), time (too little or too much), organizational changes, can make structural conflict look like a crisis. For example, in

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some patriarchal societies, women and girls are required to be submissive to men and boys and experience pressure from their communities, not to speak out or push themselves forward either legally or socially. In addition, many communities believe that decision-making is the role of men with women often forced to leave decisions affecting their lives and those of their children in the hands of their husbands, fathers and male community leaders. These constraints both legally or socially, constitute structural violence against women in such communities and with time could lead to conflict between the women and system. It will be helpful to assist parties in such conflicts to appreciate the external forces and constraints behind the cause as parties' appreciation of the external forces could come together to jointly address the imposed difficulties. Structural conflicts would have structural solutions.

3.3.5 Value Conflicts

Value conflicts are caused by perceived or actual incompatible belief systems. Values are beliefs that people use to give meaning to their lives. Values explain what is “good” or “bad”, “right” or “wrong”, “just” or “unjust”. Differing values need not cause conflict because people can live together in harmony with different belief systems. Value disputes arise only when people attempt to force one set of values on others or lay claim to exclusive value systems that do not allow for different beliefs. For example, attempts by the *Boko Haram* sect in northern Nigeria to force the adoption of Islam on the people could erode the value system of the Christians in these areas sparking off religious disputes between the Muslims and Christians. There is no need in trying to change value and belief systems during relatively short and strategic mediation interventions. It would be useful to support each participant's expression of their values and beliefs for acknowledgement by the other party. Other types of conflict include the following:

Task Conflict

Members of a group may disagree about facts or opinions from authorities. The explanation of the evidence may be questioned. Disagreement about the substance of the discussion is called “task conflict”. Therefore, this type of conflict can be productive by improving on the quality of decisions and critical thinking processes.

Interpersonal Conflict

The term interpersonal conflict refers to the disagreement most people call a “personality clash” which may take the form of antagonistic remarks that relate to the personal characteristics of a group member or disregard any organisational goals to provoke a particular group member. This type of conflict is expressed through more subtle non-verbal behaviours which include icy stares, or an avoidance of eye contact. Interpersonal conflict may be inevitable and must be managed for optimal group maintenance.

➤ Procedural Conflict

Procedural conflict which may be productive exists when group members disagree about the procedures to be followed in achieving the group's goal. New procedures may be formulated and a new agenda recommended. Even the group may be modified.

➤ Institutional Conflict

This type of conflict refers to the disharmony that takes place within and between the sub-systems in the course of governance, within and among the levels and arms of government.

This is influenced by the non-availability of, and/or non-adherence to institutional channels clearly selected as the proper forum for the articulation and reconciliation of competing demands.

➤ **Communal Conflict**

Communal conflicts in Nigeria, are common as it usually emerges in the form of demands, which may be horizontal (one group or community on another), or vertical (one group or community on the state), or both. When these demands are not swiftly and convincingly addressed, they lead to open confrontation.

3.4 Effects of Conflict

Conflict is usually assumed to have negative effect but not all conflicts are destructive. Hence, conflict can be beneficial, even though it may be harmful to individuals or groups. In other words, some types of conflicts are not beneficial, while some could be productive and have positive effects on individuals and groups.

3.4.1 Positive Effects of Conflict

Conflict may define, maintain, and strengthen group boundaries, contributing to the group's uniqueness and increasing group's solidarity. Conflict which could promote the formation of groups can also destroy groups, terms of realignment resulting from shifts in the distribution of power and in the extermination of a futile party to conflict. Conflict can improve the quality of decisions as expression or conflicting news generates need for additional information that is imperative to the decision-making process. Such conflicts tend to make possible the readjustments of norms and power relations within groups in accordance with the felt needs of its individual members or subgroups.

Past conflicts could also have either positive or negative effects on present and future conflicts. Conflict may create bonds between individuals or groups as they unite to fight a common cause. For example, in a debate session, two groups can agree to disagree on an issue, or vice versa. Conflict can also improve the quality of decisions; stimulate involvement in the discussion, and build group cohesion.

Other positive effects of conflict include the following:

1. Conflict may help define and sharpen community issues to improve decisions.
2. Conflict may help gain recognition for a group.
3. Conflict may increase unity, cohesion, and solidarity within a group.
4. Conflict may strengthen group boundaries.
5. Conflict may help in the formation of a new group.
6. Conflict could result in the restructuring of a group.
7. Conflict could lead to alliances with other groups.

3.4.2 Negative Effects of Conflicts

Conflict is potentially destructive because it is usually characterised by violence. Destructive conflicts threaten rather than consolidate governance process and are also a threat to security and national development. Their effects are usually disastrous. Nigeria had witnessed

and is still witnessing cases of destructive conflict, leading to destruction of lives and property. The losses are irredeemable. For example, the menace of *Boko Haram* and the Jos crisis. Conflict also increases bitterness, alienation and divisiveness within or among groups and may have long lasting effects on future cooperation among individuals and groups holding opposite views. Conflict impacts negatively on the social, economic and political sectors of both the people and the society.

The negative social effects of conflict according to Abolurin (2010:60) include the following:

1. Physical maltreatments which involves the following:
 - a. Maiming
 - b. Injuries
 - c. Air pollution
 - d. Land mines
 - e. Desecration of land
 - f. Kidnapping.
2. Sexual harassment in form of rape can result to:
 - a. Unwanted pregnancies
 - b. Deformation
 - c. Separation by husbands, children and relations
 - d. Stockholm syndrome
 - e. Torture
 - f. Death
 - g. Psychological Torture which can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
 - h. Education: Access to good education is denied, as this sector suffers a great deal during conflicts.
 - i. Health Services: Facilities are destroyed, medical attention is inaccessible, and medications are diverted, looted and destroyed. Thus, victims end up losing their lives or contracting diseases.

The negative economic effects of conflict are:

1. Food insecurity
2. Nutritional problems
3. Restriction of access to humanitarian aids
4. Loss of revenue from agricultural sector, energy sector, tourism
5. Abandoned investment and places of work leading to loss of revenue
6. Decrease in population
7. Scarcity in the availability of goods and services
8. High level of poverty
9. Resource competition

10. Unequal development, etc.
11. The negative political effects of conflict include:
12. Revisiting territorial disputes
13. Population displacement/movement resulting to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees
14. Competition for power
15. Competition for resources
16. Creation of multiple factions
17. Hard power high-handedness
18. Weakening of political/traditional structure of authority
19. Proliferation of arms.

Conflicts can also disrupt normal channels of cooperation among various segments of the community. Conflict within a group can allow dissatisfied members to voice their complaints. And the group may restructure itself to deal with internal dissension and dissatisfaction. However, conflict within a group often leads to internal tension and disruption resulting to the diversion of members' attention from the goals of the group to focus on the conflict.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Conceptually, conflicts could be categorised into different types. Discuss.

4.0 Conclusion

Most definitions of conflict embody the element of struggle, strife, or collision thereby distinguishing it from competition. Some definitions further suggest that conflict entails the struggle for mutually exclusive rewards or the use of incompatible means to a goal. Conflict is an ever-present process in human relations which are rarely resolved easily. The potential for conflict exists whenever and wherever people have contact because as people are organised into groups to seek a common goal, the probability of conflict arising greatly increases. All conflicts are not the same as it has negative implications for many people. For a conflict to exist, the people or groups who are involved must perceive the situation as a conflict. If no one is aware of a conflict, it is generally agreed that no conflict exists. Therefore, whether a conflict exists or not is a perception issue. The effects of conflict are many, varied and unpredictable, depending on the dimension it takes. In as much as it can be harmful to individuals and groups, the result at times can be positive. Individual or group members should try as much as possible not to allow conflict to erupt to violence. It is important to have a positive approach to conflict because this ensures that conflict is managed in a constructive way, as conflict itself is inevitable. There is need for dialogue, change, development, friendship, improved communication among others, between and among group members.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have discussed the conceptualisation of conflict and environmental conflict. We also examined the various types of conflicts and their effects. Since most times the effects of conflicts are negative, there is no appropriate technique to resolve the conflict and if unresolvable, be able to manage the conflict to decrease the odds of unproductive escalation.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

What do you understand by conflicts? Explain the various types of conflicts you know.

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Unit 2 Theories of Conflict

1.0 Introduction

A theory is an idea or belief about something arrived at through assumption and in some cases a set of facts, propositions or principles analysed in their relation to one another and used, especially in science, to explain phenomena (Ademola, 2011:35). A theory is more than a collection of facts. But not all statements that go beyond facts are theories. For a theory to have value, it must explain or suggest ways of explaining why a subject matter has certain characteristics, that is, it must have an explanatory, predictive, and problem-solving value and not just an intellectual exercise that simply seeks to provide new sets of categories or paradigms. The main objective of any theory is to explain something which has occurred with a view to dealing with problems which arose or may arise as a result. There are various theories which have attempted to provide the frameworks for understanding the causes of conflict, the conditions under which conflicts occur and the conditions for their resolution.

1.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain some of the theories of conflict developed by conflict scholars
- suggest ideas that will help in the understanding of conflict
- Try to make sense of the phenomena from the variety of approaches of enquiry in this field
- explain conflict as it occurred with a view to dealing with the problem which arises from it

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Theories of Conflict

Theories of conflict include the following;

2. Structural Conflict Theory

This theory which is similar to transformative theory in addressing the reactions of individuals, groups, cultures, institutions and societies to change has two main sub-orientations. The first is the radical structural theory represented by the Marxist dialectical school and the second is the liberal structuralism represented by Ross (1993), Scarborough (1998) and the famous work of Johan Galtung (1990) on structural violence. The structural conflict theory argues that conflict is built into the ways societies are structured and organised by looking at social problems like political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequity as sources of conflict. Structuralists maintain that conflicts occur because of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies, domination of one class by another, etc. Radicals such as Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, Joseph Lenin and Mao Tse Tung blamed capitalism for being an exploitative system based on its relations of production and division of society into the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The exploitation of the proletariat and the lower classes under capitalism creates conflict. To the Marxists, the capitalist conflict will be

resolved through revolution where the bourgeoisie will be overthrown in a socialist revolution led by workers, bringing about the establishment of a socialist order led by the working people. Also, there will emerge “capital internationalism” where workers all over the world will unite and not limited by state boundaries since the state itself is an artificial creation of the bourgeoisie to dominate others. Johan Galtung, a liberal structuralist propounded the theory of negative peace and positive peace to buttress how structural conflicts can occur in the society. The liberal structuralists propose the elimination of structural defeats with policy reforms.

Structural theory emphasise on how the competing interests of groups tie conflict directly into the social, economic and political organisation of the society as well as the nature and strength of social networks within and between community groups. While structural theory presents a large number of common factors (such as economic and social factors) that make the emergence and escalation of internal conflicts possible, the political and institutional factors (such as the structure of the state, discriminatory political institutions, intergroup politics and elite cohesion or fragmentation); security factors (like national security dilemma, regional military environment, refugee regimes, cross-border criminality and civil-military relations); as well as the ethnic facts (such as demography and physical geography) are also critical. In most cases, the problem of overpopulation, economic underdevelopment, un-integrated social and political institutions and demographic factors put pressure on human settlement and available resources are the main factors responsible for the emergence of internal conflicts.

➤ **Realist Theory**

This theory highlights inherency and argues that the root cause of conflict is as a result of flaw in human nature which is seen to be selfish and engaging in the pursuit of personalised self-interest defined as power. The realist theory originates from classical political theory as both argue that the starting point of a conflict is the individual level. It has three component parts: the **Descriptive Realism** which sees the world as an arena of conflict; **Explanatory Realism** which shows that there are genetic defects which push humans into behaving negatively and that wars become inevitable because there is no mechanism to stop them from occurring and **Prescriptive Realism** which builds on both the descriptive and explanatory realisms to believe that decision makers (individual, groups or nation) have a moral justification to defend their basic interests and ensure self-preservation using any means necessary. Morgenthau (1973:4) argues that realism is a departure from idealism, because idealism believes that human nature is malleable and good. He argued that the imperfection in the world (namely conflict) has its roots in the forces that are inherent in human nature; that human nature is selfish, individualistic and naturally conflictive; that such interest will come into conflict with those of others leading to the inevitability of conflict. Thus, actors should be prepared to deal with the outcome and consequences of conflict since it is inevitable. Realism however, has impacted on conflict at the international level immensely.

➤ **Biological Theory**

This theory gave rise to the innate theory of conflict which contends that conflict is innate in all social interactions and among all animals including human beings. It believes that humans are animals (though higher species of animals) and would fight naturally over things that they value. Theologians and the religious people also believe in the innate theory because they see the inner flaw in humankind by way of sin that brings forth bitterness, violence and conflict. Hence, conflict is inherent in man that can be explained from man's inner properties and attributes, and hormonal composition. It is this aggressive instinct in man that will be

provoked when he is threatened and challenged. They also believe that the whole purpose of religion is to regulate this sinful nature in the relationship between men and men and between men and God. Sigmund Freud in trying to understand the high level of aggression and destruction that happened during World War I, described the destructive tendencies in human beings as a product of a dialectical struggle between the instinct associated with life and survival (Eros) and those associated with death (Thanatos). He argues that both instincts are always seeking for release and the one that wins the contest of domination is therefore, released. He concludes that war and conflict is a necessary periodic release that helps men preserve themselves by diverting their destructive tendencies to others. This informs the argument that failure to express anger results in heart disease, stress and high blood pressure. Hence, many theories of conflicts resort to human nature to explain the occurrence of conflict.

➤ **Frustration-Aggression Theory**

Frustration-Aggression theory was initially developed by John Dollard and his research associates in 1939. It appears to be the most common explanation for violent behaviour arising from the inability to fulfill needs. In explaining aggression, the arguments point to the difference between what people feel they want or deserve, to what they actually get i.e. “the want-get-ratio” (Feierabends, *et al* 1969:256) and the difference between “expected need satisfaction” and “actual need satisfaction” (Davis, 1962). This implies that where expectation does not meet attainment, the tendency is for people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions. This is corroborated by Ted Robert Gurr’s (1970:24) relative deprivation thesis, whose central argument is that “the greater the discrepancy however marginal, between what is sought and what seems attainable; the greater will be the chances of anger and violence to result. Central to the frustration-aggression theory is that aggression is not just undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct as realists and biological theorists assume, but that it is the outcome of frustration and that in a situation where the legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way the society is structured, the feeling of disappointment may lead such a person to express his anger through violence that will be directed at those he holds responsible or people who are directly or indirectly related to them. When the populace is feeling frustrated because they are getting less than they deserve, it is advisable that the leaders should find out what the expectation of the individual or group are and negotiate with them. But those in position of authority feel that giving in to public demands or going into negotiation is a sign of weakness. It is usually not true but rather it will make the people believe that something is being done about the issue. The Niger Delta area is an example of how frustration can lead to aggression. The people peacefully agitated for what they feel is a fair share of the oil wealth that is exploited from their land. When they waited and nothing was done, the youth took the law into their hands by vandalising oil pipelines, kidnapping oil workers for ransoms and creating problems generally for those they believe are responsible for their predicaments.

➤ **Physiological Theory**

This theory shares the biological and hormonal origins of aggression and conflict in individual with the realists, theologians but further provided the condition under which this happens. The argument is that even though humans have the capability to be aggressive, this capability remains idle until stimulated by necessity or encouraged by success. The physiological sources of aggressive behaviour are a function of several factors including human nature and the environment. Humans are naturally capable of being aggressive but do not display violent

behaviour as an instinct, so when violence occurs, there is the possibility that it is manipulated by a combination of factors within and outside the individual's control.

➤ **Economic Theory**

Since people in conflict are assumed to be fighting over something that is material, economists try to provide an economic explanation for the existence and endurance of conflict. But the issue is whether conflict is as a result of greed (intention to corner something) or of grievance (anger arising from injustice). Collier (2003:4) noted that some conflict entrepreneurs benefit from chaos while majority of the population are affected by the negative impacts of conflict. Leaders of armed formations perpetrating violence, benefit from the chaos, as war the crisis stage of internal conflicts, has become a huge profit-making venture. Bredal and Malone (2000) argue that even though issues in conflict are as a result of ideological, racial or even religious differences, they represent a contest for control over economic assets, resources or systems. Therefore, economic theories' emphasis is on resources.

➤ **Psycho-Cultural Conflict Theory**

This theory highlights the role of culture in inducing conflict and contends that even though there are different forms of identities (the one that is based on people's ethnic origin and the culture that is learnt on the basis of that ethnic origin) is one of the most important ways of explaining violent conflict. Identity is therefore seen to be the reason for social conflicts that take long to resolve. This theory argues that conflicts that take long to resolve become possible when some groups are discriminated against or deprived of satisfaction of their basic (material) and psychological (non- material) needs on the basis of their identity and sees the recognition and protection of identity as the most important even though there are other important needs for physical security, food, belonging, political and economic empowerment, and self-esteem. Conflicts that are caused by crisis of identity are very dangerous and violent as events which threaten to remove the feelings of safety are tied to different forms of identity and lead to defensive reactions aimed at avoiding both physical and or physical exposures. The sense of security and safety that people need for normal development include the need for love and self-esteem among other non-material need. Therefore, when people feel threatened, the reaction is usually unpredictable.

➤ **Human Needs Theory**

The argument of this theory is similar to that of Frustration-Aggression and Relative Deprivation theories. It assumes that all humans have basic human needs (comprising of physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs) which they seek to fulfill and the denial and frustration of these needs by other groups or individual can affect them immediately or later leading to conflict (Rosati et al, 1990). Needs theorists like Maslow in his *Motivation and Personality* identified physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love, esteem and self-actualisation, while Burton lists response, stimulation, security, recognition, distributive justice, meaning, need to appear rational and develop rationality, need for sense of control and the need for role defense as some of the needs which when deprived could cause conflict. Burton also notes that human needs such as recognition, identity, security, autonomy and bonding among others are not easily given up and frustration from the political or social system to suppress them will either fail or cause more damage on the long run. To resolve a conflict situation caused by the denial of basic needs, or to prevent it from occurring, these needs have to be met.

➤ **Systemic Theory**

This theory provides a socio-structural explanation for the emergence of violent conflicts arguing that the reason(s) for any social conflict lie in the social context within which it occurs. The systemic causes of conflict that lead to changes in peoples' material comfort include environmental degradation that reduces access to sources of livelihood, uncontrolled population growth especially in the urban centres, resource scarcity and its allocation through lopsided political process and competition, the negative effects of colonial and Cold War legacies, breakdown of cherished values and traditions that play crucial social control functions, widespread poverty in the midst of plenty, the domination and marginalisation of minority groups by those in the majority, and ethnicity. These sources of conflict are found in every aspect of life affecting large numbers of people. Since these factors bear directly on the less privileged, preventive strategies meant to support social and political stability, initiate people-friendly economic and political reforms, and state policies that genuinely seek to prevent or reduce conflicts between individuals and groups by seriously addressing the underlying issues, often yield positive results in the long as the people will see and feel the impacts of the actions as soon as they begin to yield fruit. This theory also explains the relationship between modernisation and political disorder arguing that the movements between different economic and political periods contain pull factors, tensions and crises that create condition of internal conflict and instability. In addressing the different challenges and crises of modernisation, most governments that do not have legitimate support from the people always resort to undemocratic means and force rather than legal processes in order to suppress the legitimate demands of the people.

➤ Relational Theory

This theory provides explanations for violent conflict between groups by exploring the sociological, political, economic and historical relationships between such groups. Sociologically, the differences between cultural values are a problem to either individual or group identity formation processes. Thus, there is the tendency to see others as intruders that need to be prevented from encroaching on established cultural boundaries. From the political economic perspective, power is a major source of tension between different interest groups within a political system. Conflicts can also develop out of past history of conflict between groups. Examples of conflicts arisen from past history of conflict include groups like the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and the Yoruba in Nigeria; the Hausa, Djerma, Fulani, Tuareg and Arabs in Niger and the Bambara, Malinke and Sarakole of Mali etc.

Self-Assessment Exercise

To what degree could the Frustration-Aggression Theory be used as an explanation for the Niger Delta conflicts?

4.0 Conclusion

These theories have their limitations but they still offer some useful perspective to the understanding of conflict. The explanations of the arguments by those who developed these theories are important because there are similarities among the various theories. For example, all the theorists recommend approaches that recognise the needs and interests of all the parties, the non-confrontational strategies and strategies that remove feelings of bitterness. Thus, each perspective only adds to the pool of available knowledge on conflict resolution processes and one or two viewpoints can be used in analysing conflicts or in developing conflict resolution policies for political leaders.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we discussed the various theories which can be used to explain something which has occurred with a view to dealing with problems which arises or may arise. The nature of theories has direct linkages with the nature of the problem that they create or sometimes make their development a necessity. Conflict theories tend to be typically classified under the broad category of analytical theories which are logical in their approach and seek to link relationships between variables.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

From your understanding of theories of conflict, discuss the three appropriate theories that best explain environmental conflict.

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Unit 3 Conflict Resolution Techniques

1.0 Introduction

Conflict represents a condition of disharmony in an interactional process. Conflict is the direct result of a clash of interests by the parties involved in an interactional process which arises usually as a result of the pursuit of incompatible ends or the use of incompatible means to pursue desired goals by the parties involved in an interactional process. For a conflict situation to exist, four conditions are necessary:

1. There must be sets of individuals exhibiting some level of organisation. For example, voluntary groups, religious groups, families, communities, nations or some other collections of individuals.
2. There must be some level of interaction among group members. Without contact and communication, there can be no conflict. The contact could be merely propaganda about other people, culture, or group hence, it may not be personal.
3. There must be different levels of positions to be occupied by group members - a hierarchy of relationships as all individuals cannot occupy the same positions at the same time.
4. There must be scarcity of needed or desired resources and a general satisfaction among members about how these resources are being distributed. When there is dissatisfaction, conflict can erupt. Hence, conflict is inevitable in the interactions between human beings, either individually or in groups as all human societies, communities, organisations and interpersonal relationship experience conflict at one time or another in the process of their regular interactions.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define conflict resolution
- describe the conditions necessary for conflict situation to exist
- identify the stages of responses to conflict resolution
- Explain the various conflict resolution techniques.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Conflict Resolution Techniques

Miller (2003:8) states that conflict resolution is seen as a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflict through the constructive solving of problems different from management or transformation of conflict. It signifies 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 (Shedrack, 2010:94). It is a complicated exercise involving lengthy negotiations and patience to

achieve lasting result. Breakthroughs in negotiations are not usually as dramatic as in the case of the deployment of a peace-keeping force to stop fighting. The slowness that has characterised most conflict resolution exercises has often led to the prolongation of most peace keeping missions. For instance, a number of the peace keeping missions embarked upon by the United Nations have gone on infinitely due to the failure to effectively resolve them. For example UNTSO in the Middle East and UNMOGIP in the Indo-Pakistani border. The general interest shown in conflict management has led to the development of a number of techniques for the resolution of conflict. Conflict resolution process begins with the direct negotiation or interaction between the parties involved in the conflict but a third party involvement becomes necessary when there is a deadlock in the negotiation between the parties or when the level of escalation has reached a stage of near collapse or complete collapse of effective communication between parties to the conflict. Third party intervention is however, necessary from the outset where the parties are traditionally non-communicable adversaries. The various conflict resolution techniques include:

3.1.1 Direct Negotiation Techniques

Negotiation is defined as the process whereby parties involved in a conflict seek to settle or resolve their conflicts. Negotiation takes place between at least two parties who are faced with a conflict situation. Here, parties realise that they have a problem and know that by talking to each other, they would find solution to the problem. *Communication* is important in this process as negotiation can only take place when there is communication between parties. Negotiation takes place during the early stages of conflict when communication between parties is still existent and good or at the de-escalation point when communication has been restored.

Direct negotiation techniques are:

- a. Coercive bargaining technique
- b. Non-coercive or mutually beneficial bargaining technique.

The techniques adapted by the parties depend on the specific goals they want to pursue at the negotiating table. Some parties to a conflict perceive the bargaining exercise as a “win-lose” game. Thus, parties are usually more attracted to competitive and coercive bargaining techniques rather than the overall objective of promoting peaceful relations. The parties primarily interested in promoting peaceful relations are usually more disposed to exploring non-coercive and mutually beneficial techniques that lead to “win-win” outcome. Coercive bargaining techniques are meant to exert pressure on the opponent, to demonstrate determination and create problems in the possibility of retreat for the party applying them. They are meant to transfer the responsibility of saving the negotiations and avoiding a disaster to the opponent. Coercive bargaining techniques commonly used are:

1. Burning bridges.
2. Making irrevocable commitment, like that of Uganda's Idi Amin during the conflict with Britain over Dennis Hill.
3. Publicising one's commitment, like the ultimatum given by Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs to South Africa during the deportation incident in 2012.
4. Giving the impression of irrationality.
5. Crossing threshold, moving from one level of bargaining to another such as breaking up peaceful negotiations to announce a partial mobilisation.

The problem of coercive bargaining techniques is that they are only useful when they are applied by only one party. Because bargaining techniques amount to pressuring the opponent to make most of the concession in order to achieve a settlement. They frequently do not result in any lasting resolution. The party that made all the concessions will always look for an opportunity to reverse such an imposed settlement.

Mutually beneficial techniques are those bargaining techniques which if adopted by both parties would lead to mutually acceptable outcomes. These include:

- a. Gaining an understanding of the opponent's fear and concern.
- b. Preparedness to compromise.
- c. Avoidance of gaining too much since the opponent cannot afford to lose too much.
- d. Building golden bridges behind the opponent to facilitate retreat. This is necessary where the opponent has to make most of the concessions, a safety valve should be provided to smoothen the process. A good example is what happened during the Cuban Missile Crisis between the United States and Soviet Union in 1962.

3.1.2 Third-Party Mediation Techniques

The third-party mediation techniques involve three broad categories - the legal or judicial, the power politics and the conciliatory techniques.

➤ Judicial Method

This method tries resolving a conflict through some legal framework in which a third party assumes the responsibility of reaching an effective decision concerning the resolution of the conflict in accordance with pre-existing societal or international norms. The decision of the mediation may be binding or may not. Variants of the judicial method include the use of arbitration panel, resort to the International Court of Justice, and the use of legislation or conference resolution, especially within an international organisation. The judicial method does not always lead to an effective resolution of a particular conflict because it usually ends up with a win-lose outcome. Thus, decisions resulting from this method are usually ignored by the parties that are not favoured by the decision. The standard for judgment rarely reflects universally accepted norms while decisions are taken on the basis of right or wrong.

➤ Power Politics Method

This method attempts to resolve conflict where the main concern is how the outcome would affect the existing balance of power between the parties and their allied groups instead of responding to the genuine needs and aspiration of the parties involved in the particular conflicts. This technique was used in the management of conflicts during the period of the Cold War when the patterns of responses by the United States and Soviet Union to conflicts in the Third World were largely influenced by their expectations as to how the different outcomes would affect the east-west strategic balance. Arms balancing were adopted by the super powers as a basic technique in their responses to conflicts in different regions of the world. Arms balancing have its economic reward for these big powers who try to exploit the relative technological backwardness of most of the developing countries by capitalising on the various conflict situations in these developing countries. An example is the Middle-East crisis, where arms are sold to both sides in the Arab-Israel conflict and other conflicts arising from intra-Arab rivalries in the region. Other options of the power politics method include the use of threats, blackmail and coercive physical force to keep the parties in conflict restrained,

neutralised, or to impose an unpalatable settlements on both or either one of the parties. The problem with the method hinges on the likelihood of ignoring the salient issues of that particular conflict in favour of the pursuit of strategic advantages. Arms balancing simply postpone the doomsday rather than address the basic problem at the root of that particular conflict. It has not been able to address the fundamental problems affecting the Middle-East or in the Horn of Africa and in the other conflict areas of the world. While it impoverishes the parties in conflict and complicates their internal security problems, arms balancing serve as an avenue for rich financial harvests for the arms manufacturers. The power politics techniques usually locks its operators in a vicious circle in which the main concern is an unending struggle to gain strategic advantage, or restore threatened hegemony. Since the basic issues affecting the relevant conflicts are hardly addressed, these conflicts have usually remained unresolved. In a situation where there have been settlements, such settlements have been short-lived because the party in the disadvantageous position in the power balance was forced into making the necessary concessions. Under such circumstances, the urge to overturn the strategic balance is an overriding preoccupation of the inferior party so as to regain what it bargained away due to its inferior position in the power balance. The only type of coercive physical intervention which does not fall into the straightjacket of the power politics method is the use of peace-keeping forces, especially by international organisations to play what could be regarded as a “hold-on” role while efforts are directed towards finding a diplomatic solution to the particular conflict.

➤ **Conciliatory Method**

This is an informal process in which a third party tries to bring the parties involved in the conflict to agreement through the improvement of communications between them, helping to interpret the salient issues involved in the conflict and exploring possible options that would help to bring about a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The goal of the conciliatory method is to facilitate contact between the parties in the conflict in order to provide them the opportunity to bring forward their fears and concerns and seek mutual understanding of their respective positions. Conciliation is therefore an attempt by a third party to create an atmosphere of trust and cooperation that is conducive for a fruitful negotiation. The variants of this method are appeasement, need satisfaction and the joint problem-solving technique. Appeasement, for instance, hinges on the proposition that conflicts usually become intractable and escalate into wars because of the failure to redress legitimate grievances. In other words, if those in an interactional process are committed to redressing legitimate grievances, there will be no basis for conflict. The basic weakness of appeasement is the determination of legitimate grievances because people view their interests and needs in a subjective manner; it is difficult to agree on what constitutes legitimate grievances. Besides, appeasement is prone to abuse, especially when used against an opponent with an insatiable appetite, as was the case in Europe in the late thirties, when it was applied to Germany during Hitler's regime. Due to its woeful failure when it was applied to Hitler, appeasement acquired some negative overtones, and has since remained a rather unpopular technique. Appeasement in a way seeks to get to the root of the conflict by trying to find out the basis for compliant or deviant behaviour in order to remove it through what could be regarded as a policy of accommodation. However, because there is the possibility of appeasement being abused, it needs proper care in its application as well as some supportive element in the form of deterrence against reckless demands.

Human needs satisfaction, as a conflict resolution technique, is not basically different from appeasement. According to John Burton, its leading exponent, the human being has certain

needs that are human and not malleable, which must be satisfied if there is to be development and conforming behaviour. In this sense, any policy that neglects human needs cannot but generate protest behaviour and conflict - it does not matter how coercive that policy may be. As far as the human need theory goes, these needs represent inherent drives of the human person which cannot be bargained away or completely suppressed. This means that until they are satisfied in one way or the other, they remain a source of discord between the parties affected. Like the theory of appeasement, human needs theory seeks to get to the root of the conflict by responding to the reason for protest and deviant behaviour which tend to generate conflict. The basic assumption of the theory is that the fundamental root of conflict is traceable to the failure to satisfy human needs, which in the theory of appeasement, represent legitimate grievance. What the two theories are saying, in effect, is that to ensure societal harmony and resolve conflict situations, it is necessary to identify the relevant legitimate grievances, needs, desire, or interest involved in order to satisfy them. More importantly, the satisfaction of a particular need simply leads to the urge for another hence, like appeasement, human needs, as a conflict resolution technique could come to woeful failure as a result of the insatiability of the human appetite.

The problem solving technique, seeks to get to the root of the conflict in order to effect a lasting solution. Like the needs satisfaction technique, it assumes that conflict is generally a response to frustrated needs. In this method, the following three processes are necessary:

- a. identification of the frustrated needs to be satisfied
- b. identification of the various options available for their satisfaction and
- c. selection of the options that are mutually acceptable to the parties in conflicts.

This problem-solving technique provides the parties in the conflict the opportunity to discover some issues of mutual interests which they could explore, to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to their conflict. And also provides a better opportunity for the parties in the conflict to explore a win-win outcome as distinct from a win-lose outcome at the bargaining table. The problem-solving technique encourages the cultivation of positive attitudes toward conflict and the exploration of ways by which the needs, fears and concerns of the parties to a conflict can be addressed to their mutual satisfaction. As Dean Pruitt remarked, problem-solving entails an effort to identify the issues dividing the parties to a conflict and to develop and move towards a solution that appeals to both parties. Problem-solving techniques also seek to alter the conditions that breed friction and unrest in human and societal relations. Hence, the problem-solving techniques provide a far greater opportunity than any other conflict resolution techniques for a comprehensive analysis of the issues involved in a conflict. Admittedly, the application of the problem-solving technique has been so variegated that it is difficult to hold on to any one pattern. Problem-solving workshops, two track or multi-track diplomacy, needs satisfaction, interests' harmonisation and third party facilitation are among the specific methods that have been evolved for realising the objectives of the problem-solving technique of conflict resolution. Irrespective of the specific method applied to achieve its objective, the problem-solving techniques lead the conflict managers to the resolution of all the fundamental issues involved in the conflict and offer a better chance for affecting a lasting solution to the conflicts.

Religious Approaches

Religion and languages are two major components for the growth of human civilisation as they unite people together for cooperative action. The importance of informal conflict resolution practices is reflected by the need of people to exist and share the same space. For example,

festivals such as Yam Festival in Eastern Nigeria (religious rites), provide a public space and an occasion to reconcile relations by visiting each other's houses, exchanging gifts and good wishes, receiving blessings from elderly persons and assuming local responsibility. This helps in a way to improve communication, renew relationship and build confidence.

Conflicting parties observe cease fire during great Hindu-Buddhist festival and New Year celebration of various communities. Religious figures play important role in conflict management/resolution. In many traditional societies of the Horn, religious men are somewhat dissociated from the larger society. They are considered separate from warriors and are repository of traditional wisdom and also vehicle of religious judicial systems, such as Sharia law. This special place in society makes them an ideal link between feuding groups who might be unable to establish a dialogue.

Community Mediation

Community members such as the traditional authorities (elders and chiefs), women's organisations, local institutions and professional associations are involved in conflict resolution process. The elders function as a court with broad and flexible powers to interpret evidence, impose judgments, and manage the process of reconciliation. The mediator leads and channels discussion of the problem. Parties do not address each other thereby eliminating direct confrontation and interruptions are not allowed while parties state their case. Statements are followed by open deliberation which may integrate listening to and cross-examining witnesses, free expression of grievances, discussing with both groups, reliance on indirect evidence, visiting dispute scenes, seeking opinions and views of neighbours, reviewing past causes, holding private consultations, and considering solutions.

Mediation mechanism is more compassionate and participatory in resolving disputes. The mediator involves all parties to the dispute/conflict, listens to their grievances/grudges, encourages them to focus on long-term interest, convinces them to be reasonable about their power and weakness, and examines options for reaching a mutually acceptable solution. The elders or other traditional mediators use their judgment and position of moral superiority to find an accepted solution to the problem. Decisions may be based on consensus with the elders' or chiefs' council and could be rendered on the spot. Resolution of conflict may involve forgiveness and communal official discharge of the problem, and, if necessary, arrangement for restitution.

Local dispute resolution mechanisms can be promoted by international agencies to ensure that local actors participate in conflict management by partnering with existing local institutions. External players such as humanitarian organisations, UN officials, peacekeepers and official delegations can empower local mediation groups by:

- a. Acknowledging their relevance, meeting with them when visiting an area and securing their input into planning.
- b. Building on traditional structures for peace and conflict resolution, and using those structures in dealing with ongoing conflicts.
- c. Helping local partners to evaluate some of the traditions and approaches in peacemaking that worked in the past, and thinking through how they can be helpful today.

- d. Providing an opportunity for NGOs and government personnel to explore applying community-based conflict mitigation by learning from the experience of practitioners in the field.
- e. Paying attention to traditional customs, cultures and roles, and learning the community structure in areas where external actors are operating programmes, including the role of elders, women and other leaders, especially non-military leaders.

Community mediation can bridge the gap of resolving conflict to some level as it is better structured and takes into consideration human rights values. Local conflict mediators possess moral status, neutrality and respect of the community. They exhibit good leadership and are also acceptable to all the parties.

Disarmament as a Measure of Conflict Resolution

Here, appeal is made to the warring factions to submit their arms and ammunition at organised centres in the warring areas or zones, with genuine promises to address issues that led to the conflict. However, doubt of sincerity is a challenge to conflict resolution. For example, the Niger Delta Amnesty Programmes (government versus the militants), the fear of government's failure to honour its own part of the agreement was a challenge to total disarmament. Unserviceable arms were presented at the collation centres, so that as soon as there is any failure to honour the agreement, the warring factions will fall back on the arms which they did not submit.

Formal Approaches of Conflict Resolution

In the formal approach of conflict resolution, the courts are the major points of conflict resolution. Decisions of the court are based on a "majority formula" and verdicts can be contested. The lack of judicial independence, corruption, delay in justice and poor enforcement of court decisions among others, have undermined the fairness of the judicial process. Political parties sometimes misuse power to influence the judicial process in their favour with attempts to influence judges. In the formal system of conflict resolution, majority of the poor, weak, illiterate, women and marginalised sections of society do not have access to this approach. When powerful people reactivate their cases, the weaker party usually loses. As courts are overloaded with cases and with several adjournments, parties get discouraged and never attend courts sessions.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. What is negotiation?
2. Outline and describe the use of coercive bargaining techniques and non-coercive or mutually beneficial bargaining techniques in conflict resolution.

4.0 Conclusion

Conflict resolution is seen as a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through constructive engagement; this is distinct from management or transformation of conflict. It is expected that conflict resolution will address and resolve deep rooted sources of conflict, where behaviour is no longer violent or attitudes hostile. In principle, conflict resolution connotes a sense of finality where parties to the conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of the settlement and the conflict solved in a true sense. A conflict is resolved when the basic needs of parties are met and their fears allayed. Conflicts over resources are

permanently resolvable, while those over values may be non-resolvable but at best can be transformed, regulated or managed.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have discussed conflict resolution. We also examined the conditions necessary for a conflict situation to exist. A wide range of methods of resolving conflict are available at the individual, family, group, community, national and international levels. Conflict is seen as the pursuit of incompatible goals or interests by different groups and individuals. It is also a social necessity considered as an obstacle to progress, political stability, economic prosperity and overall socio-economic development due to its destructive impact. It has the capacity to severely hinder development activities by destroying infrastructure, interrupting production processes and diverting resources away from productive uses.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

In your own words, explain the conditions necessary for a conflict situation to exist and the techniques involved in conflict resolution.

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Unit 4 Conflict Management

1.0 Introduction

Conflict management also called conflict regulation, involves using peaceful and non-violent methods and has been in existence for a long time. It is a process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. Conflict management includes the efforts made to prevent conflict which covers conflict limitation, containment and ligation (Shedrack, 2011:94). But according to Burton (1990), conflict management may also include conflict prevention, where collaborative and valued relationships control the behaviours of parties to the conflict. The term conflict management admits the fact that conflict is inevitable and not all conflicts can be resolved, hence, the need for conflict management and regulation.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the various methods of ending conflict
- Identify the different processes of conflict management.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Conflict Management

Conflict management is based on the belief that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but can be managed to decrease the chances of unproductive escalation. Conflict management is therefore, defined as the measures that limit, mitigate, and/or contain a conflict without solving it. It involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for management of conflict in the environment, organisation or community. The strategies involved in conflict management are bargaining and negotiation. The skills for effective management of conflict include: listening, oral communication, interpersonal communication, and team work. In managing conflict, the critical element is communication, which involves the ability to gather information and make contacts. Communication is the key to the knowledge of what the other party is doing. Any piece of information will enable one to know the feelings and the intentions of the other party in the conflict. Also the amount of information helps to determine the level of tension the conflict generates. To get more information, the parties involved in the conflict need to continually talk. When in a conflict situation and there is no information; the conflict could degenerate into war. Thus, increased communication is crucial to resolving conflict. To manage conflicts, one of the first steps is to recognise the fact that a conflict situation exists. It cannot be ignored or avoided, as avoidance of conflicts often leads to intensified hostility and may later cause greater problems for the group.

According to Boulding (1962):

The biggest problem in developing the institutions of conflict control is that of catching conflicts young. Conflict situations are frequently allowed to develop to almost unmanageable proportions before anything is done about them, by which time it is often too late to resolve them by peaceable and procedural means.

In some situations, conflict avoidance might be the best option, but the step of avoiding conflicts should be made only after conflict is clearly recognised and possible ways to manage it are examined. Boulding identified several methods of ending conflicts to include:

- Avoidance
- Conquest and
- Procedural resolution which include reconciliation, and/or compromise, and/or award.

Procedural resolution by reconciliation and/ or compromise is generally the most appropriate in community development programmes. There are several means to reach a compromise. In reality, the means for conflict resolution by reconciliation is dependent on the situation. No one type can apply to all situations. Compromise involves adjustments and modifications with regard to the territories, values, goals, and/or policies of the involved parties. For example, a possible strategy for reducing conflict over how to reach an agreed-upon goal might be to redefine the situation in terms of new means towards the acceptable goals - a new bond issue rather than depleting existing funds. Territories may also be redefined and made less exclusive in order to diminish conflict. Other possible means of managing conflict within and among community groups as identified by Ohio State University Fact Sheet in Abolurin (2010:85) include the following:

1. Recognise and acknowledge that conflicts exist.

2. Analyse the existing situation

- Know exactly what the conflict is about.
- Does it involve values, goals, and means to goals, territory or a combination of these?
- Analyse behaviour of involved parties: members of the group(s).
- Determine if the conflict approach is being used by the concerned party.
- Find out how other similar conflicts have been resolved.

3. Facilitate Communication

- Enhance communication. Open the lines for free discussion and involve all members.
- Encourage accurate communication and feedback because negotiation depends on good communication.
- Listen and raise questions.
- Allow free expression. Constructive disagreement should not be suppressed.
- Supply information and facts.

- Maintain an objective level (not emotional).
 - Stay on issues, not people.
 - Provide the fact needed to 'save face' for parties.
4. Negotiate
 5. Make necessary adjustments, reinforce, confirm.
 6. Live with conflict: All conflicts cannot be resolved

The following processes of conflict management were also identified by Wali (2008:245) in Abolurin (2010):

1. Early Warning System (EWS): A mechanism set up by the United Nations and some regional organisations with a mandate to monitor activities of conflict situations. It is a system or procedure designed to warn of a potential or an impending problem. Its application is to keep a close watch over the activities that could lead to conflict (pre-conflict) situation, those that could escalate an existing conflict (on-going conflict) and also to monitor activities during and after (post-conflict) ceasefire.
2. Conflict Prevention: This is the application of necessary tools that would help avert conflict in any given situation. Processes such as mediation, conciliation, persuasion and negotiation can be applied by the bodies involved in the intervention processes.
3. Conflict Resolution: This is necessary in order to remove the major cause(s) of conflict.
4. Peace Building: A post-armed conflict activity intended for prevention and resumption of hostilities. This mechanism was initiated by the former United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali.
5. Peace Making: This entails creating enabling environment for the four key terms popularised by Boutros Ghali in his Agency for peace to be realised.
6. Conflict Transformation: This is a process whereby the local actors made up of the middle level leaders found in the academics, religious bodies and humanitarian duties, are involved in bringing about peace in post-conflict situations.
7. Peace Education: This entails inculcating peaceful methods in the people. Peace education rests on an active vision of peace where skilled individuals, who have been trained in the ways of non-violence, intervene in conflict situations to manage them without using violent force.
8. Peacekeeping: This is a form of cease fire mutually reached by warring factions to stop war. It is used to dissuade potential actors from getting involved in violent conflicts.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Outline and discuss the various ways of managing conflicts by Wali (2008).

4.0 Conclusion

Conflict management covers the entire spectrum of handling conflicts positively at different stages and involves also those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive. And since conflict brings about tension and is indeterminable, it is important to generally manage conflict to reduce tension and prevent it from escalating. With better understanding we can make informed choices about how we engage in conflict management generally.

5.0 Summary

In this unit, we discussed the various methods of ending conflict and the different processes of conflict management. In managing conflict, the critical element is communication. When in a conflict situation and there is lack of information, the conflict may degenerate into war.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss the different processes of conflict management you know.

7.0 References/Further Reading

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