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Social Conflict, Security and Peace Building in the Information Communication Age

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Abstract - The paper was burdened by the need to evolve a proactive use of the media and information communication technology (ICT) as instruments for peace building, security and conflict management system (CMS) and how these can be realised. Looking at ICT and how it affect security and security soft and hard wares. It also considered ICT as a driver of social conflict and security. The paper saw peace building as a product of ICT and how Information system management (ISM) can either increase or decrease conflict eruption.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is central to all aspects of work in conflict and post-conflict settings. The use of traditional or mass media (radio, TV, print journalism) has long been acknowledged as playing a crucial part in providing information and messaging that can shape popular views (Igwe, 2012). As we know, these tools of communication have been used to incite violence conflict and also preach peace.

Technological innovations have created new opportunities and outlets through which communication is made easy. Life and death are on the power of the tongue. There is power in spoken word. In particular, the spread of mobile phones, crowd sourcing technologies, and social networks have enabled messages to be amplified, information flows to be accelerated, and new spaces opened up for the involvement of individuals and communities to play a role in the various phases of the conflict cycle (Coyle and Meier, 2009). In recent years the use of these new technologies have changed the nature of communication flows that contribute to crisis and disaster response, conflict monitoring and early warning, civilian protection, community peace building, and state-building activities.

According to the findings in ICT for Peace Foundation Jan, (2011), it is suggested that we are moving from a rigid top-down hierarchical approach to an increasing reliance on mobile, inclusive, interactive tools, building on a wealth of information gathered from locals and those outside of traditional development,

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humanitarian and peace building communities. This transformative switch to a more bottom-up approach, focusing on the individuals and communities in crisis and conflict areas, creates opportunities for improved real-time communication with a range of agencies, but also creates opportunities for greater self-sufficiency in times of crisis and conflict. In essence, these new tools have changed what information can be gathered and accessed, who can participate in the communication process, and also, who can be a peace builder.

A basic responsibility of governance in ancient as in contemporary times has been the provision of security for the citizenry on a sustained basis. This responsibility provides for the foundation of growth and development of the society. But then the existence of relative level of security in any environment does not in itself suggest the absence of conflict which Imobighe, (1993) described as "a condition of disharmony" or the "direct result of a clash of interests by the parties involved in an international process." In essence, individuals, groups and communities are bound to pursue different interests or agenda including divergent means to achieve their interests or goals.

In the light of these scenarios, conflict becomes inevitable and it is perhaps apt to say that conflict is an inextricable feature of human existence. As to the desirability or otherwise of conflict to human existence, there are divergent opinions, Fraser et. al., (1984); Christopher, (1987; Burton, (1987; Imobighe, (1993). According to Burton, (1987), conflict is "an essential creative element in human relations" and one of the driving forces behind societal development. The import of this assertion shows that conflict has an inbuilt dynamism that must never be suppressed or else the society runs the risk of lapsing into stagnation. This is not to say that conflicts are always a driving force behind societal development as they can also impact negatively on the society. Whichever way conflicts are viewed, they need to be managed so as to be able to build bridges of understanding and respect across the society.

In Nigeria, the emergence of violent conflicts has had some grievous implications on the polity. Lives have been destroyed. The management of such conflicts with specific reference to their resolution has been anything but superficial and reactive in nature rather than being proactive. A situation whereby conflicts are allowed to erupt before measures are taken to arrest

the situation is an antithesis of good governance. Rather, a more cost-benefit approach to conflict management, and specifically a preventive one, is considered desirable. The objective of this exercise is therefore to discuss the place of information communication system for an early warning mechanism for conflict management so as to ensure social security in the country.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The Communication for Development community has long argued that effective information and communication processes are prerequisites for successful development. Proponents argue that communication and information flows are the lifeblood of development projects; an integral part of empowering and enabling a healthy, vibrant civil society; essential for the creation of efficient and effective economies; and a critical component of social security.

Information is one of the most used everyday words yet it is one of the most misunderstood. This is so because conceptually, information is more often than not taken for granted in that it lacks what can be referred to as a consensual or standard definition. This has in turn given the liberty to scholars to bring their individual perceptions of the concept to bear on their written.

Conscious of this lacuna Losee, (1997) attempted a generalist description of the concept when he said that information is that which "is produced by all processes and it is the values of characteristics in the processes output that are information." This description underlines the cognitive attribute of information which is similar to Saracevic and Kantor, (1997) who conceived information as a phenomenon "which affects or changes the state of a mind" of an individual or groups. The emphasis here is the important role of information as a facilitator in any decision-making process, conflict resolution, peace building and social security. This has been succinctly put by Aiyepuku, (1989), who defined information "as data of value in planning (and) decision making." This definition was further amplified by Oladele who conceived information as:

Structured data of value which in themselves are the outcome of conscious observations, thoughts and actions either for immediate or anticipated communication and consumption (Oladele, 1991; p.24).

An explication of this definition shows that data are mere raw materials that can only become information after careful analysis. Upon internalization information becomes knowledge. In other words, data are of no value if not processed into information, which is meaningful only when it is internalized to become knowledge. Herein lays the Trinitarian concept of information. The three concepts as variants of each other are therefore used interchangeably in this exercise. Closely related to these variants in intelligence

report, which is the result of data gathering and analysis on specific subjects or targets for specified objectives.

III. HOW ICT FOSTER SOCIAL CONFLICTS, SECURITY AND PEACE BUILDING

A problem that frequently arises for states in international politics is that of how to deal with one particular state's rapid growth in power and subsequent hegemonic ambitions. The 'standard solution' provided by the realist theory of international relations (IR) is that of other states increasing their power (internally balancing) or allying with others (externally balancing) in order to counter the rising power and ensure their own security and survival. Kenneth Waltz, one of the founders of structural realism, contends that in an international system characterized by anarchy where no overarching government exists to enforce laws, 'balancing, not band wagoning, is the behaviour induced by the system' (Waltz, (1979). The implication of the foregoing is that in this shadow of hegemony, strategic choices are made through the instrumentality of ICT as the vehicle that conveys strategic positions and decisions via Mass media operations and coverage. It is the contradiction of these ICT driven social and traditional media manoeuvrings that either engenders social conflict or peace building in power balancing that either ensure security or compromise it.

IV. ICT, SECURITY AND MILITARY TECHNOLOGY

Proponents of offense/defence theory often attribute the changes in a nation's offense/defence balance (ODB) to alterations in its military strategies. They assume that when a nation's technological capabilities favor offense, the state will be inclined to adopt an offensive military strategy; similarly, when a nation's armed forces have a defensive advantage, the state will be disposed to pursuing a defensive strategy (Stephen Van Evera, 1999). In essence, offense/defence theory views adjustments in military doctrine as the product of changes in the balance of military capabilities. It is important to note that changes in the ODB that affect the development of military doctrine and the adoption new military strategies directly depends on the dynamics of ICT.

A quick review of the history of technological development makes this point quite clear. Humanity has gone through six distinct periods of military technology: the stone age, the age of metal, the age of gunpowder, the era of mechanized warfare, the nuclear age and the current era of information based warfare (Zhongguo et al, 1993). There were thousands of years between the first three periods, and a few hundred years between gunpowder and mechanized warfare. The three last eras each lasted 50 years, and the rapid escalation from one era to the next is attributable to snowballing

technological development of the ICT industry. Starting from 1945 and counting the 1991 Persian Gulf War as the beginning of the era of informationalized warfare, there were 46 years between the latest two eras (Xu Jin, 2006). Within each age, military technology underwent relatively small incremental advancements, but the development of anti-tank technologies in the era of mechanized warfare was a serious breakthrough, as it helped to neutralize the tank power offensive.

Information Communication Technology wields a profound influence over the course of any armed conflict. When military technology undergoes significant change, the very nature of warfare has to follow suit. In formulating military doctrine, nations need to be cognizant of the structural influence that technology has over strategy. Theoretically, when the independent variable (military technology) undergoes change, the dependent variable (military strategy) should be affected.

V. ICT DRIVEN MACHINE, SOCIAL CONFLICT AND SECURITY

These machines specifically Drone, Missile launchers, and other warfare hardware are expensive, lethal, and precise in their killing; at least they are designed so to be. A creation of the nation's intelligence apparatus, they act as the new soldiers abroad, innately non-emotive machines asked to perform the previous duties of an army combatant more efficiently and free of the inhibitive emotional affects on human cognizance. They kill their enemies but also can miss their targets and a study released last month shows that Drone miss a lot. Months after researchers at the University of Texas-Austin successfully spoofed a drone into its own crash landing, proving the enormous security vulnerability of the aircraft, the study conducted by law professors at New York University and Stanford argues that American drones are killing civilians in Pakistan's tribal regions and have had a "damaging and counterproductive effect" on the psyche and social welfare of residents there. Their claims are based on roughly 130 interviews with civilians living in the regions of Northern Pakistan where drone attacks are most frequent (Medina, 2012)..

The evidence gathered with the financial and logistical support of the activist group *Relieve* amongst others, directly challenges the Obama administration's official line that targeted drone strikes aimed at suspected militants in Northwest Pakistan's tribal regions are actually hitting their targets. According data provided by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, cited in the study, between 2,593 and 3,373 people have been killed in CIA drone strikes in Pakistan since 2004 and between 474 and 884 of those killed were civilians, a figure representing a possible 25 percent of all deaths. Millions of Americans are still unaware of the existence

of drones, or unmanned combat aerial vehicles, despite billions of taxpayer dollars spent over the last decade on research, production and perfection of these devices (Medi

VI. REFLECTIONS ON INFORMATION COMMUNICATION FOR PEACE BUILDING

In the arena of conflict transformation and peace building, communications have historically played a role in shaping the views of policy-makers and influencing popular opinion on conflicts. Starting with the Crimean War (print media), through the American Civil War (photo journalism and print media), World War II (cinema newsreels, radio and daily newspapers) and the wars in the Persian Gulf (1991) and the invasion of Iraq (2002) (global television and the 24-hour news cycle), we can see how communication and media has shaped the views of policy makers and the public on war and the prospects of peace.

With the accelerating pace of change and the use of an increasingly diverse range of communication tools, we have seen a shift from the institutional, vertical realm to the new communication space characterized by the merging of mass media and the interactive, horizontal networks of communication. Castells (1996) suggests this has given rise to a new form of communication, mass self-communication, through the Internet and wireless communication networks. We have seen in the recent events in the Middle East how this form of communication has enabled social movements to organize and bring about revolutionary social change.

Within the peacebuilding profession, the role of communications has been relatively unexamined until recently. The seminal work of Kalathil, Langlois and Kaplan (2008) provides a rare examination of the role of communication and media in post-conflict and fragile states. They observe that nearly every post-conflict intervention involves some aspect of communication, from messaging on distinct topics to encouraging national dialogue to rebuilding destroyed media infrastructure and institutions. They conclude that "both in research and in the field, communication remains an afterthought, frequently treated as part of the public relations strategy rather than an integral and technical component of the post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction process. Because of this, there is very little understanding of the role that communication processes play in the numerous strands of post-conflict reconstruction, including peace building, governance, and long term development" (Kalathil, Langlois and Kaplan, 2008).

At the same time, the authors recognize that the media and communication sector can be an important element of stabilization, reconstruction and peace building challenges. Over the last several years, Kalathil, Langlois and Kaplan (2008) note that communication-

based activity has been used to support humanitarian relief, improve governance, and contribute significantly to the process of reconstruction, stabilization and social security. In terms of identifying the strands of practice in Communication for Peace building, one can discern interventions that have contributed to managing expectations, building both trust in and oversight of state institutions, aiding the formation of an inclusive national identity, and fostering a participatory and engaged citizenry.

VII. ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

In the context of traditional Africa conflict management system, the popular saying that, "words are used to search for missing links" is indicative of three factors. In the first instance, the saying underscores the importance of dialogue in the African traditional system of conflict adjudication and resolution. Secondly, conflicts are products of their environment and as such mechanism for their resolution must be derived from the same environment. Thirdly the saying, albeit philosophically, underscores the importance of "words" or information as an important element in any peace building arrangement and more importantly in early warning mechanism. A combination of these factors therefore, informs the need to situate this presentation in the context information management as an offshoot of system theory.

The theory states that a system is an aggregation of inter-related elements, which interact with each other and their environment in order to form an entity or synergy, Martin, (1992). An explication of the structure of the theory shows that a system has its boundary in much the same way a community has its own boundary. This boundary demarcates the system or community from outside world. Secondly, a system has its environment just like no community or any arrangement such as an early warning mechanism can exist in isolation of its environment. Moreover, the system interface represents the point at which the system establishes contact with its immediate outside world. Similarly an early warning arrangement must establish contact with its immediate environment if it is to be effective. Above all, a system is effective to the extent it has input and output mechanisms just like an early arrangement must have input and output devices. As for the input device, human and material resources, raw data and intelligence reports constitute major entries into the device. These are processed to produce information upon which informed prediction as to the likelihood of conflict eruption in a place and executive decisions can be based. With respect to an early warning system for peace building therefore, the system theory offers the ability for greater insight into the dynamics and workings of a conflict-ridden community or environment more importantly in the area of predictive

capacity. Characteristically, an early warning system must be elastic as much as it is dynamic to be able to accommodate other intervening occurrences.

Accordingly, for an early warning mechanism for conflict resolution or peace building to be effective, it has to be institutional based and structurally designed in a way it can absorb input from the environment as well as releasing its output to the same environment. As an institutional arrangement, the system relies on budgetary allocation and control for its general sustenance and attainment of the objectives of the system.

As a structural phenomenon, it relies on information management processes of data or intelligence gathering, storage, processing and dissemination, all within a wider context of control and monitoring. These activities become crucial against the background of the objective of the system serving as an arrangement for pre-empting eruption of conflicts within a targeted location or community. Such a system must be robust enough to be able to sound the alarm bell of conflicts eruption in an environment, well ahead of time. The predictive ability of the system must of course be coupled with the ability to indicate measures for managing the conflicts. In other words an early warning mechanism is dynamic and intelligent to the extent it is capable of combining prophylactic and curative measures vis-a-vis conflict resolution or management.

It is emphasized that an early warning mechanism being an information system, while taking into consideration the peculiar nature of its immediate environment, must be a barometer for measuring conflict level in an environment be it local, national or international. In this regard, the interplay of the contents of the system with its predictive and prescriptive elements are no more than an index of the system ability to needs are congruent with each other, both the predictive and prescriptive hit rate of the system become high. In a situation such as this, the system can be said to be pointing at an atmosphere of relative peace. Conversely a situation whereby the system's outputs show the dominance of politics or group interests over societal needs for peace, can be said to be a recipe for and/or an index of conflict.

VIII. INCREASED RISK OF CONFLICT

In recent years the problem of obtaining early warning has received a great deal of attention not only within the United Nations, the European Union and governments in developing countries, but also from NGOs and research specialists.

However, the more difficult problem of marshalling timely, effective response to warning has received much less systematic attention. A major problem is one of political will. Early warning rarely leads to effective and timely response. One of the reasons for

this is that early warning is largely a technical exercise, while early response is a political exercise. There needs to be political will to intervene, but all too often the will is just not there. Early warning is defined as the communication of information on a crisis area, analysis of that information and the development of a potential, timely, strategic response options to the crisis (Adelman, 1998). Early warning differs from intelligence systems in that early warning is not concerned with a direct threat to the gatherer or analyser of the information, or those contemplating a response. Early warning is concerned with the prevention, mitigation or management of violent conflicts.

There is an intrinsic link between the collection and analysis of information and the intended response. In fact, the design and management of early warning systems should be intimately connected with the task of determining responses to warning. The following factors, by and large, can afflict the analysis of information (like early warning signals): incredulity, mind-blindness and shadow and noise (Suhrike and Jones, 1996). 'Shadows' are referred to as external blinkers.

IX. INFORMATION SYSTEM AND MANAGEMENT

The efficiency and effectiveness of an alerting mechanism for conflict management or peace building is contingent on the existence of functional information system. Such a system must be intelligent enough to combine capacity for providing answers to queries submitted to it with ability to make some smart predictions as to future upsurge in crises in its targeted area. Some of the examples of the queries should be able to proffer answers to conflict antecedents, who are the actors or parties in a conflict, their objectives and their modus operandi. To be able to perform these functions effectively an information typology such as indicated below is illustrative from the system input-output perspectives.

The predictive ability of the system is to a larger extent predicated on the design approach adopted with particular attention to the trade off between recall and precision and the frequency with which the system is being updated. A design approach emphasizing high recall will have less of precision hits and the converse is the truth in the case of emphasis on precision, which can be more beneficial to an information system for peace building. For instance, a situation whereby a system shows increased mobilization of personnel, arms build up coupled with discomfiting utterances by actors in a conflict, are sure indices of heightened level of insecurity. Information management is the pivot around which an early warning mechanism for peace building revolves. This is more so that conflicts cannot occur in a vacuum but against the background of the interplay of factors such as related to politics cum socio-

economic conditions and resources and historical antecedents. These factors or elements serve as warning indicators or information around which an information system for decision-making can be based with respect to conflict management.

As a process, information management is geared towards holistic harnessing of information pertaining to a subject or an issue with focus on the attainment of specific objective namely peace building. Thus information management involves data sourcing, processing and analysis, storage, retrieval and delivery. The totality of these activities combines to give value to information as a strategic resource upon which decisions can be predicated. In an effort to build peace in a future. Information management can be in manual or mechanical form with either of the approaches having its strength and weaknesses.

In contemporary global environment, information management has assumed a new dimension with the ever-converging power of information and communications technologies (ICTs) such as electronics, including computers and telecommunications. As tools, the technologies have not only made it possible for large areas to be monitored remotely but to also gather equally large volume of information or data to be managed irrespective of spatial and time limitations. In much the same way, technologies have also made it possible for two or more people to share information simultaneously with little or no cost. Such is the importance of ICTs that it is absolutely inconceivable in contemporary society to think of an arrangement for early warning for peace building outside the convergence of the technologies. The advantages of these technologies lie in their capacity for high information recall, precision, delivery, Adeyemi and Oladele (1995), all of which are major requirements for decision making in conflict situations.

X. CONCLUSION

The underlying assumption of this paper has been that conflicts are human-centred occurrences that follow certain discernable patterns and rhythms that are amenable to prediction ahead of their final eruption. Unfortunately, the preponderance of conflicts in Nigeria cannot be separated from the palpable disregard of early warning signs, which are contained in intelligence (information communication) reports to those who should act. This in itself in more ways than one confirms the belief that the concept of an early warning mechanism for peace building revolves around information system design all within a framework of information management.

The interplay of the elements of the information system with the activities constituting information communication management provides the warning indicators. But it takes not only a perceptive to identify

and understand these indicators; it also requires a political will-power to utilize the indicators for decision-making with respect to nipping the potential conflicts in the bud. A situation whereby a visionless. Rather a pre-emptive approach relying on a warning mechanism is not only cost effective but more visionary vis-a-vis peace building.

It is important to observe that peace building is a collective responsibility of citizenry of the country and in particular the security agencies whose goal is to ensure social security of all citizens. A situation whereby the different security agencies in the country work as archipelagos of their own amounts to duplication of energies and wastage of resources. A linkage or networking arrangement for information sharing among the security outfits is certainly in consonance with an early warning system for conflict prevention and resolution.

An early warning information system for peace building can only be adjudged adequate to the extent it is reliable and intelligent. While reliability is a function of constant updating, a system is intelligent if it is capable of providing the indices of conflicts in the future. It is in this regard that a warning mechanism for peace building can be described as a facility for sounding the alarm bell of a potential conflict well ahead of eruption.

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