Preventing Socio-Political Conflicts and Building Peace Block: The Role of Music

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Abstract

It has been observed that when people think in dissimilar ways and are not willing to compromise at all, conflict arises. Preventing conflict and building peace are long term processes that need to be sustainable for the full realization of human rights. In order to sustain peace there is need to prevent conflicts. The changing nature of conflicts presents new threat to man, hence the expanded number of situations to address. But since conflict emanates from the mind, it makes good sense to look at ways by which the mind could be trained to become restful. Music as an art that works on the mind has a role to play here. Music education is not only useful in preventing conflicts but in sustaining peace. The focus of this paper is to establish the role of music in resolving a spectrum of social and political crisis in the contemporary world. It examines the materials and practices of music making to reveal how music and performance can be used to nurture cultural awareness among communities in conflict in Nigeria. It discovers that music is a vehicle to promote conflict resolution, peace building and to build awareness of the necessity of peace and avoid future conflict. It recommends music education programmes to build capacity by developing and enriching knowledge, skills and values that prevent conflicts and promote a culture of peace.

Key words: Conflict, Peace, Music, Music Learning and Skills.

1. Introduction

Looking at the diverse society we live in, with so many different backgrounds, perspectives and approaches to life, it is not surprising that conflict is established as part and parcel of our everyday life. This is because people do have competing interests and competing perspectives in relation to the same issues and so it should not be a surprise when tensions exist between individuals and groups. When individuals strongly oppose each other's ideas and concepts, a conflict starts. Conflict is concerned with difference. Wang (2010) defines conflict as a difference of opinion regarding ideas, wishes or desires. This means that difference in the opinions, values, understandings and thought processes of individuals lead to a conflict. Although conflicts are not always rational, it is good to find ways to avoid them. As some analysts argue, it is simply a waste of time and energy to control conflict once it starts and thus every individual should try his best to prevent conflict. According to Chalmers (2004), it is far less costly to prevent armed conflicts than to respond to them once they have started. Prevention is better than cure is an old adage.

Conflict prevention has come to mean taking a distinctly proactive stance in response to volatile situations. Conflict prevention does not seek to end conflict per se but to replace violence or armed conflict with non-violent responses and resolution. Bacal (2011) reiterates that:

> *…..the idea of conflict prevention recognizes that conflict takes many forms. Some conflicts are destructive and have a low probability of resolution while some are constructive and issue-based. Conflict prevention is not preventing issue based disagreements at all. It is rather, reducing conflict that comes from behavior and ways of communicating that create unnecessary, irresolvable conflicts.*

Many conflicts can be seen to arise as a result of a breakdown in communication. A key issue therefore in preventing conflict is the importance of ensuring that communication takes place as effectively as possible. Preventing conflict is to

learn to say things in ways that does not hurt people because of your choice of words, tone, phrasing or body language. It is a tool for the resolution of issue-based conflict.

2. Concept of Conflict

The concept of conflict is multidimensional; it envelops a family of forms. Conflict is not a balance, equilibrium, of powers. It is the pushing and pulling, the giving and taking, the process of finding the balance between powers. Conflict is universal. Our learning about ourselves, others, and reality, our growth and development comes through conflict. The desire to eradicate conflict, the hope for harmony and universal cooperation is the wish of the unchanging world. Conflict can start anytime and at any place when individuals are not ready to accept the middle path approach. A conflict results in verbal arguments, abuses and tensions. It also spoils relationships. Conflict can also arise as a result of the misuse or abuse of power. Nothing beneficial and productive comes out of a conflict. Abati (2012) reiterates that conflicts, once they exist can end up in violence. They can also serve as avenues for change of attitudes, perceptions and interests of the combatants which can lead to either peaceful co-existence or aggravation of such conflicts, transforming them into civil disobedience and outright war. Conflict is a natural part of human existence. Understanding the types of conflict is essential to beginning to resolve conflict.

Conflict theory emphasizes interests, rather than norms and values, in conflict. The pursuit of interests generates various types of conflict. Thus conflict is seen as a normal aspect of social life rather an abnormal occurrence. Competition over resources is often the cause of conflict. The three tenets of this theory are as follows:

(1) Society is composed of different groups that compete for resources.
(2) While societies may portray a sense of cooperation, there is a continual power struggle between social groups as they pursue their own interests. Within societies, certain groups control specific resources and means of production.
(3) Social groups will use resources to their own advantage in the pursuit of their goals. This often means that those who lack control over resources will be taken advantage of. As a result, many dominated groups will struggle with other groups in attempt to gain control. The majority of the time, the groups with the most resources will gain or maintain power (due to the fact that they have the resources to support their power). The idea that those who have control will maintain control is known as The Matthew Effect. (Wikipedia)

3. Types of Conflict

There are different types of conflicts. This ranges from relationships, interests, values, leadership, personality, style, ethics, and interest to socio-political conflicts. According to Mediate.com (2012) a conflict can be categorized into five areas. By evaluating a conflict according to these five categories, the causes of a conflict can be determined and prevention or resolution strategies can be successful.

4. Relationship Conflicts

Relationship conflicts occur between friends or family members. This is caused by the presence of strong negative emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication, or repetitive negative behaviors. It is usually caused by a difference in communication styles. Relationship conflicts can be dangerous because of the capacity to lose control when emotions are involved. Relationship problems often fuel disputes and lead to destructive conflict. A clear understanding of the others perspective can help in resolving this type of conflict.

5. Data Conflicts

Data conflicts occur when people lack information to make wise decisions, are misinformed, disagree on which data is relevant, interpret information differently, or have competing assessment procedures. The way information is perceived can also lead to many data conflicts. A person's choice of which data is important can lead to conflicts with others. Some data conflicts are unnecessary because they are caused by poor communication between the people in conflict. Other data conflicts are caused by data collection, interpretation or communication. Most data conflicts are resolved through data when all parties are exposed to the same correct information.

6. Interest Conflicts

Interest conflicts are caused by competition over perceived incompatible needs. Conflicts of interest are caused when people believed that their needs should be met by sacrificing other people's interests. Interest-based conflicts occur over issues like psychological needs, physical resources, time, property, money and so on. Other issues that can cause interest-based conflicts are procedural issues (having a position on how dispute should be resolved), psychological issues (fairness, trust, respect etc). In resolving this type of conflict, parties involved are assisted in defining their interest and addressing them jointly.

7. Structural Conflicts

Structural conflicts are caused by external forces to the people in dispute. Structural conflicts are normally outside of the conflicting parties' control. Limited physical resources, unequal power or authority, organizational changes can aggravate structural conflicts. According to Ireland (2010), structural conflicts can also stem from the roles and power assigned to any given group of people. Unequal control, abuse of power and a dislike for superiors can bring about structural conflict, where a partnership doesn't work simply because of the structure of the relationship. Structural conflicts are always solved structurally by assisting the parties involved to appreciate the external forces and constraints bearing upon them. When parties in conflict identify the effect of the external forces negatively or positively on the issues at stake, it can facilitate addressing the imposed difficulty jointly.

8. Value Conflicts

Values are beliefs that people use to give meanings to their lives. It explains what is good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust. Value conflicts are caused by perceived or actual incompatible belief systems. They are often seen between individuals raised in different cultural or religious backgrounds who have differing opinions over right and wrong. One person values can be trivial to another. This type of conflict can arise when people attempts to force some sets of value on others. According to Ireland (2010), when two people disagree on what is "right", they have a value conflict. Value conflicts are hard to solve and can potentially destroy partnerships because two people cannot get past their own definitions of what is important. Value conflicts can also occur with politics, religions or simply behavior. According to Puryear (2010) conflicts over lifestyle, ideology and religion are all value conflicts. Different values should not cause conflict; rather people should learn to accommodate different value systems. Other types of conflicts by Fritsky (2010) include leadership conflict, social conflict, personality conflict, style conflict, ethics conflict among others.

9. Leadership conflicts

Leadership and managerial styles differ among individuals, and this often cause conflict in the work environment. Various factors determine leadership styles. These include personality, expectations, background, environment etc.

10. Social conflict

Social conflict is the struggle for agency or power in society. Social conflict occurs when two or more individual or group oppose each other in social interaction, reciprocally exerting social power in an effort to attain scarce or incompatible goals and prevent the opponent from attaining them. It is a social relationship wherein the action is oriented intentionally for carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of other party or parties.

11. Music and Conflict Resolution

Music is not only useful in preventing conflicts but in sustaining peace. Music can make a very powerful effect on us. According to Plato, rhythm and harmony find their way into the inner places of the soul. Music education programmes aim to build capacity by developing and enriching knowledge, skills and values that prevent conflicts and promote a culture of peace. One of such skill is music composition which can serve as a tool to promote peace. Citing Omojola (2011), Cynthia's Lament, a composition by Late Samuel Akpabot was a tone poem composed in 1963, in the year before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed. This Nigerian composer and Cynthia Boudreau, the 16-year-old white woman with

whom he was sitting, were denied service in a Pittsburgh hotel, on the basis of his race. The young woman expressed her outrage and fled the scene in tears. But the composer resolved on the spot, however to memorialized it by composing a musical tone poem which came to be called Cynthia's Lament. His musical skill coupled with the effect of music in his life prevented him from resulting into conflict.

Music can stimulate a whole range of emotions and perceptions, some forms of it uplifting and likely to work in favour of peace and harmony, other forms quite the opposite. The riots led by women in the provinces of Calabar and Owerri in southeastern Nigeria in November and December of 1929, known as the "Aba Women's riots of 1929" in British Colonial history, or as the "Women's War" in Igbo history serves as a vivid example. During this riot, thousands of Igbo women organized a massive revolt against the policies imposed by British colonial administrators in southeastern Nigeria, touching off the most serious challenge to British rule in the history of the colony. This "Women's War" took months for the government to suppress and became a historic example of feminist and anti-colonial protest. According to Orji (2000), a major tactic in the protests was known as "sitting". One of the women who played major role in keeping the protests non-violent advised the women to protest in song and dance, "sitting" on the Warrant Chiefs until they surrendered their insignia of office and resigned. Using the traditional practice of censoring men through an all night song and dance ridicule (often called sitting on a man), the women chanted and danced, and in some locations forced warrant chiefs to resign their positions. This tactics of "sitting" on the Warrants was very popular with the women in Nigeria, and was used to great effect. Along with singing and dancing around the houses and offices of the Warrant Chiefs, the women would follow their every move, invading their space and forcing the men to pay attention and listens to the demand of the women.

Another prominent role of music is its potential to affect tolerance and reconciliation between otherwise hostile peoples. Urbain(2008), in one of the few studies that has comprehensively explored the conflict transformation potential of music, provides many examples where it has been used to promote peace. This includes the concert organized by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said in 1999, uniting Israeli and Palestinian musicians (Urbain, 2008: 2). This event developed into a permanent programme, the West–Eastern Divan Orchestra, where Israeli musicians play and study with musicians from other countries in the Middle East and combine this with 'the sharing of knowledge and comprehension between people from cultures that traditionally have been rivals'. In this case music provides the opportunity for contact, and therefore the potential for better understanding.

 Music in general is neither inherently good nor bad, neither positive nor negative, in its impact on conflict resolution. Yet there are many examples where music unites peoples, to 'promote our self awareness and self esteem, mutual tolerance, sense of spirituality, intercultural understanding, ability to cooperate, healing . . .' (Lawrence, 2008: 14). Music can reproduce skills, attitudes and social relations of dominant group in the society. Hashim (2004) explains that, a survey was conducted in October 2003 to assess the possibilities for promoting development and awareness messages through music and dance, and especially focusing on disseminating peace culture. Following the survey, a workshop was held during which folkloric musical instruments were made and repaired, with bands from different community groups working together. The workshop led the band to develop messages carrying the values of peace and co-existence in form of dances and songs. Citing Hasshim(2004),

> *…..Practical Action Sudan realized the importance of indigenous cultural practices in the lives of displaced people. The Kassala staff working in Wau Nur and Kadugli saw an opportunity to use music and theatre as a vehicle to promote messages among the tribes regarding issues such as gender, health, education, conflict resolution and peace building. In particular, traditional festivities are occasions at which local peace building for coexistence between tribes and the host communities can take place. The effectiveness of these indigenous arts as a means of communication comes from their simplicity and familiarity. New ideas or painful issues can be addressed through songs and celebrations that are part of the communities' age old cultures, rather than appearing as a threat to their own way of life. The benefit of this project is already being seen in resolved conflicts between the displaced and the host community, and the breaking down of social barriers. At the same time the groups' cultural practices are maintained and affirmed with harmony rather than hostility, helping to build awareness of the necessity of peace and avoid future conflict.*

12. Concept of peace

Peace is a state of harmony characterized by the lack of violent conflict. It is commonly understood as the absence of hostility. Peace also suggests the existence of healthy or newly healed interpersonal or international relationships, prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare, the establishment of equality, and a working political order that serves

the true interests of all. In international relations, peacetime is not only the absence of war or conflict, but also the presence of cultural and economic understanding. (Wikipedia)

13. Teaching peace and non-violence

Peace education programmes aim to build capacity by developing knowledge, and cognitive, interpersonal and self-management skills, attitudes and values that prevent conflict and contribute to a culture of peace. Such programmes often seek to reinforce empathy and tolerance and an appreciation of diversity, cooperation and respect. Others take a life-skills approach, emphasizing social and emotional development and peer mediation and dispute resolution. Such programmes target both formal and informal education and take diverse forms, from developing school curricula and material to campaigns for peaceful coexistence using music, art, theatre or sports.

Children and young people must play a key role in this process - not only because peace and security are basic ingredients for the full realization of children's rights but because children are such a large proportion of the world's people. In many countries, more than half the population is under the age of 25, and often under age 18. All too often, children are seen as victims and youth are belittled as a source of problems. If their energy is channelled creatively, however, children and young people can become powerful forces for peace. Since children and young people are integral to successful peacebuilding, they must also be part of any attempt to address the structural and more immediate causes of conflict.

Many observers think of political agreements, security, economic development or good governance as key to peacebuilding and prevention. What they often fail to see is the role that children can play in these processes. There are implications for children under each of these categories, not only in terms of their potentially positive - or negative, if neglected - impact, but also in terms of how 'getting it right' will enhance children's contributions to peacebuilding in their communities for years to come. Children are considered most vulnerable as their psycho-social values are influenced and shaped by the social relationships that exist in their environment. Thus the persistence of violence compromises their moral and ethical development and the future development of their societies. Therefore in a bid to have a society where children are nurtured with love, respect for life, tolerance for differences and understanding of others: where they grow up with their self esteem intact and their full potentials cultivated, music should be included in their education.

14. Building Peaceblock with Music

Peacebuilding and conflict prevention involve many of the same actions on the ground that they aim for the same outcome. Children and young people need to be an integral part of any peacebuilding or conflict prevention strategy or intervention, in any sector, for the results to be durable. In addition, child-specific indicators should be developed to measure peace. The early stage is when prevention can be most effective, and when children and young people have the greatest role to play. To the extent that their participation can involve them in creating stability and positive life options as alternatives to violence, so much the better. One of such is music participation.

Music as a component of learning is integral to children peace education. It serves the expressive, emotional, intellectual, social and creative needs of all children. Music can play a powerful part in children's early learning experience. Simple songs and rhythms play an important role in enhancing their mood. Music is a natural and important part of young children's growth and development. If children interact with music early, it positively affects the quality of their lives. Young children develop critical thinking through musical ideas. Music helps children in learning about different emotions through listening to different type of music. They also learn body awareness through dancing and moving to rhythm. This helps them gain an understanding of their culture and music traditions around them. As they grow music is useful in helping them to reduce and relieves stress and tension.

15. Recommendations and Conclusion

This paper has been able to establish the role of music in resolving social and political crisis in the contemporary world. It was discovered that music have influence on human beings and that all manner of conflicts can be resolved with music. Music is a unifying agent and it promotes peace, harmony and cooperation among societies. Children can be helped to develop socio-culturally by given them music education. On the light of the above assertions, this paper recommends that:

- All conflict prevention strategies and interventions, both on the ground and at the policy level, should be pursued with the active participation of children and young people - in a way that is inclusive and matches their evolving capacities.
- Music should be included in all Nigerian children and youth education.
- Musical equipments and instruments should be provided in the schools to encourage practical musicianship.
- National, state, zonal and local music groups should be allowed and funded.
- Avenues should be created for inter-tribal, inter- cultural musical performance at the national, state , zonal and local levels at regular intervals with handsome awards for winners just as we have in sports competitions.

All these will go a long way in building peaceblock and preventing conflicts.

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