Social Crises in Rivers State and Conflict Resolution Strategies

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Abstract
This article examined the effects of social crises in Rivers state and the domestication of conflict resolution strategies. It adopted the used of social survey of the most conflict prone areas of the state using oral interviews, questionnaire and Security Agents' and Observers' Report. The spatial analysis of these conflicts display a radial to linear pattern; and majority are politically motivated or induced by cult-related vendetta. Conflicts are causing the backwardness and economic stagnation of the conflict-prone areas of the state. These crises has caused deformation and displacement of thousands of people, separation of families, closure of businesses and schools, and the death of over 3,800 persons mostly youths. The authors postulated that the 'social space' is a battlefield hence conflict is inevitable in human society because of class struggles and competitions for resources utilization. It opined that a vibrant and sustainable 'peace culture' is paramount in the development process. The paper concluded that these forces of destabilization are spatially functionalized hence, the surest way of 'melting the ice' of mistrust and perceived threats among the peoples of Rivers state is to practically adopt the agenda-SPDS4 model for conflict management and resolutions. The model solicits for regular town hall meetings, neighbourhood policing and mediation, transparent dialogue and alternative dispute resolution.

Key words: Rivers State, conflicts, resolution, model, peace-culture, development

Introduction

Peace is simply a state of mutual harmony between people or groups especially in personal relations. Gandhi once said "there is no way to peace, peace is the way". Every person on earth must take responsibility for their lives and contribute to the building of a 'world of peace' where people of different cultures can live in peace and harmony with one another. It is therefore imperative that, the human spirit should be transformed and trained to a culture of non-violence.

Common respect of everyone's lifestyle is therefore the basis towards universal harmony. Hence, the pre-condition to national, regional or world peace, is for people to really learn about each other, understand and appreciate each other's culture and tradition (Gangopadhyay, 2010a; Ukpere, Michael & Ajoku, 2012).

The absent of conflict is a reflection that there is relative peace. Sustainable peace is the right panacea to sustainable development. It is on this ground that the United Nations in its several deliberations at both the General Assembly and special security sections of the Security Council, have always emphasize the need for nations of the world to respect the dignity of the human life by shunning violence and upholding the tenace of democracy, human rights, peace and culture of non-violence. In 2001, the General Assembly by unanimous vote adopted **Resolution 55/282** which established 21 September as an annual day of non-violence and cease-fire popularly known as World Peace Day. The UN invites all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities during the Day and to other wise commemorate the Day through education and public awareness on issues of peace. To inaugurate the Day, the "Peace Bell" is rung at the UN headquarters in New York (UNO, 2011).

Across the globe, the very factors that often cause conflicts are different and sometimes similar. This spatial variation is a function of differences in culture, employment and unemployment levels, access to the use of the resources of the land **(common wealth),** the political fragmentations of the various units, the will power and specific strategies in resolving disputes. Others are political interests and supremacy struggles, absent of equity and justice in developmental strives, level of access to basic amenities and quality of social services rendered such as environmental sanitation across different segments of the area. Hence, conflicts are inevitable in human organizations or society because of spatial differences, spatial behaviours and spatial interactions as well as spatial aspirations.

Unresolved 'perceived threats', mistrust and spatial inequalities in development are responsible for the spatio-temporal occurrences of conflicts across the globe especially in Nigeria and in particular, Rivers state. Examples of such conflicts in world history are the internal strife in South Africa, the Communist aggression in Afghanistan, the Al-Qadar challenge, the American-Russian cold war, Southern Sudan struggles and the Darfur conflicts, the Hutus and Bantus struggles in Rwanda and Botswana, the Maasai struggle and Land protests in Kenya and Tanzania, the Los Angeles Watts Riots of 1965 and 1992, the uprising across the Middle East and North Africa, the Mau Mau suppression struggles in Kenya during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Idi Amin's suppression of the Acholi and Lango ethnic nationalities in Uganda in the early 1970s (Kurtz, 2008; Ukpere, et. al 2012; the Africana, 2003; Fishburn,2012).

Most time, the very issues in a conflict are never treated and are allowed to fester for too long. In Nigeria, we have the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), the post 1993 presidential election crises, resource control and the Minority quest, the Odua People's Congress (OPC) and MASSOB insurgencies, the incessant Fulani herdsmen and farmers clashes in Plateau, Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa states which is fast spreading to other states, Niger Delta militants attacks, kidnapping, cult rivalry and reappraisal attacks. Others are the post 2011 presidential election uprising, the Boko Haram insurgency and acts of terrorism, the anti-fuel subsidy-labour unrest, the Aso Rock villa cabal syndrome and the 2009/10 YarAdua Orchestra, and the series of politically motivated crises in Rivers state.

These and other conflicts need special strategy in order to unravel the main issues so as to resolve the conflict. We must separate politics and ethno-religious sentiments in conflict resolutions. This is the only way to build a vibrant peace culture that is sustainable in Rivers state and Nigeria in general. A vital key to understand the nature of conflicts is to examine relevant conflict styles and theories in conflict management.

Theoretical Framework

A crucial tool for the management of conflicts is to understand the various styles of conflicts and theories. We noted earlier that differences might arise between certain people as a result of spatial interactions, relationships and behaviours occurring among them. This difference is therefore the root cause of mistrust and perceived hatred which often causes of conflicts in any geographic space. These spatial interactions and behaviours can be categorized according to conflict styles. Each style is a way to meet one's needs in a dispute but may ordinarily impact on other people in different ways. These conflict styles include competing, accommodating or smoothing, avoiding, compromising and collaborating (Behrman, 1998). See figure 1 below.
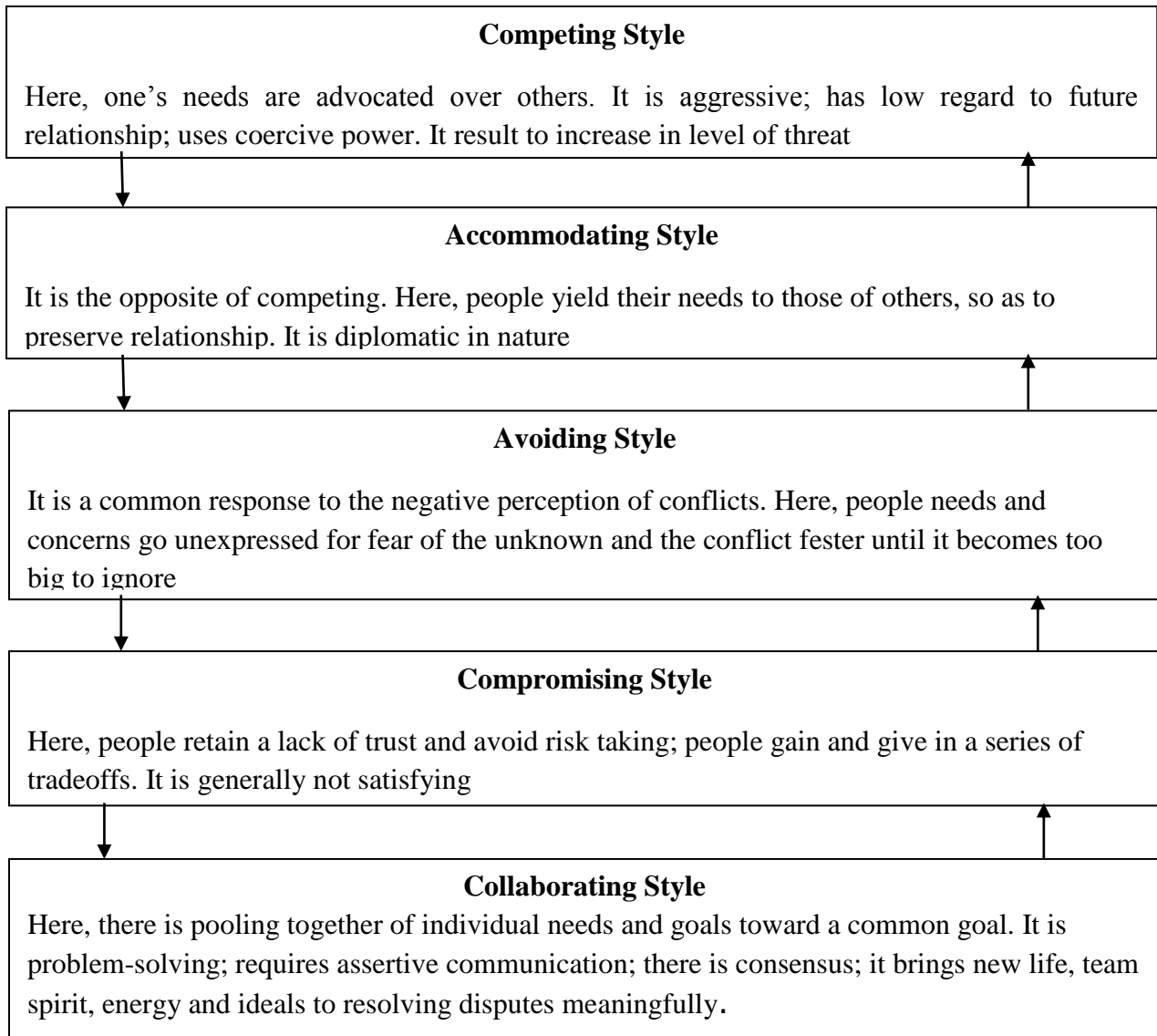

Competing Style

Here, one's needs are advocated over others. It is aggressive; has low regard to future relationship; uses coercive power. It result to increase in level of threat

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Accommodating Style

It is the opposite of competing. Here, people yield their needs to those of others, so as to preserve relationship. It is diplomatic in nature

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Avoiding Style

It is a common response to the negative perception of conflicts. Here, people needs and concerns go unexpressed for fear of the unknown and the conflict fester until it becomes too big to ignore

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Compromising Style

Here, people retain a lack of trust and avoid risk taking; people gain and give in a series of tradeoffs. It is generally not satisfying

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Collaborating Style

Here, there is pooling together of individual needs and goals toward a common goal. It is problem-solving; requires assertive communication; there is consensus; it brings new life, team spirit, energy and ideals to resolving disputes meaningfully.

Figure 1: Conflict styles Modified after Harry Webne-Behrman, 1998.

Conflict Resolution Theories

Social scientists are divided on the question of whether social conflict should be regarded as something rational, constructive and socially functional, or something irrational, pathological and socially dysfunctional. This has very important consequences on conflict resolution. There is also significant polarity among theoretical approaches. The two contending approaches are the classical and the behaviourists. While the classical approach focuses on

the macro level of analyzing the social interaction of groups, the behaviourist focuses on micro level with the unit of measurement being the individual rather than the group (Gangopadhyay, 2010a; Schellenberg, 1996).

Most theories of conflict spin around spatio- temporal considerations which are rooted on the contending factors of social, cultural, economic, religious, political, and psychological. Based on these, human conflict springs from:

1. The Human Nature itself (i.e. biological composition)

Here, psychological theorists deduced that aggressive behaviour (conflict) results from a psychological condition of stress and frustration. Sigmund Freud embraced the idea that the human mind is a veritable battlefield for three subconscious forces: the ID, the EGO, and the SUPER EGO, which interplay to make up the human personality as organized by the LIBIDO. Other psychological theorists opined that antisocial behaviour springs from the innate responses triggered by frustration (Iwundo, 1996; Flourman, 2008). It is assumed that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. ''Aggression' itself, is a condition of causing harm either to oneself or to others, while 'frustration' is the state of mind that result from the inability to obtain some specific goals" (Varua, *et. al,* 2012).

2. Other theorists argued that conflict comes usually from the distribution of wealth, goods, and class struggles. Hegel and Marx represent this group. They claim that materialism and economic class conflict occur because they are the major troubles of societies. They postulate that economic institutions determine who get what, when, and how, not human nature. Their argument is that, unequal distribution and control of wealth have created class stratification which leads to constant conflict among groups. This dilemma of capitalism which represent conflict promoter was in one word: 'Communism, through socialism' (Gangopadhyay, 2010a).

3. A third group of theories asserts that conflict emerges from cultural differences with no common commitment to national symbols and beliefs. Such spatial differences include race, language, ethnicity, religion or generational differences. These theories assumed that different cultural variables create disintegration and disruption. For instance, the internal strife within the national structure in South Africa, the Palestinian- Israeli rift, the confusion in Northern Ireland, the Communist aggression in Afghanistan, the United States of America as World Police, the Balkans and others including the Boko Haram rage in Northern Nigeria. These cultural differences result to unhealthy competitions, mistrust, domination, and constant agitations for fair-share of the common wealth (Kurtz, 2008, Lebaron, 2002; Tullock, 2009).

4. The forth category of conflict theories states that world growth, technological progress, scientist knowledge, supremacy, and consumption of resources are the causes of conflict (Jeong, 1999). The basic assumption of these theories is that, conflicts is as a result of applying scientific knowledge and inventions implies nuclear family, high divorce rate, weak family ties, and social vertical mobility contrasted with better quality of life satisfaction.

Deducing from the above theorization of conflict, there are two directions of these theories. One is that man is conflict oriented by nature; the other is that man is not a conflict maker unless his environment pushes him to do so. Grescentology believes in the later, where man is born pure good, and his social environment (parents, peers, neighbours, and other factors) have different instable impacts upon him in his everyday life (Sampson, 1999; Bankole, *et.al.,* 2006). In practical terms, the domestication of conflict theories has always assumed different levels and styles across the globe. This is due to cultural differences and differences in the nature and scope of the different theories which can either be regarded as evolutionary, revolutionary, ethno-centric, psycho-analytic or psychogenic, micro and macro, or socio-

economic in nature. In practice, Nigeria like other developing nations, have copied some of these theories with a view to resolve conflicts, but all to no avail. Some of these theories of conflict that are in use in Nigeria include the Enemy System theory, the Human Needs theory, Conflict resolution (track one and two-diplomacy), Alternative Dispute Resolution, and the Negotiation Principle (Ukpere, et.al.2008; Bankole, *et.al.,* 2006; Sampson, 1999).

Causes of Conflicts in Nigeria and Rivers State

Most of the conflicts in Nigeria are caused by tribal sentiments, a feeling of mistrust, and perceived threat to one's or group goals. Thus, ethno-religious, cultural, political, economic, and social underpinnings are responsible for conflict occurrences in Nigeria. In practical terms, the main causes of conflict in Nigeria include-the Land Use Decree No. 88 of 1992, and the subsequent denial of indigenous people to use of resources in their land; poverty, youth unemployment and vulnerability; illiteracy; misinformation and lack of communication; ethno-religious bias and tribal sentiments; the elite's supremacy and suppression tool; political fiat, cabal system and monopoly; threat to one's job, and ethnic domination of means of production; perceived marginalization; corruption, greed, lack of transparent leadership; inflation and hike in prices of commodities and essential services e.g. health care, school fees, food stuff; environmental pollution, degradation and company's acts of insincerity and insubordination; absent of basic amenities and inaccessibility to basic needs; stress, sudden shock or disappointment, aggression and frustration.

Rivers State in Perspectives

Chieftaincy tussles and land disputes were the main cause of most of the initial crises that occurred in some parts of the state during the early 1980s and 1990s. The economic and socio-cultural life of these places was severely affected. These crises led to the dead of so many people and the burning down of properties (houses, churches, schools, cars, markets, community civic centers and town halls). Example of such crises are the Okolomade versus Ekunuga crisis in Odual, the Ogbo-Abuan chieftaincy crisis that culminated into diverse degrees, the protracted Ogbakiri civil unrests, the factionalized Rumuekpe civil disturbances, the Gokana versus Okirika crises, Okirika versus Tai, the Eleme versus Ogu civil unrest, the Bakana crisis, the Okirika versus Ikwerre cold war, the Kalabari versus Okirika cold war, Andoni versus Ogoni civil unrest, the protracted Emohua clashes, the Rumuolumeni civil disturbances, etc. Others were either instigated by the government or multi-national companies who devised 'divide and rule' tactics to mis-inform, instigate and maneuver their host communities in a bid to continue their operations without regard to lay down basic rules on company-host community partnership. These companies applied oppression and suppression on the people using the instrument of government, the police and military. Example of such crises during the military era prior to 1999 include the Shell-military invasion of Ogoni land, the Kalabari versus Nembe civil disturbances on the ownership of Soku oil fields, the Shell sponsored Military invasion of Umuechem-Etche, the Elf and Agip premeditated Obagi land Obirikom crises, etc (Ukpere, *et.al.,* 2008; Sampson, 1999).

With the coming of civilian rule in the country in 1999, these crises took a different shape, pattern and dimension. From the early 2000, majority of these crises in Rivers state have political underpinnings and cult related activities. Nevertheless, there are still cases of the impact of chieftaincy tussles in the occurrence of crises in Rivers State. The decade 2000 to 2010 marks the beginning of the use of sophisticated and expensive weapons (AK-47, Machine guns, dynamites, grenades, petrol bombs, etc.) unlike the use of machetes, cutlasses and local guns that characterized the civil unrests of the decade 1980 to 1990. According to reports from Security Agencies, NGOs, Observer Groups, Social Commentators and

Researchers and Private Investigators, most of these crises were sponsored or stage-managed by tough politicians and highly placed individuals in the society for some selfish and greedy gains. As a result of economic hardship, joblessness, and out-of-school syndrome, the youths (who are the most vulnerable set of people) are the ones that are often used by these greedy politicians to perpetrate these heinous crimes against humanity. It is said that over 1000 lives and properties worth over one billion naira were lost due to crises in Rivers state between 2000 to 2011 (The Voice, 2012; Coalition for Freedom and Civil Rights, 2009).

The years 2012 to present 2018 has witnessed the highest number and level of crises in Rivers state with over 90% of these unrests caused by political tensions and cult related activities instigated by greedy politicians and some chiefs in the respective communities. These crises have a spatial dimension sometimes linear and in other times radial. Example of such crises are the Ogbo-Abuan political uprising, the Emughan cult rivalry and reprisal attacks between Iceland and Greenland cult groups in the Abua axis, the politically-induced and cult related activities in Ahoada and Omokuarea that has so far claimed over 1326 lives; the often occurring Rumuekpe, Omuduoga, Egbede, Obelle and Ibaa civil unrests cum cult activities between De-baam and De-well cult groups in the Emohua area of the state which have claimed over 723 lives, the protracted cultists mayhem in Elele, Omerelu, Obima, Ozuaha, Omademe, Ipo, and Apani area of Ikwerre area between De-gbaam and Iceland cult groups which is continuing. This crisis has resulted to the death of over 836 people mostly youths. Others are the politically premeditated and cultists-induced crises in Okehi, Obibi and Igbodo areas of Etche, the Okirika cult mayhem, and the several crises that raved the Ogoni area. Popular among them are the Lewee versus Boomu, Deeyor versus Biara in Gokana area; Kaani versus Sogho, Okwale versus Loore in Khana area; Ban-Ogoi versus Gbakee Camp in Tai area, and the Deeke (Gokana) versus Kpite (Tai) clashes that has so far claimed over 2,868 lives according to intelligent report and several news commentaries by the both media houses, Observers Group and the Movement for the Survival of the Ognis (MOSOP), (Ukpere and Amadi, 2016).

It is painful to state here categorically that the figures as given above are far below the actual causality figure. In some cases, the locals are still in search of missing love ones. Also, the authors were not allowed to publish some figures and facts collated from security agencies base on the fact that the Authorities concerned claimed that these are classified information. It is most painful that despite the high level of causality in these heinous crimes, both the State and Federal governments are doing little on nothing to curb this menace. These crises are continuing unabated. There is hardly any week in 2018 that Rivers state does not record cases of mass killings due to cult related activities. The government knows those who are responsible for these crimes, yet could not act swiftly due to the fact that most times, these same people (sponsors and instigators) are occupying strategic positions in government and that the government uses them for their own selfish interest.

This is barbaric and insane for any person (s) to use their privileged position and terrorized the very people that they are supposed to be protecting. This is the same picture across the nation where certain criminal elements like Boko Haram militia, herdsmen and religious extremists now uses dangerous and sophisticated weapons like AK 47, machine guns and bombs to ransacked villages through mass killings and burning down of entire village Even when security agencies risked their lives to apprehend these criminals, nothing is been done as one call from government will order for their immediate released.
As social scientists, it is our opinion that when people in government failed to keep to the oath they swore to protect lives and properties of citizens, then that government is

irresponsible and has breached the constitution. Such a government lacks the peoples' mandate hence, does not need to exist any longer. This is the main reason why some pundits have often argued that Nigeria is a 'failed' or 'near a failed state' where anarchy and chaos, corruption and policy failure, nepotism, tribalism and criminality rein.

Conflict Resolution Strategies in Rivers State: The Way Forward
Conflict resolution is in the long term, a process of initiating change in political, social, and economic systems with a view to building a defined peace culture in the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria. It is an analytical as well as problem solving process that takes into account individual and group needs as identity and recognition, as well as institutional changes that are required to satisfy these needs (Kurtz, 2008).

Over the years, governments, individuals and group identities have often used one form of strategy or the other as a tool to manage conflict and promote mutual co-existence, but these strategies have not really worked. It is on record that the much 'perceived threats' and issues that led to the emergent of most of the challenging conflicts in Rivers state have not been properly dealt with. Perhaps, this is why these conflicts are continuing unabated. Prominent among the approaches to conflict resolution in Nigeria are military fiat (through forceful invasion, eviction, demolition and open fire); protracted legal tussling; alternative dispute resolution (out-of-court settlements); traditional open forum dialogue; volunteer-mediating; diplomacy through official negotiations, dialogue, pardon or amnesty rule; use of spiritualism-religious rites and use of juju or spirit mediums consultations (Ukpere, *et. al.,* 2008).

Of all these approaches, only the use of alternative dispute resolution, which is a relatively new approach, traditional open forum dialogue, volunteer mediating, and spiritualism (religious rites and use of juju or spirit mediums) seemed to have worked in some instances.

Our Model (agenda-SPDS4) for Conflict Resolution in Rivers state and Nigeria
The agenda-SPDS4 is carefully designed bearing in mind the complexities of the Nigerian environment especially, the Rivers state multi-ethnic groupings. The model is a four layer resolution strategy for the management of conflicts. The acronym SPDS4 stands for sustainable peace and development strategies. The four-layer hypothesis is explained below.
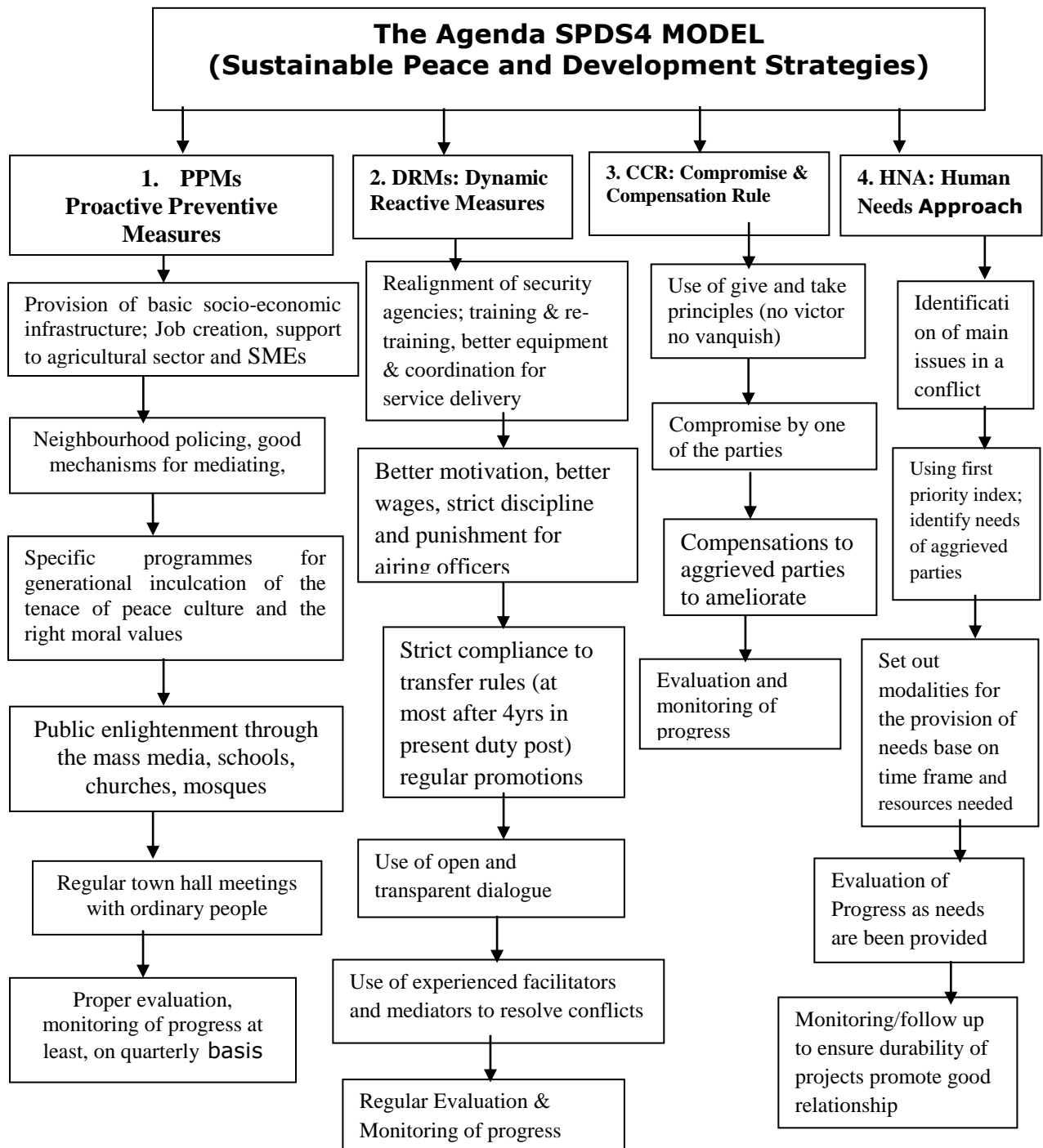
Fig 2: Schematic diagram of Model SPDS4 for conflict resolution

Each of the four key approaches of the model is explained below. Transparency, sincerity and well-articulated commitment is needed in the application of the model. Some aspects of the model may not be entirely new however; they may not be completely the same to what we used to know.

1.   **The PPMs: Proactive-Preventive Measures**

The basic assumption of this strategy is that conflicts are better prevented than managed. It is cost effective to prevent conflicts than to manage exiting conflicts. To prevent conflict from

occurring, the hypothesis suggest for the provision of basic socio-economic infrastructures that will help to fast track development. There will be comfort and people will have a sense of belonging. Comfort encourages people to belief in themselves and in the nation. The provision of gainful employment through encouragement in the agricultural sector and providing support to SMEs will promote self-reliant, job creation and the enhancement of sound peace culture.

There should be practical modalities to checkmate spatial juvenile idiosyncrasies and delinquency. Inequality in development should be avoided, as well as curbing youth restiveness and melting the ice of 'god fatherism' and cabal syndrome in the polity. Also, there should be a generational process of inculcating the tenace of peace culture and sound moral values through public enlightenment campaigns using the mass media, schools, churches, mosques, markets, and regular town hall meetings. There should be effective neighbourhood policing, and the use of 'feelers' and 'feeders', as well as the establishment of the right mechanisms for mediation.

2.   **The DRMs**: **Dynamic Reactive measures**

These are measures that help to resolve existing conflicts. This hypothesis argued that, since conflict is inevitable in human setting, practical steps should be put in place to tackle them and avoid the conflict from degenerating. To do this, we postulate that there should be re-alignment of the various security agencies for better co-ordination and excellent in service delivery. Training and re-training cum proper equipments and motivation should be encouraged. It is our opinion that conflicts have spatial dimension hence, there should be special security outfits in strategic locations across the country. They should be well coordinated with sound regional connectivity:
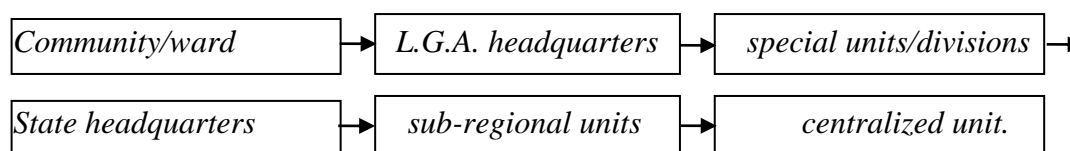
Community/ward	→	L.G.A. headquarters	→	special units/divisions	→
State headquarters	→	sub-regional units	→	centralized unit.	

 Figure 3: Model for establishing security out fits/coordinating units

The model also converses for the establishment of conflict research centres and data bank. Open and transparent democratic dialogue should be encouraged in conflict resolutions, where all parties involve is given equal opportunities to air their grievances. The real issues rather than the perceived issues in a conflict should be addressed properly. Facilitators and mediators must not be mediocre nor people with questionable characters rather, they must be people of proven integrity with the right experiences in conflict management.

3.   **Compromise and compensation Rule (CCR)**

This hypothesis presupposes that 'all rights cannot make wrong', and 'all wrong cannot make right' hence, there should be 'give and take'. Sometimes, the government or one of the parties must compromise in order for peace to reign. To compromise does not mean that one is weak. The reason for compromise is to avoid protracted misunderstanding and waste of time and resources. It is aimed to rebuild and sustain good relationship that will help transform future generations. By Compensation, this model suggest that having carefully studied the conflict and the main issues on ground, one party or the government and some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can compensate the other aggrieved party (parties) in order to end the

conflict. Compensation can come in cash or kind or by sitting/building certain projects. This will help to reduce losses and damages incurred or pains inflicted on the parties involved.

4.   **The HNA: Human Needs Approach**

This strategy is aimed at building spatial blocs of good relationship between parties in a conflict. Certain human needs of the aggrieved parties are identified, and they are gradually been provided for within a time period. The beneficiaries of these needs must be carried along, from the selection of the 'choice of needs' to the subsequent provision. This is to avoid misgiving and unnecessary suspicions. Because any attempt to foil the process, could be detrimental to the overall goal of the programme.

Conclusion

It is our sincere hope that our SPDS4 model will help to curb the several challenges inflicted on Rivers state by the different conflicts in the history of the state. After all, conflict itself if well managed, is never a bad thing. It is only an expression of grievances resulting from perceived mistrust or a threat to one's or group goals. With sincerity and great zeal, these measures can be practically operationalized in Nigeria. This will bring about the much needed culture of peace in Rivers state and Nigeria as a whole.

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