
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Conflict Management in Inter-Governmental Relations in Nigeria: Issues and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Intergovernmental relation is an interaction among different levels of government. Intergovernmental relation is oftentimes conflict-ridden, and the extent of the conflict depends on how they are managed by the actor operating at the government levels. This study examines conflict management in intergovernmental relations in Nigeria. The content analysis method would be used. This will be carried out by analyzing data obtained from extant literature on the subject matter. This paper found that intergovernmental conflicts mainly borders on tax jurisdiction and revenue allocation. Other areas of conflict were found to include domination by the centre of other units, as well as, parallel and vertical misunderstanding among units on administrative, legal, social, and economic matters. It was suggested that levels of government should introduce such a method as discussion, integration, good management of communication in other to attain a peaceful intergovernmental relations regime.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict-management, Inter-governmental.

INTRODUCTION

In the federal system of governments, inter-governmental relations have never operated without some conflict. These conflicts may be high or low, depending on government type and environment. According to Ofoeze (2002: 145), there does not exist anyone's best system of inter-governmental relations for all countries and for all times, rather it all depends on the particular circumstances of each society. They may indeed, occur in the areas of politics, social-cultural, economic, administration, finance, etc (Ofoeze, 2002: 145). To Nweke (2006: 46), intergovernmental conflict develops "when the process of the relationship among the tiers of government that possess a varying degree of authority and jurisdiction degenerate." Olugbemi, (2000:113)

observes that “the transactional process among units of government are not always smooth and cooperative, and indeed, those inter-jurisdictional conflicts seem to be the rule rather than the exception.

Be that as it may, efforts to eliminate or reduce conflicts in the system of transaction and behavior patterns among managers of hierarchically structured levels of government in the state are necessary. This is particularly so judging by the welfare of citizens and the stability of society. This, without doubt, informs why several scholars have advocated for the establishment of Inter-governmental Relation Agencies (IGRA) in the country to monitor, streamline and coordinate all activities relating to intergovernmental relations at every level. The essence of this, according to them, will be to facilitate a pragmatic approach to conflict management in Nigeria’s inter-governmental relations (Olugbemi, 2000; Ofoeze, 2002; Ikegbu & Diana-Abasi 2017; Edet 2012).

This paper will, therefore, examine conflict management in inter-governmental relations in Nigeria. After the introduction, section I will examine briefly the meaning of conflict/conflict management, section II will look into the causes of conflict, section III will examine the manifestations of conflict, section IV will examine the ways forwards in conflict management in Nigeria, while section V will be Summary and Conclusion.

MEANING OF CONFLICT/CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

As it is common with social science concepts, conflict does not have universally accepted definitions. Scholars have looked at conflict from the prism of the environment (Ugocha: 12).

Conflict is a clash of interest between two or more persons, group or bodies (Ofoeze, 2006: 6; Ihuweze 2005: 13; Ugocha 2002: 11; Akpan 2005; Duke 2017; Obot 2012). To Enendu (2006) conflict is a situation where two ideologies are asymmetrically opposed to each other. Conflict emerges when some actors fail to arrive at a consensus. Egho (2001: 22) argues that as long as group or people's background have their peculiarities, the conflict remains inevitable; and that it is only through effective management; that tensions warranted by conflicts are doused.

Conflict management, therefore, means efforts and practices put in place to reduce or militate against the degeneration of the cooperation, ordination, communication, and alliances among levels of government. According to Egwuibe (2003: 22), conflict management is policies put in place by the government and its agencies to address conflict (Nwagu, 2007).

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

So many factors lead to conflict in the inter-governmental relations system. Iwuamadi (2001) and Ofoeze (2002) argue that one major causes of intergovernmental

conflict are jurisdiction, concerning authority distribution among government levels. According to

Ofoeze, a survey conducted within 2015-2018 reveals that

92% of conflict inter-governmental relation is informed by jurisdictional factors. The same study confirms that the frequency of inter-governmental conflict is higher in the developing federal state than in developed countries, 25% of respondents voted for the above assertion, 10% voted against it while 5% are entire.

Conflict in inter-governmental relations has also been as a result of their transactional processes, and the extent of their constitutional arrangement and definition. More factors include the share of tax field, power, and functions, the quality of allocated funds as well as the unending search for an acceptable sharing formula (Olugbemi, 2000; Ofoeze, 2000: 151).

However, Wheare (1943) quoted by Dare (1979) and Ofoeze (2002), argues on the contrary that, “if state authorities, for instance, find that the functions allotted to them are too expensive for them to reform and if they call upon the federal authority for grants and subsidies to assist them, they are no longer coordinate with the federal government but rather subordinate to it”. For according to him, financial subordination makes an end to the federation. Wheare (1943) in Dare (1979) and Ofoeze (2002) argues further that both state and federal authorities in a federal system must be given constitutional power each to have access to and to control its financial resources. Each must have the power to tax and borrow for the financing of its services itself, rather than depend on a certain benefactor.

Ofoeze (2002: 152) observes that, indeed, these disagreements and controversies among scholars and theoreticians over the jurisdiction and revenue allocation are adequately reflected in the realities in the Nigeria context, manifesting themselves in the unending quarrels, controversies, and conflict over the issues of tax jurisdiction and revenue allocation, thereby making the nature of inter-governmental relations in the country conflict ridden. In Nigeria, these conflicts are of two dimensions. First, both that the federal government is dominating the more lucrative and important tax source as well as has more shares of the nation’s revenue than it really requires given its functions, or that the component units put together have more tax resources and revenues than they deserve. A substantial number of conflicts precisely over 90% of conflicts between states are informed by this factor (Ofoeze, 2002). The second dimension of quarrels, controversies, and conflicts relates to those between the states themselves with some arguing that not only that they receive little but also that some other states are receiving more than their fair share reserved for the components units (Amadi, 2003: 11). The overall outcome is mutual antagonism between the states thereby leading to conflict-ridden inter-governmental relations in the country” (Amadi, 2003: 11).

Mutual antagonism between states manifests in agitations over both the colonial and postcolonial allocation formula, over five Revenue Commission was established and rejected before Nigeria's independence. Mention would be made of Sydney Phillipson's commission, Hinks Phillisons, and Binn's Commission. None was able to satisfy the fiscal needs of the federation.

Dike and Iwuamadi (2005:120) in, Anyim-Ben, Ogbulafor, Anyim, and Chukwuanih (2016) list some of the causes of conflicts in inter-governmental relations among units of government to include;

- a) Overwhelming domination of other units by the Centre;
- b) Clashes of interest among units;
- c) Constitutional loopholes;
- d) Fractionalization of responsibilities;
- e) Structural defects;
- f) Patterns of interaction;
- g) Scarcity of resources;
- h) Alienating units from policy formulation and implementation;
- i) Party difference;
- j) Influence of primordial instinct in governance;
- k) Bad political leadership; and
- l) Problems of communication gap.

MANIFESTATION OF CONFLICTS

Conflicts in inter-governmental relations manifest in several ways (Dike and Iwuamdi, 2005, in Anyim-Ben, Ogbulafor, and Chukwuani, 2016). This, of course, depends on the societal environment. We shall here list and briefly explain some of these manifestations according to Dike and Iwuamadi (2005) in Anyim-Ben, Ogbulafor, and Chukwuani (2016) thus,

- a) Inter-governmental conflict;
- b) Executive legislature conflicts;
- c) Disagreements on politics and administrative actions;
- d) Legal disputes;
- e) Gang-up of component units;
- f) Establishment of parallel organizations;
- g) Psychological warfare;
- h) Propaganda;
- i) Secessionist tendencies and ethnic wars;
- j) Disregard of constitutional authorizes, and
- k) Withdrawal or boycotts.

Inter-Executive Conflicts

This occurs when executives within various levels of the federal system disagree over an issue. It is common in Nigeria where governors and their deputies constantly disagree. It happened in Enugu State 2013/2015; Ebonyi State in 2014/2015; Edo, State in 2016; and Abia State in 2014/2015 (Anozie, 2016).

Executive-Legislature Conflict

It occurs at the legislative and executive organs of government; and it always borders on issues of autonomy (Aguada, 2010; Duke 2018). It is common in Nigeria today and leads to poor delivery of dividends of democracy and impeachment (at worst). Obasanjo never had it smooth with the legislature. So also was Buhari on his first tenure. Both men had military backgrounds before becoming civilian presidents, which made them have a reactionary disposition toward political matters.

Disagreement in Politics and Administrative Actions

It occurs among the levels of government in the area of politics, administration, social, and security relations. It would also be as a result of the incompatibility of their ideas.

Gang-up of Components Units

Sometimes, certain units of the federation may gang up against the Centre for a perceived injustice. It brings about disharmony among units of government. In the 1990s, the Association of Local Government of Nigeria (ALGN), ganged up to reject revenue allocation formula; northern states ganged up over the issue of sharia law enforcement; the south-south solidarity and resource control; south-Eastern ganged up on the issue of marginalization and opposition to the 2006 population census.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PARALLEL ORGANIZATIONS AGENCIES

Some units of the federations do establish parallel organizations as strategic moves. This does not bring peace in inter-governmental relations. It also brings about duplication of duties (Ogbo, 2009). These agencies and organizations include; Oduduwa people congress (OPC); Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB); etc., as against the Federal Security Agencies. State Universities as against Federal Universities, State Housing Estate as against Federal Housing Estate.

Psychological welfare

This involves the dissemination of information packaged in a way that makes it palatable to the general public. It is more of a propaganda. It can be used to manipulate information networks to control attitudes and conflicts among levels of government.

Secessional Tendencies and Ethnic Warfare

Secessional tendencies always abound in a federation when the units' fuel marginalized in the scheme. Examples are the Nigeria-Biafra war of (1967-1970); ZangoKataf, indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) secessionist bids, Niger-Delta agitation/secessionist bid.

Disregard for Constituted Authorities

This is common where there is no effective constitutionalism; where electoral processes that bring in leadership id poor. Also, when leadership or authorities do not live up to the expectations of the citizenry; they lost legitimacy. This obtains at every government level depending on the system.

Withdrawals or Boycotts

Too much conflict among government levels would lead to a lack of trust, rejection, provocation, threat, etc. these could lead to withdrawal and severance of communication. It is counter-productive (Ofoeze, 2000).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN INTER-GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS IN NIGERIA: WAYS FORWARD.

Conflict, as mentioned earlier, is common in federal organizations. What remains imperatives is the ability to manage these conflicts to achieve stability-unfortunately Nigeria seems to presently lack this all-important quality. However, Dike and Iwuamadi (2005) in Anyim-Ben, Ogbulafor Anyim, and Chukwuani (2016) have listed both formal and informal approaches to conflict management to include; discussion, mediation; organization of inter-governmental programmes; integration; reparation; and interpolation.

DISCUSSIONS

This is done through organized conferences and seminars among levels of government. The Nigeria constitutional conferences and the 2014 National Conference (CONFAB) are examples.

Integration

It involves re-integrating the tiers of government especially after a major conflict such as war. It happened after the Nigeria-Biafra-War when the Igbos were re-integrated into the federal system through the (RRR) programme. Yara'dua also used the 2007 Amnesty Programme to integrate, establish Niger Delta militants into the mainstream.

Reparation

It means the payment made to victims of damages done to them (Agada, 2006). Africa has severally demanded reparation because of the crime perpetrated on them by Europe through slavery and colonialism. Reparation came to the Igbos from the Federal government after the war through the (RRR) programme. The rebuilding of Zango-Beam, North East, and Niger Delta where all forms of reparation.

Interpolation

It is a final resort. It is the use of force to manage conflict. Udi under Obasanjo's administration as an example. But it has been observed that this method tends to generate more conflicts. It leads to the constant regrouping and sophistication of the marginalized groups in modus operandi and action. (IPOB) and the militants in the Niger Delta experience this fate. It is common in military regimes and parochial political culture.

Another panacea to conflict management is the management of communication in inter-governmental relations. Hippo (2003) argues that good communication is only achieved when care is taken in the use of language; time and media to achieve goals, communication facilitates the mobilization of supports for inter-governmental relations and its programs. It enhances participatory culture among citizenry at the levels of government and general polity. It exposes people to the working of government and inculcates in them the consciousness of solidarity as well as of patriotism for national integration and growth in Nigeria.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has examined conflict management in the inter-governmental relations in Nigeria. It argued that conflict is necessary inter-governmental relations but that the managers of government at all levels could only address the problem through conflict management; and that Nigeria presently lacks this needed good management. It also revealed that in Nigeria, conflict is common in areas of the tax regime and revenue allocation- and that the controversial nature of revenue allocation had led to frequent establishment and abolition of revenue allocation commissions. Conflicts were seen to manifest in so many ways including; enter an executive conflict, inter-level conflicts among others.

In conclusion, therefore, there is no federal organization bereft of conflict, it is only through leadership ability and good conflict management method that healthy intergovernmental relations could obtain as well as stability of the state.

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