CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS, PEACE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Umaru A. Pate[1], Sharafa Dauda[2]
[1]Professor of Media and Society, Department of Mass Communication, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria
[2]Department of Mass Communication, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria

Introduction

Communication, peace and development are inextricably linked concepts that define the direction of societies. In very simple terms, communication fortifies the foundation of peaceful coexistence which facilitates the process of development in a country. Today, development is beyond structural growth and industrialization as enunciated in earlier development theories. It is positively considered as a culturally driven process that promotes the standard of living of a people within the context of their socio-economic and political dynamics. Thus, peaceful coexistence is a foundational prerequisite for development; and lack of it retards the general progress of the individual and the society. A society that lacks the culture of peace does not develop, because culture, popularly seen as the way of life of a people, provides the environment and context for development and assured sustenance (Soola, 2003). For UNESCO (2013), culture "is that set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, encompassing all the ways of being in that society; at a minimum, including art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs". This assertion establishes the connection between the concepts of communication, education, peace and development. Simply put, culture provides the context for development; without peace, there can be no development; without communication, there can be no education; without education, there can be no collective understanding and appreciation for development in society. Summarily, the concepts are inextricably linked; each one is positively joined to the other.

Communication

Communication is central in human interaction. It is a social process that facilitates exchange of ideas and feelings among and between individuals in societies. Communication takes place at multiple levels and in different forms but all with the goal of transferring meaning from a source to an intended receiver with the hope of a feedback. Communication can be verbal or nonverbal depending on the nature of the interaction. In a broader form, communication:

> includes language as well as nonverbal behaviour, which includes everything from use of sounds (paralanguage), movements (kinesics), space(proxemics), and time (chronemics), to many aspects of material culture (food, clothing, objects, visual design,architecture) and can be understood as the activeaspect of culture. Culture may be understood as themore static, noun form – knowledge, behaviour, language, values, beliefs, and attitudes learned by socialactors through experience from the time they are children.Communication then would be the more active,verb form – the act of transferring cultural knowledge, behaviour, language, values, beliefs, and attitudes fromone generation of social actors to the next (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1989 in UNESCO, 2013).

Communications can take place at the interpersonal, group or international and intercultural levels. But at whatever level, communication involves interaction between individuals who may share similar characteristics or not. In situations where individuals of different cultural backgrounds and different nationalities interact, this is easily categorised as intercultural communications, i.e. individuals with diverse cultures involved in communications across internationally acknowledged boundaries. This leads us to the subject of cross cultural communications or what is easily described as exchange of information or symbols, verbally or symbolically, between and among individuals of diverse cultures but with similar characteristics in the same country. For instance, in a country like Nigeria where there are numerous cultural groups, individuals of different ethnicities are daily involved in cross cultural communications.

Communication takes place at the personal, group or mass society level. At any level, the aim of communication is to exchange information; reduce uncertainty in the mind of the receiver of the message and establish relationships through the process of interaction. Communication is a function of the perceptive process in individuals. In very simple terms, perceptions are the lenses through which we see ourselves, others, our relationship, and the

situations we encounter. As such, perceptions wield an enormous influence over our behaviour. If we perceive something to be in a certain way, even if we are incorrect, in our minds, it is that way, and we often base our behaviour on that perception. Perception greatly influences the way people and societies mould their attitudes and much of their behaviour, and therefore play a major role in the cause of conflict and in the way we deal with it (Weeks, 1992).

Communication becomes a much complex task when it involves people across cultures because of the fact that individuals often view the world through their culturally perceived lenses, thus influencing and shaping their understanding of the world around them. According to Avruch and Black (1993): "...one's own culture provides the "lens" through which we view the world; the "logic"... by which we order it; the "grammar" ... by which it makes sense. In other words, culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves". Of course, there are several other factors that contribute significantly in shaping our style of communication with people outside our cultural groups. Some of these factors are, "our ethnic background, our family, our education, our personalities" (DuPrawand Axner, 2013).

Thus, one can argue that most of the "peacelessness" or violent conflicts that occur in the country are products of poisoned perceptions about one another by individuals within their group settings. This presupposes that addressing the issue of peace and national development must involve targeting the perceptual processes of individuals. Perhaps, it was in realization of this, that over time, Nigeria had evolved specific measures like federalism, state creation, local government administration, introduction of quota system and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC); and citing of institutions of higher learning and opening up of roads and airports all over the country. Others include: development of national media institutions, building of a telecommunication backbone, opening up of the economy to the private sector and the establishment of federal government agencies in all corners of the country and so on. At the individual level, people engage in series of relationships that cut across ethnic, cultural, religious, economic and political boundaries as manifested in activities like trading/commerce, marriages, educational pursuit, etc (Pate, 2010).

Peace

Peace is the fundamental basis of stability, progress and development. Peace connotes tranquility, psychological consonance, physical and environmental stability and the sustenance of enabling circumstances that guarantee freedom from all sources of individual and societal instability. Individuals and societies pursue peace unendingly, often, with different degrees of attainment. Societies develop in peace, cultures promote peace, religions uphold and cherish peace and individuals prosper in peace. That notwithstanding, there could hardly be a society where total and absolute individual and societal peace exist.

The alternative to peace is chaos, instability, upheavals, violence and in extreme cases, war. But, this is not to suggest that peace simply means the absence of war. Peace can be viewed from different perspectives. Scholars and activists have defined the concept and practice of peace with variations. For instance, the concept could be looked at from the philosophical, sociological, political, religious and even commonsensical perspectives. But from whatever angle, peace is an important element that commands attention from every sector in the society.

Thus, in this paper, our concern is on the role of cross cultural communications and peace education in the building and sustenance of peace for development in multicultural and diverse Nigeria. Without doubt, Nigerians and Nigeria need to strengthen the existing basis of peace in the country to reduce the level of "peacelessness" which tend to defeat, and in some cases, reverse the process of development and unity in the land. But peace in a diverse and multicultural setting like Nigeria does not occur in a vacuum. It must be consciously nurtured based on peace education infused through cross cultural communication amongst and between the peoples of the country

Understanding Peace

There are variations in the understanding and definition of peace. For example, to the philosopher, peace is a natural, God-given state of human existence without the corruptive tendencies of man. For the sociologists, "peace refers to a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms. In the case of the political science student, peace is "a political condition that makes justice possible." Operationally, Ibeanu (2004) has described peace as a "process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the wider international community". The scholar further submits that to understand peace, we should note that it:

- relates to existing conditions, rather than an ideal state or condition;
- is a dynamic process and it is possible to identify the factors that drive it;
- is not a finished condition, or said differently, it is never finished;

- increases and decreases depending on objective socio-economic and political conditions;
- can be measured as it increases or decreases; and
- is not a linear, unidirectional process, instead it is complex and multifaceted

Another scholar defines peace "as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence and about peaceful coexistence" (Francis, 2004). To him, peace connotes: the absence of war, presence of justice and development; existence of respect and tolerance among and between people; maintaining a balance with the ecosphere and quite importantly, having inner peace and wholeness. Clearly, peace is a requirement for individual and societal existence. The absence of it at any level is not desired, even though several reasons may be adduced to explain the current level of 'peacelessness' being experienced in the country.

Daily, we are bombarded with messages from the mass media on aspects of violence and 'peacelessness' that pervade the society at different levels. Additionally, we are confronted with several forms of 'peacelessness' in interpersonal and intra/inter group relationships. Why do we experience such negative tendencies? Perhaps, that should be seen as a justification for the argument that peace is boundless, timeless and never finished. In Nigeria, we can easily categorize some of the major causes of "unpeaceful" situations at the individual, community and national levels.

The Norwegian Scholar, Johan Galtung (2004) had categorized types of violence relevant to the cause of 'unpeaceful' situations in settings like Nigeria. He said there could be direct violence referring to physical, emotional and psychological violence; structural violence, i.e. deliberate policies and structures that cause human suffering; and cultural violence that manifests in cultural norms and practices that create discrimination, injustice and human suffering. He had also categorized peace into positive and negative peace. Negative peace can be equated to the absence of direct violence, war, fear and conflict at the individual, national, regional and international levels. On the other hand, positive peace connotes the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, and presence of justice and inner peace. In Nigeria, while one can say that the country is living generally in peace, it may not however be equally valid to say that the citizens are experiencing positive peace, particularly if we consider the occasional violent outbursts in the communities and cities, deprivations, violations of human rights, violent exchanges in interpersonal relations, high rate of family squabbles, exponential rise in crime rates, etc. On a general note, we can summarize the major causes of "peacelessness" in the country to include:

- poor understanding of individual and collective self-identities by the citizens;
- degeneration of individual and group values;
- poor/inadequate understanding and low respect for the human rights of citizens by individuals and the government;
- prevalence and persistence of poverty, deprivations and other unfulfilled needs; and
- bad governance as manifested in corruption, injustice, failure to deliver services, insecurity, etc.

Peace Education

One of the effective methods for the mainstreaming of peace in the society and indeed promoting the process of peace building is through the instrumentality of formal and informal education. Education is a lifelong learning process for the individual and the community through various socialization avenues. Education equips individuals and communities to respect alternative opinions, live in diverse settings, uphold justice and non-violence, and tolerate, understand, accommodate and feel for each other.

Peace education has varying interpretations depending on background and context. For instance, Raviv et al (1999) explained peace education as an issue of changing mindsets; with the hope of promoting understanding, respect, and tolerance for those considered as enemies. According to Fasokun (2004), peace education in its best form, "attempts to change the individual's perception of the other's collective narrative as seen from the latter's point of view and consequently about one's own social self, as well as come to practically relate less hatefully and more trustingly towards that collective 'other''. From her perspective, Gumut (2004) said peace education is "the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and the promotion of peacemaking skills in homes, schools and communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization". She observed that peace education concerns itself with human and social dimensions of peace. It is about the creation, sustenance and management of positive attitudes to peace among and between different levels and segments in the society.

Based on the foregoing, peace education, whether taught formally or mainstreamed informally is about the building and sustenance of positive attitudes and instilling of values and skills coupled with emphasis on elements of peace among the different individuals and segments in the society. Such actions may need to be done in a global

perspective with total contextual relevance to the understanding of the individual. In essence, peace education is expected to yield four interrelated dispositional outcomes: accepting as legitimate the other person's position and its implications; a willingness to critically examine one's own groups' actions toward the other group; willingness to experience and show empathy and trust toward the 'other'; and a disposition to engage in non-violent activities (Fasokun, 2004).

As indicated earlier, the focus of this paper is cross cultural communication, peace education and development in Nigeria. It is essential, therefore, at this point to expand our understanding on the issues at stake by examining the concept of peace building. The United Nations has described peace building as a "complex and lengthy process requiring the establishment of a climate of tolerance and respect for the truth. It encompasses a wide range of political, development, humanitarian and human rights programmes and mechanisms." Indeed, these are all elements that constitute the basis of unity and progress in the country. Therefore, it is necessary for us in Nigeria to strengthen the foundations for our peace building process through the increased inculcation of relevant cross cultural communication skills, attitudes and knowledge to transform stereotypes, expand spaces of understanding, live peacefully with one another and by extension, have a peaceful nation.

Promoting Peace Education in Nigeria

Peace education could be formal or informal. But at whatever level or in whatever context, peace education in Nigeria should be strategically designed for maximum impact. Nigeria needs that to develop effectively through strategic promotion of cross cultural communication competence and peace education by targeting segments of the society in specific ways. For instance, we may have to identify the following segments for effective targeting based on their characteristics, contexts, relevance and possible impact. For each segment, there may be some unique gaps that may be addressed, which over time may yield positive behavioural orientations and collective peace. A rough segmentation may include:

- the individual
- the family
- the community
- socialization institutions – schools, religious bodies, the media, etc
- the government and its institutions
- the country at large

The Individual

The individual Nigerian is the first and the most important target for any peace education. It is often said that the perception of the individual determines his/her state of mind and direct him/her on possible actions to take. Therefore, it is reasonable to start early enough to inculcate the values of peace in the individual within the context of his immediate and distant environments. In doing so, it is important to focus on the individual's sense of worth, his identity, his relationships with other identities, and the nature of his/her diverse environment, gender sensitivity, empathy and a general culture of respect for the other fellow.

Identity understanding by the individual reduces the level of disquiet and anxiety and "point illuminatingly to the positive and constructive importance people tend to attach to a shared sense of history and a sense of affiliation based on this history" (Sen, 2006). Unfortunately, today, many Nigerians, especially the younger elements appear to be poorly informed about the histories of our peoples, talk less of appreciating the dynamics of relationships between the various groups in the country. In fact, the increased individualization among citizens comes with it newer challenges of upholding positive interpersonal relationships. Thus, the foundation of peace building must start at the level of the individual, formally or informally, through the provision "of relevant knowledge that include: cultural self-awareness, cultural other awareness, culture-specific knowledge, culture-general knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness(of such topics as code switching or moving between languages or dialects), the cultural adaptation process, ethnocentrism, ethno relativism, culture shock, and reverse culture shock UNESCO, 2013).

The Family

The family is the "primary vital cell of society". It is the primordial school where human beings learn the 'civilization of love' (Gottschalk, 1997). A critical examination of the institution of the family in the country would reveal that the family system is experiencing considerable stress characterized by squabbles, disputes, deprivations, poverty, divorces, domestic violence, abandonment and other elements of' 'peacelessness' caused by human and environmental factors.

Ideally, the family is the number one informal school for educating the citizens on the virtues of peace. If parents live in peace, teach their children to learn to tolerate, respect diversity, develop interpersonal skills of negotiation, appreciate positive values, uphold the rights of their neighbours, schoolmates, etc, respect superior arguments and be responsible for the consequences of their decisions, coupled with inculcation of the sense of fairness, then we can say that the foundations of peace building are being strengthened in the country. But the question is: to what extent is the family institution undertaking its responsibilities in the present day Nigeria? How hospitable is the environment of the family and the larger society toward peace building in the country? Evidently, the family can be a very useful platform for strengthening the process of cross cultural communications especially noting that many Nigerian settings are multicultural and heterogeneous.

Community Level

The community provides an enlarged setting for the mainstreaming of peace education as the solid foundation for societal peace building in the country. Communities, be them physical or psychological are bound to be diverse on the basis of ideology, ethnicity, religion, economic status, political affiliations, social standing, etc. In such a complex setting, quite often with multicultural characteristics, there are bound to be frictions, caused by misunderstandings, incompatibility of values, competitive access to resources and other such discriminate elements. Therefore, in such a scenario, as we commonly have in Nigeria, it is possible that such disagreements lead to occasional breakdown of peace among individuals and in some cases, the whole community. While it may be foolhardy to assume that there can be no disagreements and conflicts in our communities, it may however be useful to know that there exist community structures that manage such occurrences and facilitate the existence of culture and climate of peace.

A culture of peace interacts with other determinants of social perception and action to promote peace building in the community. In the words of Peng (2012), the knowledge of how culturally different others perceive each other can help us avoid misunderstandings, tolerate and accept differences as well as achieve effective cross-cultural communication. For instance, among the Igbos and the Yorubas, high-pitched voices are used to make emphasis, while it is considered an act of aggression and an insult among the Hausas. Also, the Yorubas use a lot of humour in interactions to get rid of boredom and as a device to ensure the message is understood. However, such communication devices, if attended by non-Yorubas, may appear jeering; considering the laughter and outbursts that could accompany the humourous interjections.

The major instruments for this type of action are generally informal cross cultural communications and societal peace education, with focus on ethics, respect for the rights of others, rejection for violent behaviours, promotion of a sense of debate and desire for the truth. Equally, communities should be encouraged to reject corruption, domesticate processes of negotiation and the downplaying of stereotypes, cultural ethnocentrism and relativism in diverse settings.

Socialization Institutions

Apart from the school system and possibly the family setting, there are other institutions that play critical roles in the informal education of the individual in Nigeria. Few among these are peer groups, religious institutions, the mass media, civil society, work places and similar platforms that provide effective and relaxed avenues for the inculcation of peace education in the society. Such platforms have the latitude to engage in different dimensions of peace education for peace building depending on their areas of focus. Such settings are indeed appropriate for the inculcation of positive attitudes and building of skills on issues of ethics, negotiation, respect for human rights and freedoms, fight against hunger, deprivations and poverty to create a 'peaceful' environment and reduce the sources of "peacelessness."

Religious institutions, for instance, are exceptionally known for the promotion of peace and peace building. The two major religions in Nigeria (Christianity and Islam) are categorical in their promotion of peace even though there have been cases when differences in understanding and interpretation by adherents had led to violent explosions. But a careful understanding of the teachings of the two religions would show that they mean peace, promote peace and seek to build peace in the heart of man and society.

And, considering the attachment of Nigerians to their religions, there is a high chance that faith-based approach, if objectively handled can facilitate the process of bridge building, fence mending, heartwarming and eventually peace building at all levels. Of course, this should be on a continuous process to achieve the desired change in the behaviour of people and sustain the culture of peace. Thus, it is important that the actors in this area are eminently equipped in cross cultural communications for competence.

Equally, the mass media institution is an important pillar in the promotion of peace in the country. One can easily recount instances of peacelessness caused by the actions of the media. Except in very rare circumstances, the

media are generally engaged in cross cultural communications and informal peace education. Here, it can only be suggested that the media be encouraged to reorient their approaches to imbibe the spirit of "peace journalism", a concept that connotes the constructive engagement of "issues of diversity and conflict" as a continuous challenge to humanity (Albert, 2002). Advocates of peace journalism enjoin the media to reflect the dimensions of peace objectives in the content of their outputs through "balanced news coverage, positive education of people about what is going on in the divided society, controlling dangerous rumours and providing a trusted source of information for all…"(Albert, 2002).

Other platforms like the civil society and work places are reliable avenues for continuous mainstreaming of peace education for peace building in the country. Intercultural communication competences empower the participating groups and individuals and enable them to interact with cultural 'others' with a view to bridging differences, defusing conflicts and setting the foundations of peaceful coexistence (UNESCO 2013). What may be desired is for them to have a clear understanding of their expected roles in the enthronement of the culture of peace and rejection of all actions and inactions that undermine peace in the behaviour of individuals and society. To this end, individuals in this sector should be sufficiently equipped in cross cultural communications that would enable them have wider horizons and high empathy levels nationally and internationally.

Government

Government creates the enabling environment for peace to flourish in the society. Equally, government through its policies can undermine peace of individuals and the society at large. Government policies can promote peace, achieve inner contentment for the citizens and in the obverse, government policies and practices can lead to deprivations, disappointments, frustrations and general despondency among the citizens with the general tendency of making them unnecessarily aggressive and peace less. The government at all levels have significant roles in peace education as promoter of the concept, sponsor of the efforts and creator of the enabling environment where rights of citizens are respected, sources of poverty, deprivations and other unfulfilled needs addressed for the inner contentment of the citizens and the building of societal peace, "in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace".

Characteristics of Peace Education

From any angle one looks at it, peace education is geared towards peace building with the following characteristics. These are:

- speaking for a purpose;
- listening attentively and reflectively;
- promoting self-esteem, dignity for oneself and respect for the feelings and rights of others;
- speaking about oneself instead of the other person; and
- understanding possible barriers for effective communication and how to diffuse them (Fasokun, 2004)

Strengthening Peace Education and Cross Cultural Communications

Peace education including cross cultural communication is an on-going and life-long learning process. It could be disseminated formally as in the school system or informally at the family or community levels. In the school system, elements of peace education are incorporated and taught as part of existing curriculum of subjects at the different levels. The objectives of peace education in the school system focus on increasing the knowledge of the recipients, helping them to develop positive attitudes and acquire the skills to become competent cross cultural communicators who are peace builders (Gumut, 2004).It is, thus, recommended that school children in the country should be deeply and widely exposed to histories in the country to strengthen their sense of appreciation of the dynamics of existence within the Nigerian landscape. At the informal levels, which offer wider platforms for peace education, the process is multifaceted; less organized but quite effective in the gradual building of peace in the society. This avenue should equally be explored further for peace education and intercultural communications for societal development. Undoubtedly, deliberate steps are necessary to guarantee optimal development in a multicultural setting like Nigeria.