

Knowledge about Conflict and Peace

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OBJECTIVES

- To introduce participants to the basic understanding of relationships between conflict and peace.
- To enhance the understanding of the processes in addressing conflict and the search for peace.

INTRODUCTION

- Conflict and peace are different faces of society.
- Conflict and peace are ever present where there are people, depending on issues in their relationships.
- People's lives are characterized by periods of disputes and periods of harmony.
- Escalation of conflict creates a host of complicated relationships between people, communities and nations.

CONFLICT

The most important thing one should know is to understand what conflict is all about, the nature of the conflict and seriousness of the conflict. What people know generally is that conflict involves differences and disagreements. It is always unwise to rely on definitions of conflict because different situations of conflict give rise to variations in definition. We can always describe conflict in a variety of complex entities.

Terminologies of conflict: Differences, perceptions, feelings of threat, fear of failure, distribution of power, state of personal or communal security, etc. Many differences do not become conflict unless:

- One of the partners perceives the difference as an actual or potential obstacle to interest.
- People's means of achieving desired goals are weakened by differences they have with the other party.

- Resources of one party are threatened by the other party's values, goals, perceptions and behavior.

Results: Developing different degrees of hostile relationships, considering violence as a possible solution, engaging in violent action to change a situation.

There are always different types of conflict. In one way or the other there may be an interrelationship between such conflicts. This is when we talk about overlapping conflicts. It is important to know the types of conflict that are common in our communities and the country. Communities can be religious, ethnic, tribal, regional, or economic interest groups.

Interpersonal conflict: Disagreements or acts of violence between members of a family, between one family member and an individual from another family, etc.

Community conflict: Disagreements or acts of violence when a group of individuals within a community confront another group within the same community. This involves a pattern of alliance of parties to a conflict within conflict.

Inter-communal conflict: Disagreements, disharmony or acts of violence between different communities.

State versus non-state entity: Disagreement or violence between the state and sections of national society. This is represented by civil war, which is also a political conflict.

Conflict may cut across two or more of the types described above. An example is how armed conflicts can change the intensity or nature of communal or ethnic conflicts. In all, conflicts have impact on lives of people in society as summarized below:

- Breakdown of harmonious relationships in society.
- Social confusion and emergence of a culture of violence.
- Violations of human rights depending on the seriousness of the conflict (beating, killing, destruction of property and social service, displacement, abduction and others).
- Exposure of the most vulnerable groups of people to misery, poverty, disintegration of families and death.

PEACE

Peace cannot easily be defined because it is possible to find itself in relationships of conflict. Peace is a positive relationship in the family, community and the nation. There are many relationships that describe peace.

Terminologies of peace: Self-confidence, satisfaction, prevalence of security, enjoyment of rights, justice, respect of others, tolerance, flexibility in a situation of difference, perceiving problems as mutual concerns, soberness and rationality in dealing with others, forgiveness, reconciliation, dialogue, etc. Peace can be assured when:

- Problems are perceived as shared concerns and expressed constructively.
- Social, political and economic disputes are addressed through dialogue.
- Alternative options are generated in situations of conflict relationships.

Results: Constructive expression of relationships leading to positive personal, socio-economic and political changes in society.

There is the tendency to classify peace into political peace and social peace. Political peace involves mediation and negotiation between political entities such as the government, international organizations, organized political institutions or movements which are in disharmony over power and power-related grievances. Social peace is the harmony after re-establishment of normal relationships between communities after dispute over services and other means of livelihoods. Political peace plays a major role in community stability and reduction of effects of social conflicts. For example, ending of civil war in some parts of Sudan may reduce cattle rustling and inter- community killing.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict resolution is the process of all the attempts made by institutions and individuals to resolve a dispute or conflict between the parties involved. Conflict practitioners are at work on conflict in many arenas in the international scene, the domestic scene, and in communities. At the community level there are interpersonal and collective distorted relationships developed by a variety



Photo: Matthew Davies / Episcopal Life Online

Violence and destruction

Warning signs on the road between Juba and Lainya are a reminder that mines left over from the 21-year civil war in Sudan still pose a threat to lives in southern Sudan.

of events and interactions. Conflict itself has negative and positive aspects. The negative aspects of conflict involve the pain, injuries, destructions and deaths. However, the positive aspects focus on translating conflict into positive outcomes such as change, restoration of damaged relationships and sustainable peace.

Scholars in the field of conflict resolution differ on this topic. They argue that conflict cannot be resolved because it is an inseparable part of humanity. For this reason, new terms are emerging such as Conflict

Management, Conflict Transformation. All in all, these terms go in the same direction as Conflict Resolution. Their focus is on mitigating and reducing dynamics of conflict. The terms imply that conflicts have to be addressed in order to restore harmony, and consolidate the harmony to develop into a durable peace

There are two important tools of conflict resolution. They are mediation involving the technique of negotiation, and arbitration. The first falls into the category of political and social interactions, but the second is in the legal domain. Many people go for mediation and negotiation because they are based on mutual arrangements achieved through discussions and compromises. These tools are more relevant to Church functions. For this reason, our emphasis will be on techniques of mediation, negotiation and communication in conflict relationships.

RECONCILIATION PROCESSES

Objectives:

- To familiarize participants with critical steps of solving a problem.
- To make participants understand basic methods and principles of resolving disputes.
- To learn skills that will help reconciliation processes.

Critical Steps in Reconciliation

Peacemaking involves diplomacy at the appropriate level of intervention in a reconciliation process. It involves:

- Knowledge of the conflict one intends to address.
- Understanding culture, traditions, psychology and social environment of parties to the conflict.
- Identifying your targets for the re-establishment of working relationships and opening of communication channels.
- Engaging in mediation and negotiation.

What are the frequently used methods in reconciling parties to a conflict?

MEDIATION

Mediation is the intervention by an acceptable, impartial and neutral third party who has no authoritative decision-making power in a dispute or negotiation. This person assists contending parties to voluntarily reach their own mutually acceptable agreement. Mediation is an extension of the negotiating process.

The basic components of mediation are intervention, acceptability, impartiality, assistance to the parties, and encouraging a voluntary process.

Pre-mediation preparation

- Information and data gathering
- Getting parties to the negotiating table
- Conflict analysis
- Selection of venue
- Physical set up of negotiations

Mediator's role

- Explain the process and develop trust.
- Manage the process of negotiation and ensure confidentiality.
- Encourage parties to tell stories about their situation.
- Listen carefully and actively and ask open-ended questions.

Techniques and strategies of mediation

- Recognize the potential issues of conflict and agreement.
- Choose strategies and be flexible to harmonize conflict situations.
- Help everyone keep his or her self-respect.
- Encourage parties to turn win-lose negotiation into real problem-solving exercise.
- Identify issues separating the parties and convert them into creative alternatives for problem solving.
- Establish business and ground rules that must be respected by parties during negotiations.

Mediator checklist

- Pre-mediation preparation.
- Beginning the mediation session.
- Defining the issues and setting the agenda.
- Defining interests and needs.
- Generating and assessing options for settlement.
- Achieving formal settlement.

NEGOTIATION

- Problem-solving processes in which two or more people voluntarily discuss their differences and attempt to reach a mutually agreed solution.

- Requires participants to identify issues about which they differ; educate each other about their needs and interests, and generate possible settlement option and bargain over terms of final agreement.
- An opportunity that enables people to review old relationships, which are not working to their satisfaction.
- An opportunity to bargain and establish new relationships that did not exist before.
- As a common problem-solving process, is in everyone's interest to become familiar with its dynamics and skills.

Patterns of Negotiating

Two recognized patterns of negotiations do occur in reconciliation processes: competitive and problem-solving.

In the competitive pattern the negotiator:

- Tries to maximize gains within the limits of the current dispute problem.
- Makes high opening demands and is slow to concede position.
- Uses threats, confrontation and extreme argumentation.
- Is not open to persuasion on substance.
- Is oriented to ambitious goals.

In the problem-solving patterns the negotiator:

- Tries to maximize benefits within the available alternatives.
- Focuses on common interest of parties.
- Tries to understand the merits of demands as objectively as possible.
- Is open to persuasion on substance.
- Is oriented to realistic goals.

Conditions of negotiations

The following conditions are necessary for negotiations to produce results:

- Identifiable parties who are willing to participate.
- Readiness of parties to engage in negotiations.
- Means and resources for negotiations.
- Sense of urgency and meeting deadlines.
- Elimination of psychological barriers in the process of reconciliation.
- Identifying the real issues to be negotiated.
- Delegates or representatives must have the authority to negotiate and decide on behalf of the party they represent.

- Demonstration of willingness to compromise.
- Issues of agreement must be reasonable and capable of being implemented.
- Controlling of emotions: anger, fear, bitterness, vengeance and misunderstanding.
- Focusing on interests not positions.
- Inventing alternative options for mutual gain.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Objectives:

- To promote the understanding of the role of communication in conflict situation.
- To prepare trainees to deal with communication problems in processes of conflict resolution.

Communication is an important tool of negotiation and mediation. It can contribute to increased or reduced tension in the process of negotiation and mediation. What is important in this topic is to overcome difficulties of communication in conflict situations. This session examines the relevant aspects of communication.

Emphatic listening

This expression means listening actively with understanding. There are many benefits of emphatic listening:

- Enables the understanding of the other person's point of view and deal more actively with the problem.
- Allows each party to clarify their own thinking about the problem.
- Provides an opportunity for parties to air out anger leading to reduction in tension.
- Gives the impression to parties that someone is interested in them and their problem.
- Encourages cooperation of parties to a problem.
- Develops an active state of mind.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means re-stating in your own words what the other person has said. It is useful in that it:

- Enables the other person to know you are listening and trying to understand what is being said.

- Facilitates good communication and helps to identify truth from statements.

Examples of paraphrasing are:

- “Let me make sure I am understanding you. You are saying...”
- “So the way you see it is...”
- “You felt I was being unfair to you when...”
- “You believe...”

Golden rules of paraphrasing are:

- Keep the focus of the person you are paraphrasing.
- Do not evaluate or judge.
- Be brief and condensed in restating.

Communication Openness

Communication openness is described as:

- Being keen to hearing the perception and needs of others even if you disagree with them.
- Efforts of the listener to avoid situations where parties are concerned with their own positions.
- Means of extracting as much information as possible from both sides in order to make way for expanding the options to resolve the problem.

The question is, How can we best use communication openness in negotiation and mediation? The following items are golden rules of how to do it:

- Ask as many questions as possible such as “What,” “Why” and “How.”
- Do not assume you know exactly what the other side means.
- Do not make others defensive by abruptly disapproving or contradicting their statements.
- Resist the temptation to gain the upper hand by chasing weakness in the other person’s point of view and the reasons behind it.

Examples are:

- “I am not sure I understand your idea. Tell me more.”
- “How would that work...?”
- “Elaborate that point further...”
- “Tell me what you have in mind...”
- “Could you give me a specific example...?”

Dealing with Threats and Anger

Threats and anger are familiar scenes of reconciliation processes because emotions are always high, especially during the competitive pattern of negotiations. Threats and anger are dealt with at two levels.

Dealing with your own anger

- Recognize the underlying causes of your anger.
- Try to identify the other emotions you are experiencing such as fear or frustration.
- Acknowledge and accept your anger. Think about it. Do not deny its presence or refuse to deal with it. Otherwise it may come back and you may direct it at the wrong people.
- Express your anger when it is necessary, safe and appropriate to do it. Otherwise, anger makes problems worse.
- If you want to solve the problem that caused your anger, separate it from the people.
- Avoid making important decisions when your anger controls you.

Dealing with the anger of others

- Try to determine whether the anger is directed at you personally. Many angry people had those feelings inside them before you came along. You might simply have been in a wrong place at a wrong time.
- Adopt a calm style yourself and avoid getting into an angry response.
- Acknowledge and affirm the other person's anger.
- Encourage the other person to talk about his/her anger until it is no longer controlling the person.