

**BRIDGING PEACE BETWEEN HERDERS AND FARMERS
IN NIGERIA. A STUDY OF *BORDERLINE* ON RADIO
NIGERIA, ENUGU.**

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Abstract

In the past decade, Nigeria; a nation state with a population of about one hundred and sixty million people and over two hundred and fifty ethno-linguistic, socio-cultural and religious groups, had suffered pervasive violent crises with devastating impacts on the peaceful co-existence of its citizens. These crises which were either fuelled by seemingly incompatible interests and values or mere hostilities, had resulted to major outcomes such as premature deaths, gruesome casualties and general stagnation in the socio-economic growth of the communities affected and the nation at large. Several reconciliatory measures and mediation processes have been applied by the Nigerian government, as well as the international community but the results are yet not impressive. This paper presents drama as an interventionist tool for conflict resolution and social reconstruction. Using qualitative methodology, the selected radio drama attempts using a dramatic approach to expose the various perspectives to the prevalent issues of conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria; and calls for a peaceful co-existence amongst the ethnic groups, hence, advocating for dialogue and negotiations rather than violence and aggression as effective ways of achieving lasting peace in the nation.

Keywords: Conflict, Drama, Nigeria, peace, Radio.

Introduction

Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. It is as old as man and has pervaded the life cycle of most nations, communities and individuals. Man's survival on earth is a function of how the various features of conflicts are managed or resolved. A tactful management of conflict brings about change in the positive direction while the reverse leads to extreme crises, violence and utter destruction. Considering the magnitude of horror, loss and storm that engulfed Nigeria over the Biafran secessionist bid, it is expected that the post war years would be calm and peaceful. In retrospect, the nation has recorded countless violent clashes such as the Niger/Delta militancy, Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism, Farmers/Herders crises, religious and inter-ethnic conflicts. Basically, these conflicts arose as a result of unlimited resources, ownership of land for farming, fishing, oil and solid mineral deposits or in the defence of the community's pride, people and properties. According to Okeke Isa,

Wars, violence and insecurity usually occur as a result of delay in the application of right thought or the neglect of addressing every injustice that affects a group of people or the human families due to deprivation, isolation and neglect or lack of action that creates frustration due to the collapse of the economic condition of the majority of the people. (1)

Conflict is not static in nature; it undergoes different stages before culminating into violence. Lederach believes that "conflict is not a static phenomenon, but is expressive, dynamic and dialectical. Each has its dynamics characterized by different stages and phases of change and transformation" (65). There is a pre- conflict stage; a period when goals of the parties involved are incompatible and their

issues are yet not known by the public but communication is undermined between the parties. The next stage is the point where the conflict becomes manifest with confrontations. This stage is characterized by strained relations, polarization and occasional fighting. The third stage is the peak of the conflict which features wars, killings, injuries, loss of properties, destruction of infrastructures and population displacements. Conflict gets to its peak when issues are not promptly attended to.

The effects of conflict can be favourable or unfavourable. That notwithstanding, the negative outcomes of violent conflicts in a nation's socio-economic system cannot be over emphasized. As Awori in Adetula Victor plainly declares;

It is now widely accepted that violent conflict is the major hindrance to the development of African continent. It inflicts human suffering through death, destruction of livelihoods, constant displacement and insecurity. Violent conflict disrupts the process of production, creates conditions for pillage of the countries' resources and diverts their application from development purposes to servicing war. Violent conflict is thus responsible for perpetuating misery and underdevelopment in the continent. (383)

The massive massacre of innocent citizens, bombings, kidnapping and abduction of expatriates have succeeded in putting fear in people, thus turning the people's attention from creative productions to creative destructions. Also, the democratic and political developments are disrupted as resources mapped out for socio-economic developments are overly diverted into rebuilding the nation. In accordance with these views, Adetula submits that, "conflicts have the capacity to severely constrain development endeavours by destroying infrastructure, interrupting the production process and diverting resources away from productive uses" (385).

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The extreme and the most dehumanizing result of violent conflict is loss of human lives, as many are killed by direct military action or other means of violence as well as famine and starvation. Likewise, Francis adds that “the worst form of armed conflict includes mass murder and genocide against unarmed civilians” (20). Many people die as a result of inadequate medical attention and trauma. Women, children and the aged remain major victims. In some cases, the survivors of this violence often retain its physical and psychological scars while many are forced to migrate from their homes either as refugees or internally displaced persons. (IDP’s).

In pursuit of peace and national integration, the Nigerian government had made frantic efforts to tackle the issue of violent conflicts in recent times. These include; the deployment of special armed troops, establishment of camps for internally displaced people and the relocation of the military headquarters to Maiduguri. Also , the international community, non- governmental bodies and African Inter-governmental collective security organizations have made impressive moves towards the maintenance of peace, management and resolution of conflicts but all proved ineffective and most times, counter-productive. The big question now is, “how do we effectively manage our ethnic and religious differences and establish lasting peace amongst conflicting groups in our nation”?

The process of peace making and reconciliation as Omotosho Mashood declares, “is basically one where there is restoration of good relationship between individuals and groups. It is rooted in individuals but has lasting effects on social harmony in the state” (143). The true test of a nation’s stability is not in the absence of conflicts, but the effective management of such conflict situations in a way that ensures better understanding, mutual respect, trust, co-operation and Integration of the divergent views of the opposing

parties. Going by these assertions, it is evident that there's need for the use of non-violent approaches such as grass root based proactive activities to put violence in check. To achieve this, effective communication, mediation and conciliatory strategy will play vital roles since this will demand the sharing and exchanging of information between individuals, groups and potential parties trapped in a conflict situation. This helps to remove doubt and suspicion and contribute to the whole process of confidence building. Francis David further explains that;

Communication relates to the presence and sharing of accurate information about a conflict situation, being able to talk about feelings and concerns of parties, speaking about what parties would like to change, and discussing the nature and type of conflict, touching on the positions interests, need and fears of parties. Poor communication or the absence of communication about these and other subjects, or a misinterpretation of the needs and feelings of another by conflict parties can easily lead to the escalation of conflict. (103)

These statements above suggest that effective communication brings about social change and development whilst characterized by flexibility and diversity of communication techniques used in addressing problems. Some of these techniques according to Obadiogwu Cyprian include; "information dissemination and education, behavior changes, social marketing, social mobilization, media advocacy, communication for social change and participatory development communication. Theatre is one of such fields."(10)

It is against this background that this study analyses the issue of the farmers and herders conflict in Nigeria using the radio drama

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Borderline, which captures succinctly the violent situations in Nigeria through narratives, commentaries and satirical parodies as a means of conscientizing the masses and even the authorities, who sometimes create enabling environments for crisis. The radio drama graphically points out greed and selfish interests as the causes of these violence and as well, captures the negative impacts of these crises on the nation's economy. The drama carefully interrogates the theme of disunity and egotism amongst Nigerian citizens and ethnic groups, thus advocating for peace through the destruction of all ethnic divides and sentiments.

The Concept of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

The term conflict can be described as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups which are usually immersed in the insatiable human nature. It is simply a fight, struggle and quarrel over something or situation. As a social reality, it comes in the form of war, dispute struggle, clash, misunderstanding and opposition with one another and is always wrapped up in violence, division and disruption. Alagoa in Ebo Emmanuel defines conflict as the “opposition of interest, contradictions of conditions, differences of views between individuals, groups, classes, nationalities or states.” In other words, conflict is any condition that threatens the peace and security of a society. Johnson David and Johnson Frank proclaim that conflict can also arise when there are “scarcities of certain resources such as power, influence, money, time, space, popularity, position and rivalry” (303). The post-modernist theorists see it as a by-product of diversity and power contest. Most conflicts usually occur when people do not have direct access to the truth or the facts about the real situation but

rather view things from a subjective position. They rely solely on the information they have, develop a story about what has happened and continue to act into a social situation out of the story they have created. This perspective shows that conflicts have political, religious, economic and cultural influences which determine how they are perceived, defined and managed. Conflict hence, can be constructive or destructive as the case maybe, depending on how it is handled. It can be positive and is necessary for good decisions and for growth, change, learning and intimacy to occur.

Conflict resolution on the other hand; is a process or method of transforming a conflict into a peaceful interaction between conflicting parties. This, in a more theoretical term differs from the general category of conflict management which includes efforts and interventions to limit, contain and regulate conflict. It refers more, to an alternative means of reconciliation rather than just pacific settlement of dispute. According to Christopher Miller, “conflict resolution is a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflict through constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict”. (8) This simply connotes finality, where conflicting parties are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and also goes to say that, a conflict is resolved when the basic needs of parties have been met with necessary satisfiers and their fears have been alloyed. Conflict resolution as an academic field of study and research was born out of the need to apply non-coercive and participatory methods of intervention in conflict situations. It emphasizes co-operation and collaboration instead of competition. It achieves this through controlled communication, consultations, workshops, facilitations, mediation and conciliations.

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The radio drama analysed in this work is a typical example of a non-coercive conflict resolution initiative targeted towards addressing the conflicting issues between the farmers and the Fulani herders in Nigeria. This radio drama project made use of familiar scenarios, language and a more accessible medium to communicate to the conflicting parties the dangers of their actions. As a conciliatory tool, it tries to build a consensus by facilitating knowledge which both parties might be ignorant of, in order to achieve a positive change.

Conceptual Framework

This work is hinged on the concept of development communication, which was first coined by Nora C. Quebral in 1972 and later modified in 2002. The core of this idea is using different mediums and communication tools to bridge differences, create awareness thereby inducing sustainable growth and development in human community. According to Quebral, this is “the systematic use of the art and science of human communication to persuade specified groups of people to change their habits, lifestyle or ways of thought”. (55) This concept primarily aims at persuading and gaining influence over the audience using any possible communication channel that will guarantee result. It is audience oriented with its main target on rural and farm folks. This concept continues to evolve till today with different unique approaches and perspectives in the field. Development communication does not only probe into the cause of action but strives to present alternative ways of ensuring lasting change. According to Obadiogwu, “development communication is a process of eliciting positive change (social, political, economic, moral, environmental etc.) through an effective exchange of pertinent information in order to induce people to action”. He went further to say that this process involves: “information dissemination on developmental schemes/

projects, communication for eliciting positive change, interactive, feedback on development issues and feedback communication for eliciting change”.(11) This concept had been widely practiced in Africa for developing rural communities, using theatre, dance and music. Theatre for development has been explored by networks of development NGO’s and other international bodies such as UNESCO, world bank etc to reach out to the grass root. The radio drama chosen for this discourse is a project of UNESCO. Radio poses as the most effective medium for development communication. This is because it is cheap and has a wide reach of audience, as recent research has proved that seventy-five percent of households in rural areas have access to radio.

Drama as a tool for Conflict Resolution

Drama is an art form that mirrors and explicates human actions in life. Wilson in Ebo defines drama as a “mirror of its age; revealing the prevailing attitude, under assumption and deep seated belief of a particular group of people”. (560). The artist uses drama to expose and analyse tensions, conflicts, contradictions and other issues of interest in the society in order to address and proffer solutions to them. Commonly, drama is associated with performances on stage but in the context of this work, it refers to a creative form and appropriate communication style of processing the experiences of conflict thus, expressing view points and adopting innovations for change. Its ability to entertain and educate makes it possible to probe into the conscience of its audience and make lasting impressions in them. Obuh in Nwafor Friday thus observes that, “drama’s impact is also direct and more immediate than other forms of expressions” (88). The immediacy and concreteness of drama also qualifies it as a form suitable for inculcating social, moral and political values.

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Drama as a communication and mediation tool, assumes a utilitarian potential for combating social crises and promoting social reforms in the society. It achieves this through the use of its performance idioms such as plot, theme, setting, character, language and action that give insight into real life situations through mediums such as oral narratives, songs, dance and modern communication strategies like participatory video, community television and radio. The idea of drama as an alternative communication tool is not necessarily based on its entertainment potentials alone, but in its ability to create a platform where societal problems can be radically examined. It is an avenue through which certain issues that are affecting the society or problems that the society is faced with are unveiled. Drama therefore, acts as a third party which assists the conflicting parties to admit that they have a problem which they are both committed to solving thereby, creating an enabling environment for the parties to carry out dialogue sessions leading to the resolution of an existing or pending conflict. Drama works on common themes and draws attention to neglected points in a bid to help both parties arrive at common grounds with a view to overcoming their fears and satisfying their real needs. Its potency as a tool for conflict resolution is no longer in doubt. This is made evident in cases such as the Kimirithu theatre of Ngugi Wa' Thiongo, Murewa popular theatre workshop and the Al- Rwandan Ballet Isonga where dance and songs were employed to mediate in the conflict between two ethnic groups, Hutsis and Tutsis in the Rwandan crises.

In recent times, drama has left the confines of the theatre building and penetrated the society through mediums such as television, radio and other forms of mass media in other to ensure maximum

productivity. Amongst all, radio remains the most effective means of transmission because of its wide area network. Its signals penetrate the rural communities and it is quite affordable as well as flexible. Radio, commonly referred to as the blind man's media is auditory in the physical dimension but very powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension. Also, radio has the potential of reaching millions of listeners at the same time but speaking to each of them individually thus, making it a personal medium. Radio drama takes place in the mind of the listener, thus, makes it possible for listeners as in no other form of drama, to enter into the minds of the character to have sense of thinking their thought and feeling /their feelings. Radio drama makes use of sound, dialogue and music to paint a convincing picture of real life in the minds of the audiences. It possesses unique qualities that make it distinct from other forms. It cuts across time and space without limit therefore, creating environments without restrictions. It can go extra miles to evoke images that are impossible in real life or even stage or television. It is persuasive in nature hence, targets attitudinal and behavioural change by focusing on the psychological characteristics that affects a person's perception and response to issues.

The Herders and Farmers Crises in Nigeria: an Overview

The most notorious conflict in Nigeria today is between the indigenous farmers and the Fulani herdsmen across the states in the nation. The Fula people popularly known as Fulani in Hausa language are diverse in culture and widely dispersed. Majority of them are nomadic in nature, herding cattle, goats and sheep across the vast dry and wetlands in the country. They are rated the world's largest nomadic group. The dispute between the farmers and herders began as the farmers accused herders of failing to control

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their cattle and of damaging their crops. In turn, the Fulani accused farmers of stealing and killing their livestock. The crux of their disagreement which triggered off the dispute include: land and water use, obstruction of traditional migration routes, livestock theft and crop damage. Their conflict is not entirely new in the nation, thus; it existed but was restricted to the northern part of Nigeria and later spread to almost every part of the nation due to environmental devastation which led to the widespread migration of the Fulani from the north. There are recent records of herdsmen attacks on farmers in Nigeria, especially in the eastern region and Middle Belt. Some of the earlier reports include; an incidence where a Fulani herdsman was accused of murdering one Benjamin Chegue on his farm in Isoko North local government area of Taraba state. In Offa in Oyo state, Nimbo in Uzouwani local government area of Enugu state there are similar gory tales. Such attacks are also reported in Nasarawa and Benues states and the and very recent gruesome and unending attacks and massacre in Benue state appear to be unprecedented.

According to the Global index report as quoted by Toromade Samson, Fulani militants were responsible for the death of many people in 2014 thereby, making them the fourth deadliest terrorist group in the world. Based on this report, the estimated death toll of approximately 2,000 to 3,000 has been recorded between years 2016 and now, with about 60,000 displaced people. The Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore (MAKH) and Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN); the two Fulani socio-cultural groups owned up to being responsible for most of these attacks arguing that their human rights of freedom of movement have been

violated over the years as a result of the restrictions placed on the conduct of their business. They openly acclaimed that the attacks are reprisals for the loss of over a thousand Fulani people and millions of cattle in state sponsored military attacks. On the other hand, other perspectives to the farmer/herders crises exist. While some people argue that the random Fulani herdsmen are not associated with sophisticated arms, thereby, linking the incessant attacks to religious causes hinged on Islamizing the nation; others perceive it as a political strategy for sabotaging the ruling government by unscrupulous politicians.

Synopsis of *Borderline*

This is a serial drama of ten episodes aired on Radio Nigeria Coal City 92.9fm, Enugu state between October and December, 2017 at 9.15pm every Tuesday and Thursday. It was a project of a non-governmental organization known as Society for the Rights of the Excluded and Disempowered (SOREX) and was fully funded by the European Union. The story presented a community called Mkpapa village which woke up one day to notice strangers living amongst them. Their efforts to eject the Fulani family from their village proved abortive as they insisted that Chief Udemba, a council member in that community sold the land to them (though without the knowledge of other village authorities). Many years later, the Fulani community began to increase as new sets of their brothers, wives and children invaded the community with their livestock. The villagers of Mkpapa community who were mostly farmers began to complain bitterly as the Fulani herdsmen made their cattle feed on their farms, thus; destroying their crops. This issue brought the king of Mkpapa community, his council members and the representatives of the Fulani community to several meetings but the Fulani men

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strongly maintained that the welfare of their herd is of utmost importance to them. The king, being a patient and peaceful man continued to engage them in peaceful deliberations to ensure mutual co-existence. The persistent destruction pushed the youths of Mkpara community to go on a rampage, inflicting injuries on some Fulani men. In reaction to this, the herdsman launched a reprisal attack which was very bloody. The crises escalated when the unscrupulous Chief Udemba and his cohorts capitalized on the chaos on ground to maim their own enemies who were also co-villagers. The whole attacks and killings were blamed on the Fulani men until the truth came to limelight.

Conflict Resolution Initiatives in *Borderline*

The episodes of this radio drama are quite entertaining, action-packed and solution oriented. This drama paints a similar picture of the actual conflict scenario between the farmers and the herders in Nigeria. It carefully highlighted the various possible causes of their dispute. The drama clearly pointed out that their dispute was triggered off by the inconsiderate acts of the Fulani men who were only concerned about the welfare of their livestock. The herdsman were adamant and refused to act in the interest of their host community who in resentment attacked them and their livestock. This is simply the exact situation in the country today. The play reveals that the major cause of conflict is the insensitivity of groups and their undying desire to satisfy their selfish interests. This was captured in the comment of a character in the play, thus;

Duroyi: There's a limit to what we can take in this community. They know that our cows mean everything to us and they went ahead to kill them. They must pay.

From this excerpt, what matters most to a Fulani herder is the welfare of his cows and not human lives. They refused to consider the fact that the farmer's farm is also very important to the farmer as his source of sustenance and livelihood. The play also drew attention to another possible factor that could also contribute to the escalation of the conflict using the character of Udemba. The play highlights the possibility of having a villain who sabotages the community and heaps the blame on the herdsmen. Chief Udemba and Udoka took advantage of the dispute to perpetrate more evil in the community. They robbed people of their possessions and kidnapped and even killed the prince of the community. This goes to reveal that there could be more underground forces behind the crises between the herders and farmers. The discovery of these forces is paramount since fact finding is the first step in the mediation process which allows the intermediaries to assess the situation and proffer solutions to the parties. The whole narrative of this radio drama bothers on the need for understanding and mutual tolerance between the different ethnic groups in order to enhance harmonious inter- ethnic relationships. Its overall goal is to support co-existence and reconciliation through the media's intervention. This is exemplified in the intermittent theme song that goes thus;

Refrain: Can we live in peace, can we live in harmony
(2x).

Na because say I be hausa oo, na the reason no one
see me so.

Shey na because say I be Igbo, you dey tell me
make I park and go oo.

Fulani, Yoruba, Hausa, Delta, let's come together
and live as one.

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All we need is love; all we need is peace and
harmony.

Tell me wetin you dey see oo, when you dey look
at me?

Me, I be your brother oo, me I be your sister oo.
I say me I be your neighbor oo, so wetin we dey
fight for?

Radio drama being an entirely audible entity relies on music for the depiction of theme and plot in other to compensate for the lack of visual elements. Through the above theme song which occurred intermittently in the radio drama, the audiences are consciously sensitized about the need to see one another as brothers or sisters irrespective of tribe, social class and differences, in other to achieve lasting peace in the nation. This therefore, calls for an urgent need to bridge the indigene-settler differences and maintain an atmosphere where people will be accepted as they are and also be treated with some level of love and respect. This was exemplified in the play through the character of Ochiora, who against all odds tried to bridge the communication gap between the Mkpapa and Fulani communities. Here is an excerpt of her conversation with Gimbiya.

Ochiora: Gimbiya! Gimbiya!! I can hear your voice from afar when you're talking. {laughs} You can even make a good conductor oo.

Gimbiya: Awww Ochiora! I notice say your shop never open today, hope there's no problem?

Ochiora: There's no problem. I was summoned by the Igwe this morning because of the theft in my shop days ago. From there, I went to pay my children's school fees.

Gimbiya: I like am for you very much. Upon the thing wey happen yesterday, you still pay am for school fees? Ahhh!

School dey very important to you as cow dey important to mallam.

Ochiora: Education is even more important than cows of course. Knowledge is power and that is why we make sure that we empower our children, so that they can be better than us

Gimbiya: Ahhh..., my daughter Abeye. She wan go am for school but Alhaji say make she no go am for school.

Ochiora: why now? Education is very important oo. Gimbiya let me tell you now, if a quarter of your people will be educated, it will get rid of some of these attitudes that put your tribe in bad light in front of others. I'm telling you.

Gimbiya: Abeye na girl. She dey twelve years old and go soon go am for her husband's house.

Ochiora: {shouts}, no no. no. she's too tender. She should be thinking of going to school. She needs to better her future and be independent. If Abeye goes to school, she can provide for you and her father and better your lives and even stand up in the midst of her peers and make valid contributions not marriage. She's too small for marriage.

Gimbiya: Gaskia! You are very right. I go think about it.

Ochiora, in the above dialogue presents education as a major tool for enlightenment and total transformation. Education is key to the attainment of national peace and unity because some causes of the crises in the nation are rooted in ignorance and misinformation. This point was further buttressed in the drama through the character of Joro, the son of Alhaji Danlami, the oldest Fulani man in Mkpara Community. In his speech, he objectively condemned the evil actions of his kinsmen and blamed illiteracy and poor

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communication as major causes of their differences. Here's an excerpt of his discussion with his teacher:

Emeka: How do you see the conflict that exists between your people and Mkpara community and what do you have to say about it?

Joro: I only see one people here- our people. We, Fulani know the truth but hardly say it. We must try to close the communication gap. The gap is too much sir. The truth is that we have similar sort of conflicts in our homes or various groups. Conflict in itself is neither positive nor negative. The way we deal with it produces the positive or negative consequences.

Conflicts are usual occurrences in daily existence but the approach to its management is what makes the difference in outcome. For effective management of conflicts in this nation, ethnic groups should make conscious efforts to deliberate over their differences and eschew violence. The radio drama went further to present dialogue and negotiations as the best options to the realization of peace in any conflict situation. The actions of the king in the drama are highly commendable. The character painted a picture of what a true leader should be. As a ruler, the king maintained peace by always engaging the Fulani community in deliberations in order to avoid tension. He also dissuaded his subjects especially the youths from violence with his mantra, "Violence begets Violence". This sets the cue for religious and community leaders in the nation to follow. They should thus, avoid sentiments and guide their subject aright.

Finally, the narrator at the end of the play summarized the whole message of the play in this excerpt:

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Narrator: Conflicts are just normal. They are neither good nor bad in themselves. It is the way we deal with conflicts that produce good or bad results. When we co-operate with others during conflicts, we can transform the situation and win together but when we contend with others in conflict, we escalate the situation and destroy one another. We must therefore learn to co-operate with one another in matters of conflict.

Conclusion

Peace is fundamental to national integration and should be pursued at all cost. There is need to give attention to radio as a viable medium for effective communication and sustainable development in human communities. In summation, one may assert that drama has proven its strategic position as a non-violent medium and competent tool for conflict resolution which uses the radio medium to suitably communicate ideas and concepts which are expected to eventually culminate in behavioural change. Therefore, this research recommends that the Nigerian government, international organizations and other non-governmental organizations should invest on, and encourage drama projects, especially on television and radio in order to ensure a conflict and violent-free nation.

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