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COMMUNICATING FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

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About Credo Advisory

Credo Advisory is a strategic communications firm that specializes in designing and implementing strategic, operational and tactical communications initiatives. We provide a full suite of communications support to our clients, which include public communications and advocacy, government relations, media relations, crisis communications, digital communications, and capacity building.

Our mission is to develop bespoke communications products, activities and campaigns built on knowledge, research and industry insights. With our ability to communicate effectively with diverse audiences and stakeholder groups, Credo's mission is to provide impactful strategic communications advisory from inception to implementation. At Credo, we are committed to improving the way societies communicate.

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Introduction

Strategic communications plays an essential part in the peace building process particularly as Nigerians continue to experience escalating outbreaks of violence, killings, incessant terrorist attacks and inter/intra ethnic rivalry. So, what are the key roles of strategic communications in conflict resolution and building sustainable peace? The spectrum of possible answers is wide but two stand out;

1. Fostering meaningful dialogue among different sections of society

2. Nurturing a shared vision and national identity for the country's nation building

According to the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) *"Peacebuilding is defined as the process intended to address the root causes of conflict, to reconcile differences, to normalize relations, and to build institutions that can manage conflicts without resorting to violence. The process involves a diverse set of actors in government and civil society and can involve short-term actions to prevent violence or can take place over many years."*

Along this vein, a major threat to peace building is violent conflict. Prominent among these conflicts are the ongoing attacks in the middlebelt of Nigeria by suspected Fulani herdsmen and the activities of Boko Haram that have deprived northern Nigeria of durable peace since 2009.

One of the factors that defines a nation's development is its language of communication. Communication for peacebuilding is characterized by a range of communication practices including: information dissemination, public education, media advocacy and participatory development.

For this thought piece, the roles and functions of strategic communications as a means of non-violent conflict resolution and peace building will be examined.

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Communicating to support sustainable peace

It is in the reconciliation of diverse views with a call for collective action that Nigeria can truly achieve peaceful co-existence with greater impact. This cannot be achieved without leveraging strategic communications – specifically public education and advocacy. While healing the wounds and societal divide in the aftermath of violence can be a significant challenge, Credo advocates for dialogue, shared vision and the application of resolution methods to mitigate the impact of conflict. This will allow us to determine the driving force for sustainable peace. This section makes a few recommendations based on the principles of insurgency and the views of experts in security, peace and conflict resolution globally.

Counter narrative campaigns

Counter narratives offer a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or alternatively delegitimizes extremist narratives.[1] In the case of Boko Haram; an extremist Muslim ideology founded on fundamentalism and abhorrence of western civilization activities, Credo advocates for concerted efforts by government to provide counter-narratives to contravene against extremist propaganda.[2] For example, creating strategic and tactical messaging using Islamic principles that promote peace and encourage education.

In the same vein, the government should empower young Muslims through counter ideology messages and discourage them from joining Islamist-extremist groups. This tactic was part of an informative campaign used to build resilience among young Somali Muslims living in the United States when young Somalian men were leaving Minneapolis to join al-Shabaab, the militant, radical Islamist insurgent group at war in Somalia.[3]

[1] Tanya. S, Christopher. J. S (2016) The Impact of Counter-Narratives Insights from a year-long cross-platform pilot study of counter-narrative curation, targeting, evaluation and impact.
[2] Omobuwajo, O.A (2015) Terrorism and Insurgency in Northern Nigeria: A Study of the Origins and Nature of Boko Haram. Available from: http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/23435
[3] The Guardian International (2015) Somalis in Minnesota question counter-extremism program targeted at Muslims. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/sep/14/somali-muslims-minnesota-counter-extremism-program

Early warning and response

> " *The values of peaceful co-existence must be integrated in the national discourse through comprehensive public communications initiatives from both public and private sector.* "

Early warning and early response systems have been adopted by international organizations to access risk, provide information and appropriate prevention interventions.[4] Boko Haram can arguably be described with the reference point of not putting out a small fire before it gets uncontrollable.[5] In the advent of a crisis, Credo recommends concerted efforts by the government (through organized associations and civil society) to develop a variety of information gathering systems to help predict, prevent and manage conflict in a timely and coordinated manner.[6]

For example, in 2009, the UN developed the Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System (GIVAS) to collect real-time information to better prepare decision makers for a response to a crisis or emergency.[6] Similarly in Kenya during the aftermath of the post-election crisis in early 2008, the Concerned Citizens for Peace association (CCP) was formed as an early warning and early response mechanism. The CCP helped to rally the country toward dialogue and negotiations.[7]

Peace education

While recognizing that unity among feuding groups cannot be imposed on the people, the government can sensitize on the values of peace and unity, social orientation and, partisan engagement in recreational programmes. Local influencers as well as corporate organizations should be engaged to support message reinforcement on peace and security as part of their corporate social responsibility.[8] The values of peaceful co-existence must be integrated in the national discourse through comprehensive public communications initiatives from both public and private sector. Communications initiatives can include peace media, journalism training, media legislation, inspirational dramas and community

outreach activities promoting public campaigns of a "One Nigeria" throughout all levels of society but notably in schools. In Chile, the National Corporation on Reparation and Reconciliation was established in 1992 to implement an 'Educational and Cultural Promotion Programme'. This participatory Programme constituted a genuine effort to incorporate the topic of human rights in the education system and succeeded in promoting the knowledge building about human rights and supporting the creation of spaces for reflection and debate across all levels of education.[9]

[4] Brigitte. R (2015) Helpdesk Research Report - Conflict early warning and early response. Available from: http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq1195.pdf

[5] Omobuwajo, O.A (2015) Terrorism and Insurgency in Northern Nigeria: A Study of the Origins and Nature of Boko Haram. Available from: http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/23435

[6] Search for Common Ground and United States Institute for Peace (2014) Communication for Peacebuilding: Practices, Trends and Challenges Available from: https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/communication-for-peacebuilding-practices-trends-challenges.pdf

[7] George. W, Thomas. A, and Simon. M. C (2008) Making Peace in the Post-Election Crisis in Kenya. Available from: http://www.npi-africa.org/pages/admin/publications/upload/CITIZENS_IN_ACTION_Making_Peace_in_the_Post-Election_Crisis_in_Kenya_-_2008_1329134877.pdf

[8] IPCR, NSRP, UNDP (2016) 2016 Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria.

[9] Lynn. D (2015) The Politics of Peace Education in Post-Conflict Countries. Available from: https://soc.kuleuven.be/crpd/files/working-papers/working-paper-davies.pdf

Religious collaborations

The influence and role of religious leaders building cannot be overemphasized, particularly in conflict areas characterized by deep religious differences. The conciliation capacity of religious leaders is established in the trust and credibility they garner in their communities.[10] The interconnection of religion, conflict and peace has been evidenced throughout history with examples like the Crusades dating back to the 9th century. However, one main function of religion in peace building is interfaith dialogue which should be encouraged and promoted to eradicate religious and political mistrust especially among the majority and minority groups in the country.[11] Popular among the growing inclusion of religious leaders in mediation policy is Finland, where it has led to substantial results, setting the country out to become "a great power in peace mediation."[12]

Constructive stakeholder engagements

[10] Maiju. L (2017) Supporting the Peace Mediation Efforts of Religious Leaders. Available from: https://tampub.uta.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/101008/GRADU-1493739605.pdf?sequence=1

[11] Maiju. L (2017) Supporting the Peace Mediation Efforts of Religious Leaders. Available from: https://tampub.uta.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/101008/GRADU-1493739605.pdf?sequence=1

[12] Maiju. L (2017) Supporting the Peace Mediation Efforts of Religious Leaders. Available from: https://tampub.uta.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/101008/GRADU-1493739605.pdf?sequence=1

[13] World Bank. Stakeholder Engagement and Grievance Mechanisms (2014) Available from; http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRANETENVIRONMENT/Resources/244351-1279901011064/StakeholderEngagement-andGrievanceMechanisms_111031.pdf

[14] Deloitte (2014) Stakeholder Engagement. Available from: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/za/Documents/governance-risk-compliance/ZA_StakeholderEngagement_04042014.pdf

[15] Premium Times (2018) How to resolve herdsmen crisis – Nigerian Working Group. Available from: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/255364-resolve-herdsmen-crisis-nigerian-working-group.html

Stakeholder engagement in crisis aims to build and maintain an open and constructive relationship with key actors, particularly victims and perpetrators of violence.[13] So far, the use of force as a conflict mitigation strategy seems to provoke more opposition than cooperation. While "boots on ground" can help restore peace and security in a conflict area, it is not a sustainable nor assured methodology for sustained and inclusive peace making. Conflict stakeholders need their experiences, concerns and issues to be taken seriously. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a watershed example of the power of stakeholder engagement and constructive dialogue. Government should, therefore, consider more solution-oriented dialogue and inclusive engagements specifically with underrepresented actors such as minority groups, women, youth, and the vulnerable for more sustainable peace making.[14] In the case of the herdsmen crisis, conflicts primarily involving Fulani pastoralists and local farming communities, Credo advocates a comprehensive identification of affected communities and groups from all sides. Understanding their experiences, needs and challenges, recognizing their expectations then developing and implementing an extensive communications and community engagement strategy designed for peace building is critical.[15]

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> " *The government should promote public awareness and participation by collaborating with the media to foster fact-based reporting on conflict issues and supporting journalists to produce material that examine conflict with a focus on peacebuilding mechanisms.* "

Peace media

Conventional media is founded on the premise that conflict sells, and peace is unprofitable.[16] As a result, conflict coverage is amplified and even exaggerated. The media plays an important role in shaping the narrative on conflict and promoting peace efforts. The government should promote public awareness and participation by collaborating with the media to foster fact-based reporting on conflict issues and supporting journalists to produce material that examine conflict with a focus on peacebuilding mechanisms. This must include access to information for the media based on the Freedom of Information Act, access to officials for interview, access to conflict areas for investigative reporting and consistent engagement with the media as the crisis evolves.

The media has historically played a role in shaping the views of policymakers and influencing public opinion on conflict. For example, starting from the Crimean War (print media), through the American Civil War (photo journalism and print media), World War II (cinema newsreels, radio and daily newspapers), the Persian Gulf war (live coverage and the 24-hour news cycle).[17] The media are obligated to provide fair and accurate news reporting for the good of society, therefore, all efforts must be made by media and Government to ensure responsible and credible media coverage.

Summary

Conflicts are unavoidable in societal relationships and can have either progressive or damaging results. When conflict occurs, society expects government to provide immediate and adequate mitigation with proposed measures that are inclusive.

Despite government efforts in utilizing technological, legal and social responses to insecurity in Nigeria, interventions to conflict predominantly in the form of military deployment, negotiations, arrests and prosecutions will not achieve sustained peace in any locality. This points to reasoning that responses to insecurity must go beyond containing violence through military action but by leveraging communications and conciliatory engagement.

The role of strategic communications in conflict resolution and peace building is a relatively recent phenomenon. However, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) acknowledges its potential in this field by initiating grants to support learning and improved practice in the creation of communications methods that can lead to improved conflict monitoring, community-based responses to conflict, and participatory peacebuilding.[18]

[16] Oscar. B (2010) Strategic Communication for Peacebuilding - How to use strategic communication on development objectives as a tool for peacebuilding (A Training Guide)Available from: https://www.sfcg.org/programmes/rfpa/pdf/20100315trainingGuideEngFinal.pdf

[17] The World Bank (2011) USIP: Communication for Peacebuilding Grant Program. Available from: https://blogs.worldbank.org/publicsphere/usip-communication-peacebuilding-grant-program

[18] United States Institute for Peace (2012) Communication for Peacebuilding Priority Grant Program Available from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CfP_Learning_Group_Report_Internews_2012.pdf