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Building Social Cohesion in a Pluralistic Nigeria: A Human Relations Perspective

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Abstract

Nigeria's religious and ethnic diversity makes social cohesion essential to peaceful coexistence and national development. Despite the ideals of "Peace and Unity" embodied in Nigeria's Coat of Arms, recurrent ethno-religious crises have resulted in loss of life, property destruction, and persistent insecurity, demonstrating that these national aspirations remain insufficiently realized. This study examines how human relations officers can contribute to building social cohesion among Nigeria's diverse communities through their professional roles and functions. Data were obtained from primary sources, including observations and oral interviews, and secondary sources, including newspapers, magazines, textbooks, scholarly books, edited volumes, and journal articles. The findings indicate that human relations officers can promote social cohesion by educating, counseling, and mediating among citizens, thereby strengthening awareness of the importance of harmonious coexistence across ethnic and religious divisions. The study concludes that effective human relations practices are integral to social integration, peace, and national unity in pluralistic Nigeria. It contributes a human relations perspective to social cohesion discourse and underscores the practical

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importance of educational, counseling, and mediation interventions in reducing social divisions and supporting sustainable national development.

Keywords: Ethno-Religious Diversity; Human Relations; National Unity; Pluralistic Society; Social Cohesion

Introduction

Nigeria is a conglomeration of diverse ethnic groups. Prior to colonialism, some of these ethnic groups were independent, under a traditional monarch with various customs and traditions regulating the day to day lives of the people. For instance, among the Igbo people, there was some democratic or republican character that unifies all their political organizations. Njoku (2005) observed that these communities were either administered by male elders, the age grades, cult groups or interaction between the women elders and male elders. Even where monarchy existed like the Anioma, Onitsha, Oguta, there was the manifest democratic and republican spirit, which characterized Igbo societies everywhere. The Oba in Yorubaland is at the topmost hierarchy of the holders of traditional power and authority. Oguntola-Laguda (2006) explains that an Oba is not only a mere head of a kingdom but generally seen, recognized and acknowledged as the custodian of the people's history and culture. A Yoruba Oba personifies the kingdom and represents the reincarnation of the past ancestors of the community. Olowolafe, Olawale, Adetunde (2020) opine that Hausa/Fulani emirates are headed by the emirs, in those days with two headquarters Sokoto and Gwandu in which Islamic rule serves as the guiding principle of the administration.

When the British came, they carried out expeditions and military bombardments in order to subdue ethnic nationalities that opposed them. Such as Aro warriors of Arochukwu, King Jaja of Opobo, Oba Kosoko of Lagos etcetera. However, when the British dominated, the colonel government for the seek of administrative/political purposes, amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates (Obiefuna and Uzoigwe, 2012), as one nation called Nigeria. The fact that Nigeria is dominated by three main religions namely African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity coupled with diverse ethnic groups living inside it, makes it a pluralistic society. Nigeria as a

pluralistic society requires social cohesion for harmonious coexistence among the diverse ethnic groups and for overall development of the nation.

However, this has not been fully realized as shown in the level of ethno-religious crises that have led to loss of lives and destruction of properties and has given room for insecurity to persist in Nigeria. Nweke (2019) documents that between the 1980s to the present, there have been more than 50 religious crises recorded in various part of Nigeria which have left political, social, economic and psychological losses and pains on the affected people and area. Pluralism should not be considered as a tool of destruction but should be utilized as tool for nation building. Izuegbu (2024) affirms that Nigeria's pluralism makes it imperative to think nation building. Thus, for a united Nigeria to be realized, building social cohesion is a perquisite for its actualization. Social cohesion cannot take place without effective human relations hence, this creates avenue for human relations officers to play integral roles such as teaching, counseling and mediating to ensure that citizens understand the need for harmonious coexistence among themselves for peace and unity to thrive in Nigeria.

Extant literature have written on ways to ensure social cohesion in a pluralistic Nigeria, to add to existing body of knowledge, This research examines how human relations officers through their roles and functions can inculcate into citizens, the principle and tents of social cohesion for harmonious coexistence among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. This is because, the only way a pluralistic society like Nigeria can achieve sustainable development is through effective human relations and social cohesion.

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Human Relations

Human relations is inevitable as regards to man to man interaction in the society. This is because man is a social being hence, needs to interact with his follow human beings in order to survive. This creates room for communication and relationship to exist among people within a locality. Omolawal (2021) supports the view that man is a social being and is motivated by affective needs, and that organisations are not merely economic units but are also social units for workers to interact. Relationships are an innate and integral part of human nature. So, man must build relationships through communication which transcends from the family to workplace, religious organization and invariably the

whole human society. This is what could be considered as human relations. Career Guide (2020) defines human relations as the ability to interact in a healthy manner with people and build strong relationships. Izuegbu (2024) asserts that human relations involves the ways individuals relate to each other in group situations especially workplace. As people come together, there are expected ways of interaction among them. These come under human relations. Individuals come from different backgrounds; such requires a conscious way of interaction. Lamberton and MinorEvans cited in Umeanolue (2020) state that, human relations is the ability to work effectively through and with other people. Human relations includes a desire to understand others, their needs and weaknesses, and their talents and abilities.

From another perspective, Iwan and Kiyai (2016) opine that human relations has an impact on performance improvement. The implementation of human relations is very important because it can solve problems which are related to human factors in the organization to make it run in line with the expected goals and create a conducive work climate and eliminate miss-communication at work which in turn can encourage improvement in employee performance itself. Hartati (2004) defines human relations as the overall series of formal and good relations between superiors and subordinates, as well as subordinates with other subordinates who must be fostered in such a way as to create an intimate and harmonious team work and work environment in order to achieve goals. However, it could be said that effective human relations cannot take place without communication. Willcox (2020) asserts that human relations/interaction between people involves communication, which is the process of sending messages from one person to another and receiving feedback. Communication involves talking, listening, writing, and reading. It also involves actions, such as rolling your eyes, winking, or waving. According to Nmah (2012):

Communication is the transfer of information and understanding from one person to another person, it is a way of reaching others with ideas, thoughts and values. It is a bridge of meaning among people so that they can share what they feel and know. By using this bridge a person can cross safely the river of misunderstanding that sometimes separates people or groups (p. 247).

Willcox (2020) affirms that communication is the essence of human relations thus, communication is a vital tool for effective human relations in a workplace. Also, Udezo

and Nwadialor (2012) describe effective human relations as positioning people emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually so as to maintain and restore relationships at all levels of human interaction, to create safe environments that nurture each individual. Man, by nature is religious…. In addition to being a religious being, he recognizes that he is a being in relation. This peculiar quality makes man to be in relation not only to other beings of his own species, but to divinities and to God. (p. 239). The idea of man being a relational being shows that in his religious life, economic life, political life, communal life, spiritual life, work life and so on, he relates with people. This relation is not just irrational but well planned and cautious to enable such relations yield the needed results for general human and societal development. Human relation is goal oriented. As Udezo and Nwadialor (2012) point out, effective human relations creates opportunity for developing qualities, attitudes and abilities which enable the individual to critical understanding of problem of society, to understand and explain facts, opinions and ideas, to work in groups, to accept and participate in free discussions and to have value judgments and decision on a national analysis of relevant facts and factors. Izuegbu and Obiefuna (2024) reiterate that human relations is therefore the life wire of working together as a community, organization and as a nation.

Concept of Social Cohesion

Social cohesion broadly refers to the strength of bonds or social distance between societal members. Pahl (1991) writes that the concept can be traced back to Émile Durkheim, one of the architects of modern sociology. Fonseca, Lukosch and Brazier (2019) report that Émile Durkheim defined social cohesion as the interdependence or solidarity between individuals with strong social bonds and without social conflict. According to Jenson (1998), building on these concepts in the 1950s, Talcott Parsons argued for a functionalist approach, which could treat society as a system, composed of interdependent subsystems, held together by shared values reproduced by socialisation. Lott and Lott (1961) later defined social cohesion as reciprocal positive attitudes among individuals of a group. Fonseca et al., (2019) elucidate that in the field of psychology, Sigmund Freud defined social cohesion as the phenomenon of individuals sharing common characteristics forming emotional ties. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011) further describes a socially cohesive society as one that works towards the well-being of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation.

In the words of Jenson (2019), the OECD's characterisation entails three major dimensions, namely; fostering cohesion by building networks of relationships, trust and identity between different groups; fighting discrimination, exclusion and excessive inequalities; and enabling upward social mobility. This definition of social cohesion highlights the capacity of a society to pursue its members' welfare while at the same time reducing inequalities and promoting inclusion amongst diverse groups. For the purpose of this study and within the context of the Nigerian society, Africa Polling Institute (API), (2019) defines social cohesion as "the willingness of Nigerians to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper." A socially cohesive society encourages participation, social inclusion of all groups, minimises disparities, and avoids marginalisation. A non-cohesive society on the other hand is at risk of increased social vices and conflicts due to perceived exclusion, marginalisation and disconnection from the social contract.

Concept of Pluralistic Society

The concept of pluralism or pluralistic society is traced to Hwok-Aun. In Hwok-Aun's (2017) research, he documents that, in the 20th century, the term "plural society" was applied to parts of Southeast Asia where both Dutch and British colonialism had encouraged immigration (usually from other parts of Asia) for commercial or agricultural development. The classic examples for this literature are Chinese merchants but also South Asian, often Muslim, workers who built what is now Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. The "plural society" concept was also applied to East Africa where Asian and other immigrant populations had been encouraged or pressured to settle by colonial powers. Nigeria is a pluralistic society, owing to the diverse ethnic, religious and socio-political affiliations. Obiefuna and Uzoigwe (2012) state that Nigeria is undoubtedly a pluralistic society; its pluralistic character is evident in its varied cultures, varied ethnic groups, varied languages, varied political, economic, legal, and belief (religious) systems. This means that there are many worldviews within Nigeria.

Sunday cited by Ifejika (2018) describes pluralism as the existence of diverse cultures within the same society, it is the harmonious and enriching co-existence within one political community of people of divergent, at times incompatible views, establishing and promoting their common good. Global Centre for Pluralism [CGP] (2012) defines pluralism as an ethic of respect that values human diversity. For CGP (2012), pluralism is an outcome, "a choice" made within diverse societies. Practices generate the ethic of

pluralism. These are practices of institutions as well as groups and individuals. The definition of pluralism as an "ethic of respect that values human diversity" means that for successful pluralism to work it must overcome division and conflict, and ensure inclusion and participation. Kymlicka (2017) identifies the drivers of successful pluralism as being "hardware" and "software." Both are important. Hardware is institutions, such as constitutions, legislatures, courts, schools and the media. These formal institutions define the legal and political space within which members of society act. Software is made up of cultural habits or cultural norms, such as conceptions of national identity and historic narratives that shape perceptions of who belongs to any society and influences everyday interactions as well as policy choices.

In summary, the GCP's (2011) position is that pluralism is an ethical commitment to both respect and value rather than downplaying or eliminating diversity in representations and practices. Successful pluralism involves equal participation of persons from all cultural, linguistic and religious groups; avoids exclusion based on difference in diverse societies and promotes inclusion; minimizes the resort to violence as a mechanism for conflict resolution; and includes promoting notions of shared citizenship. The way to achieve these characteristics and advantages of pluralism is to develop and ensure the maintenance of the "hardware" of legal and political institutions (including civic associations) committed to and active in the dissemination of the ethic of pluralism. Jenson (2019) views that it also requires attention to the "software," particularly social norms and values that respect social diversity. The practices generating such results can occur in a variety of economic, political and social domains that intersect on the pathways towards pluralism.

Nigeria in Historical Perspective

The territory known today as Nigeria began its match to nationhood in 1861. In that year, Okeke (2010), posits that the king of Lagos, Dosumu was made to sign away the political independence of the territory to Britain. With treats of bombardment and other acts of intimidation, the imperial Britain succeeded in making the pliant king to succumb to its desire to control the politics and economy of Lagos. By this act, Lagos with its territory became a crown colony of Britain. Before this period, British consuls had established offices first along the cost and later in other parts of what is today known as Niger. Okpalike and Nwadialor (2015) view that in 1879, sir George Goldie and Mr Hawith, a

consul, requested the government of Britain to declare the lower and Delta areas of the Niger a British Colony. In response to this, as noted above, the British government granted Sir Goldie's trading company a charter of administration over territories along the Niger and Benue rivers for a period of ten years. To consolidate the territorial gains of Goldie, Britain sent Fredrick Lugard to assist in the establishment of British trade monopoly there. In January 1914, the Northern and Southern protectorate were amalgamated and became one British Colony. Fredrick Lugard was made its first Governor General. A name was now needed for the colony and a British reporter, Flora Shaw, who was later married to Fredrick Lugard suggested the name Nigeria, to be named after the Niger River meaning Niger Area. Etuk cited by Obiefuna and Uzoigwe (2012)stated that, the amalgamation of over 250 ethnic groups into one political unit called Nigeria in 1914 by Sir Fredrick Lugard as a result of ghastly economic and political accident of history. It was done simply for administrative purposes. The British administration introduced the "Indirect Rule System of Government".

In October 1st 1960, some nationalists like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Herbart Macaulay etcetera fought for independence. In 1963, Nigeria became a Republican Sovereign State. Just six (6) years of gaining independence, the military took over power that lasted for over twenty-eight (28)-thirty (30) years. It was in 1999, called the Fourth Democratic Dispensation that the military handed over power to civilian administration and it has been till date.

A Survey of Pluralism and its Effects in Nigeria

From the political perspective, despite that the nationalists were from diverse ethnic groups yet, they joined forces together and in uniformity fought for independence of Nigeria. However, Amali and Jekayinfa (2013) decry that, the problem Nigeria faces as a nation since independence is the task of processing national pluralism for national integration. The efforts to build one indivisible nation from the several ethnic nationalities have constituted problems as well. For instance, the 1966 coup by Chukwuma Nzogwu a military personnel from Igbo extraction was conceived as an attack against the political leaders of the North. Since most of top northern political leaders were killed while many of their southern counterparts especially Igbo top politicians were not killed. This led to a counter coup six months after by young soldiers from the north. It led to Yakubu Gowon being the second Head of State just six years of gaining independence. Major Colonial

Ojukwu kicked against Gowon leadership and declared Sovereign State of Biafra. It led to the civil war (1967-1970) that ravaged Eastern Nigeria. Since after the Nigerian-Biafran civil war, it seems that political pluralism has been buried as political power rotates mainly within north and western Nigeria while the eastern part seems to be neglected.

In recent years, it seems that political appointments are always lopsided in such a way that the man at helm of affairs appoints people from his ethnic group or his geo-political zones. Late President Muhammadu Buhari appointed majority of Northerners while in this President Tinubu's era people from South West are more in Number. Channels Television (2025) reports that Kenneth Okonkwo claimed that South-West has greater number of ministerial positions than any other geo-political zones. Moreover, Ogun State has more substantive ministers than the entire South East geo-political zone. This according to him, contravenes Section 14, subsection 3 (Principle of Federal Character) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended.

Pluralism also has socio-economic effects. Nigeria, though rich in mineral, natural and human resources is still a poor country and rated among the poorest nation in the world. Some political leaders only focus on the proceeds from crude oil without making efforts to ensure that the revenue is utilized for societal development. Moreover, the oil host communities are not properly taken care off. Leading to neglect of the host communities. Nyam (2009) observed that there is perceived injustice, deprivation and ecological degradation occasioned by oil exploration in the Niger Delta region without commensurate pay. This could be because, those in helm of affairs are not from Niger Delta region. So they concentrate more on amassing the proceeds from crude oil and pay less attention to development of area where it is extracted. Poor management of natural and mineral resources by Nigerian government has led to poor socio-economic growth, high rate of unemployment, poor state of development with the poor getting poorer and the rich getting richer

Understand the Person and the Qualities of a Human Relations Officer

The pluralistic nature of Nigerian society, makes it imperative for the existence of human relation and something which must not be relegated to the background. Thus, Izuegbu (2024), affirms that the inevitability of human interaction gives credence to the need to study and emphasize human relations in a pluralistic Nigeria. Every human being as a rationale being must interact with others for survival. This makes human relations to

be equated to water which every living being must take for continuous survival. However, there are people who have gone various training both intellectually, psychologically and otherwise as regards to human relations. Hence, such people specially trained for such course or purpose is considered as human relations officers.

Moreover, in higher institutions in Nigeria, human relations is a discipline studied in conjunction with other related disciplines like religion, sociology, psychology, among others. For instance, in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria, there is the Department of Religion and Human Relations. Obiefuna and Uzoigwe (2012) explain that studying is a function of formal education, of course education is a life-long process. It starts from cradle and ends in the grave. It is informal, non-formal, and formal. In formal education there is one who teaches and the other who learns. There is a formal setting where the teacher inculcates knowledge in a particular area of life. Onwuka cited by Obiefuna and Uzoigwe (2012) say it refers to the specific discipline or area of study pursued by all preparing to become professional teachers". It is different from the broadest sense of education that "consists of all of man's activities which enable him to realize himself and to live fully as a human being. The two senses should not, however, be separated. To study is to use the benefits of formal education to be fully human as a person and to help others to be equally fully human. To be fully human is to appreciate life, self and others, personal and communal. It is also to respect and protect what enhances life and human living.

Hence, a human relations officer is a person who have gone through series of training and have acquired the necessary intellectual, sociological and psychological skills to be able to coordinate people from diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds for there to be cordial relationship and interaction among them. It could also mean series of training that positions a human relations officer, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually so as to maintain and restore relationships at all levels of human interaction, to create safe environments that nurture each individual (Udezo and Nwadialor, 2012). It is also a discipline which creates opportunity for students (prospective human relations officer) to develop qualities, attitudes and abilities which enable the human relations officer, to critical understanding of "problem of society, to understand and explain facts, opinions and ideas, to work in groups, to accept and participate in free discussions and to have value judgments and decision on a national analysis of relevant facts and factors (Udezo and Nwadialor, 2012).

The qualities of a human relations officer are numerous owing to the multifarious nature of the job. Human relations involves skills to allow for interactions that are healthy. It requires special skills and this would have prompted Obiefuna (2018) to state that "it is not causal. It is planned" (p. 19). These skills as discussed in Izuegbu (2023) include conflict management skill. Since conflict is inevitable in human interaction, it becomes necessary to equip humans with skills in managing conflicts. Human relations requires skill in management of relationships. It requires skill in teamwork; skill in decision making when dealing with others. It requires communication skill which is very crucial in human interactions. Negotiation skill, emotional intelligence, empathy, cultural competence and listening skill are very essential in human relations. These skills enable an individual to be able to work effectively with others in any human sphere. In achieving the above skills, individuals ought to engage in developing what Izuegbu (2023) refers to as self-related factors in human relations. These according to Obiefuna (2018) are areas of emphasis in human relations.

Another quality to be possessed by a human relations officer is high self-esteem. Human beings are influenced by the image they have in themselves or the level of confidence in them. Developing positive self-image or worth enables an individual to work with others without feeling intimidated. Izuegbu (2024) opines that self-awareness is very necessary also where individual understands his abilities, weaknesses, sensations, talents and so on. This enables him to be committed when working with others for he knows where he fits in. Mutual respect becomes very necessary in human relations. Having positive regards towards one another is very important in human interaction. Positive attitude towards human beings is a factor in human relations. Individuals have attitudes which enable them judge things around them. These attitudes may be positive or negative. However positive attitudes make for good human relations. These factors are part of the reasons human relations goes beyond mere study of interactions but very importantly, the development of the human person who is the centrality of human relations.

A human relations officer should possess effective communication skills, because effective human relations cannot take place without communication. Izuegbu and Obiefuna (2024) elucidate that listening skill and communication skills are among the powerful skills human relations promote. The reason is that the two skills enhances proper understanding, critical assessment and proper situation of things. Men have regretted their actions because they could not listen. People have attracted enemies to themselves because

they feel communicating to certain individuals is not necessary. Human relations frowns at this.

A human relations officer should inculcate mutual respect becomes very necessary in human relations. Mutual respect is very important character of human relations. Obiefuna (2018) enunciates that mutual respect is a way of recognizing that every individual has worth. The worth-ness of the individual is not dependent on his religious affiliation. It is totally depended on him as a person with conscience and dignity, created in the image of God. Izuegbu (2023) sees mutual respect as mutual regards and considerations among individuals who interact. This symbiotic regards is very vital for effective human relations. The idea of giving honour to whom it is due is apt here. In human relations, mutual respect is observed and once each honours the other, interactions move with less hitches.

A human relations officer should imbibe the value of religious tolerance. Alao (2017) describes tolerance as the mutual understanding and cooperation between groups with different ethnicities, religions, political ideologies and economic status. It is seen as the basis for longer and deeper process of developing a culture of peace, it is the minimal essential quality of social relations that eliminate violence and coercion. This simply affirmed that tolerance is the pathway to peaceful life and community, without which national development can attained. Religious tolerance however can be said to be ability of a human relations officer to appreciate and accept other religions' beliefs and practices without necessarily involve or practice it. It is respecting and relating with other peoples' religious beliefs and values (which is quite different from personal faith and beliefs), without enforcing personal interested religion on others who are not adherent followers.

A human relations officer should imbibe the culture of peace and love. Nigeria as pluralistic society is dominated by three main religion, African Traditional religio, Islam and Christian. These religions advocate for peace and love. Thus, human relations officers should encourage peaceful co-existence and harmonious living among citizens s despite the religious sect they belong to. This should be based on peace and love. But to achieve peace and harmonious living human relations officers should make citizens to know that they must be sincere, open and engage in religious dialogue.

Confidentiality: A human relations officer must keep the secrets of his/her clients without leaking it to another person. Since one of the role of a human relations officer is

conflict mediation, he must not say things that can jeopardize the conflict resolution process.

Responsibility: A human relations officer has to take responsibility of things under his care. Therefore, a human relations officer is expected to be responsible human being highly dedicated and committed to duty and respond to events like disputes when he is called upon. Responsibility in human relations attracts respect to a human relations officer as it boosts his efficiency in his job.

Cleanliness and Modesty: Human relation services is public service hence from day to day related with the public in the course of discharging his duty. A human relation officer is a friend to the public and is expected to attract and retain respect and regard from the public by his dressing code and maintenance of personal hygiene. Cleanliness helps to maintain good health which is prerequisite to perform effective in rendering services. Through modesty, a human relation officer in the words of Okeke (2014) reduces certain unhealthy conditions including rape and its likes.

Hospitable and Kind: In the course of rendering services to people, a human relations officer should always show hospitability and kindness towards the people as to make them feel at home and be able to relate their problems to him. Unruly behaviour exhibited by the human relations officer can scare prospective clients away.

Roles and Functions of Human Relations Officer in Building Social Cohesion in a Pluralistic Nigeria

Human relations is very important, as it has lots of benefits. The rudiments of human relations are very critical in solving human problems. Izuegbu (2023) holds this axiom by explaining that good human relations is capable of leading to high productivity among people; bringing about peaceful-co-existence; opening ways for cross-pollination of ideas; promoting general development and progress; bringing about reduction in violence; giving sense of belonging to people of a particular social group; opening way to have common solution to common problems; reducing fear and bitterness among people. These benefits of human relations make it imperative in solving human problem in a given society. Izuegbu (2024) writes thus, suffice it to say that a society, a nation, a human organization that lacks good human relations would always experience chaos, stagnation, retrogression, conflicts and the likes. Nigeria as a nation has witnessed such maladies.

Human relations involve itself with one's ability to work effectively with others, understanding others based on their needs and weaknesses, their talents and their abilities. Owing to the benefits of human relations, the roles and functions of human relations officer in building social cohesion in a pluralistic Nigeria need to be studied.

One of the role of a human relations officer is to advocate strongly for religious tolerance among citizens. Izuegbu and Obiefuna (2024) expatiate that religious tolerance is the ability and willingness to appreciate spiritual values, beliefs and practices which are different from one's own. The existence of different religions in a society necessitates the idea of religious tolerance. Religious tolerance seeks to promote mutual coexistence of every religion in a peaceful manner without conflicts. Religious tolerance is anti-bigotry or fanaticism. It promotes the existence of various religions and respect for each religion. In Nigeria, which is the scope of the current research, religious tolerance is achieved when Christians, Muslims and other religious faiths appreciate that each of them have spiritual values and each can coexist with the other without discrimination or elements of religious superiority. This is a culture of peaceful coexistence among religious adherents of different religious faiths. To this end, a human relations officer should encourage citizens to be tolerant of others who may have different religious beliefs or affiliations. When citizens tolerate each other's religion, it binds them together.

Another role of a human relations officer is to be a human rights activists. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2018) describes human relations as the core of human rights. Izuegbu (2024) enunciates that human relations is not just a social practice but a foundation of human rights. In observing the rights of individuals, the principle of relativity is applied. Relativity here implies that individuals should be mindful of other people's rights while he is exercising his own rights. This comes to mind when one reads Udezo and Nwadialor (2012) description of human relations as "live- and let live". This idea is embedded in the fact that in a pluralistic society, individuals should be mindful of their actions that they do not trample on others dangerously. This is what human relations upholds. Izuegbu and Obiefuna (2024) view that there cannot be religious intolerance when an individual imbibes this understanding in his dealings with other. The human person who is both a religious person and a relational person is to be accorded respect not just corporal but equally in his belief system. Observing the idea that where one's rights end, another one's rights begin is very important to the promoters of human relations. This is why it is unarguable that if there should be

religious tolerance, practitioners of religious faith must know that they have their rights relative to other people's rights, though of a different faith. Going by this position, it implies that human relations remain inevitable in achieving human rights and so, a nation where human rights are not expressed is suffering from lack in human relations. Thus, human relations officers should be proactive in carrying out their roles with fear or favour.

A crucial role of a human relations officer is conflict mediation hence, he is also considered as a mediator. Mediation according to Moore (1996) is the intervention in a negotiation or conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision making power but who assists the involved parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute. Mediation can also be defined as a problem-solving negotiation process, in which an outside, impartial neutral party works with disputants to assist them to reach a satisfactory negotiated agreement. Mediation helps stakeholders discuss issues, repair past injuries and develop the tools needed to face disagreements effectively. Human relations officers as mediators in the opinion of Moore (1996), may help participants glimpse at their blind spots, broaden their perspectives, and even muddle through the problem-solving process. Mediators are to help the parties involve solve the problem, this way even if the mediator is not around the conflicting parties own the resolution of the crisis. Anumah (2018) states that mediation is an informal, voluntary and confidential process in which a trained professional dispute resolver (in this context, human relations officer the mediator) facilitates understanding, communication and negotiation between disputing parties and assist those parties in reaching their own mutually acceptable resolution to their dispute. The major aim of a human relations officer as a mediator is to help the parties in conflict reach a mutually satisfying agreement.

Conflict management is also the role of a human relations officer. Ogonor (2004) states that conflict management is a strategy employed by a human relations officer, to reduce the frequency of destructive encounters by strengthening the inhibitors to conflict actions and avoid triggering off events. According to Ogonor (2004) conflict management is aimed at limiting and avoiding violence between two parties. It therefore covers every action taken before during or after conflict aimed at mitigating its effects and to ensure that both parties live in peace harmony and conduct themselves in an orderly manner. Conflict management is a method used by a human relations officer in handling disputes. Anumah (2018), conflict management refers to the long-term management of intractable conflicts

involving institutionalized provisions and regulative procedures for dealing with conflicts whenever they occur. It describes the way human relations officers respond to and deal with conflicts before, during and after it has occurred. It is the label for the variety of ways by which human relations officers handle grievances standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong.

According to Aghedo (2011), conflict management is an umbrella term. When disaggregated, three meanings are discernable that is, a term, an approach, and a discipline. As a term, conflict management refers to a process or approach adopted by a human relations officer to ensure that dispute is reduced and therefore brings about a positive change in behaviour between warring parties. As an approach, it is a systematic method utilized by human relations officers in dealing with the causes, symptoms, dynamics, transformation, containment, settlement, and resolution. Conflict management is when a human relations officer uses managerial tactics to contain a conflict, to put a lid on it, and control the environment. Indeed, many conflicts cannot be really resolved, but can be managed. The ability of a human relations officer to manage conflict, enables parties to co-exist amicably and deal with their disputes without necessarily resolving the underlying conflict. For example, in Nigeria, the various conflicts among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria have not been resolved; rather the conflicts have only been managed, which is why the various ethnic groups are still together as a nation over sixty years after independence. This calls for more training of human relations officers in this pluralistic society.

Conclusion

Nigeria as a pluralistic society, cannot progress without social cohesion coupled with effective human relations among the diverse ethnic groups in the nation. Human relations is seen in this study as fulcrum for social cohesion without which, a pluralistic society like Nigeria cannot survive. There is every tendency of achieving unity in diversity if citizens can see themselves as one (social cohesion). This entails that human relations officers are to make efforts to teach, counsel and enlighten citizens on the need to imbibe the principle of human relations, to be tolerant to people of other faith, imbibe the value of mutual respects, peace and love, cooperate with others leading to social cohesion. So that pluralism could serve as a resource for national development. A united Nigeria is possible.

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