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Mainstreaming Cooperative Societies Into Peacebuilding Knowledge Networks For Sustainable Peace And Development In Nigeria

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Abstract:

Evidently, peace is a critical ingredient of socio-economic development in any polity. Unfortunately, the Nigerian State has become a theater of violence. Thus, socio-economic activities that could engender sustainable development of the nation are interrupted and hindered. The implication is that the top-down approach (track one diplomacy) for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Nigeria needs to be complemented by the other tracks. In light of this, the question that looms large now is how do we energise the civil society to become an effective stakeholder in building peace in Nigeria? The paper examines how the nation's plethora of cooperative societies can be mainstreamed into peacebuilding knowledge networks for effective participation in peacebuilding activities. Qualitative data collected were interrogated using Stone's elucidation of the role of knowledge networks to articulate strategies for reinventing the nation's cooperative societies to become effective agents for promotion of peacebuilding works. The paper concludes that these efforts would greatly strengthen the collaboration between the state and society. The collaboration, the paper shows, is required for effective implementation of peacebuilding initiatives meant to engender sustainable peace and development in the country.

Keywords: Cooperative Society; Knowledge Networks; Mainstreaming; Sustainable Peace and Development; Nigeria

1. Introduction:

Since the early 1990s, building peace during and after conflict has been moving away from the conference tables of diplomats to informal settings created by local NGOs. The vast majority, if not all, of the peacebuilding policy and literature argues for strengthening local organisations as vehicle for peace (Hilhorst & Mathijs van Leewen, 2005: 537)

Post-authoritarian Nigeria has become a theater of conflict and violence arising from contestation for control of state power and resources, herders and farmers conflict, kidnapping, sectarian and intra-and inter-communal conflicts. One of the factors responsible for the increasing level of violent conflict and general insecurity in the Nigeria state, among others, is the obvious inability of the state-centric conflict prevention and peacebuilding mechanisms, which locate conflict as a state-level variable and vest responsibility on the state for the promotion of peaceful co-existence in the polity (Osaghae, 2012: 105). The perception by the generality of the Nigerian people that conflict prevention and peacebuilding tasks are solely state responsibility underlines the lukewarm attitude and marginal participation of the mass of the Nigerian people to issues related to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the country. Indeed, until the recent past when non-state entities such as civil societies, traditional institutions, communities, religious organisations and private individuals started

having more than a passing interest in peace and security issues, such matters were seen to be the sole responsibility of the government.

Over time, it has been clearly established that the state-centric approach (Track 1) to conflict prevention and peacebuilding has become grossly ineffective due largely to the dwindling capacity of many nation-states, especially in Africa, to perform their statutory responsibilities. The inadequacy of the machinery of the state in promoting peace and security triggered the need for a new and holistic perspective to the management of the challenge of insecurity that has come to define the Nigerian state. This necessitates changing the state's 'security monopoly': the view that governments are solely responsible for providing security and that this can best be achieved through military capacity and the threat of force (Barnes, 2006:7). In Nigeria, this reality informed the development of a framework that will assist the government and other development actors in mainstreaming peacebuilding in all stages of the development cycle which was put together by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, (IPCR), Abuja, Nigeria and the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). Indeed, the initiative is a commendable response to Galtung's proposition that there are 'tasks for everybody' (Galtung, 1980:396). Galtung's position is technically expressed in the nine tracks outlined in the multi-track diplomacy, which encompasses all persons and groups within a polity as possible

agents and channels through which the course of peace can be promoted.

A major step towards bringing all on board the peace-promotion project is to envision and mainstream non-state actors into the conflict prevention and peacebuilding networks especially with a view to promoting and inculcating a culture of peace which the United Nations General Assembly (1997) has defined as “a set of values, attitudes modes of behavior, and ways of life that reject violence” in the minds of all people. This is the backdrop against which a critical overview of the importance of mainstreaming cooperative societies into the conflict prevention and peacebuilding networks is undertaken in this paper. The paper takes its bearing from how the economic crisis that bedeviled the Nigeria state and or coupled with the failure of the nation’s leadership to deploy national resources to meet basic and fundamental needs of the people forced the generality of the people to join one cooperative society or another to access/draw financial support for their business and meeting basic needs.

The main thrust of this paper, is that given the estimated size and spread of the co-operative societies across the nation, cooperative societies, if conscientiously integrated into the conflict prevention and peacebuilding networks, could be used as a vehicle for promoting peace, security and peaceful co-existence among the diverse groups within the nation’s territory. Indeed, the

importance of equipping individuals and groups within a polity with values and mores that facilitate prevention of conflict and peacebuilding cannot be over-emphasised, especially if one takes into account the damaging effects of the violent genre of conflict on developmental efforts and human security. Evidently, it is more prudent and wise to invest in conflict prevention than its management and resolution. Lund (2009:308) expresses this when he argued that the costs of preventing bloodshed and overall destruction are dramatically lower than huge costs of armed conflict.

It must be observed at this juncture, that within the context of this study, conflict prevention is seen as an integrated and complementary activity meant to foreclose the outbreak of violence in a polity. Canada Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)’s definition of conflict prevention captures this as “activities to prevent the emergence of violent conflict through an open, inclusive, coherent, and comprehensive framework that takes into account all phases of the peace and conflict cycle”. Another important concept that is critical to this study is the idea of Peacebuilding. The imperativeness of engaging peacebuilding strategies, such as mainstreaming cooperative societies, is strengthened by the clear understanding of the fact that a secure and stable peace cannot be based on “forced order, repression of others or military might in a situation of social conflict”(Albert, 2001:133). More importantly, in light of the obvious

inability of the state-centric approach to effectively address conflicts and engender safe and stable atmosphere for development, there is the need to rejig and reconstruct the nation's peace and security architecture in a manner that non-state actors that possess the required social capital such as cooperative societies - especially the cooperative credit societies- are integrated into peacebuilding knowledge networks. This will largely help to equip their members to become veritable agents and channels for promotion of peace in the Nigerian state. Kofi Annan underscores the importance of knowledge to the accomplishment of societal goals in general and that of peacebuilding in particular when he posits: "we realise more and more that knowledge is what makes the difference: knowledge in the hands of those who need it, and those who can make best use of It"(Clarke and Squire 2005,110).

Here, it must be stated that a knowledge network is construed as that "in which the cross-sectoral exchange of knowledge and experience takes place around a particular set of issues in order to generate new knowledge, improve practice, advocate specific issues, and/or influence policy and discourse"(Verkoren, 2006,32). It is a community of individuals, groups or organisations formed with the intent to extend the reach and influence of members and to gain access to sources of knowledge that could improve practice toward the realization of

a common goal(Verkoren 2006 & Deventer, 2004).

It is instructive to note that networks have been of tremendous value in critical areas of human endeavours - academia, commerce, media, development issues, conflict and peace. In fact, it has been observed that going by the character of violent conflicts erupting in many parts of the world, especially Africa, networks are said to be particularly relevant and suitable in dealing with issues of conflict and peace. Deventer (2004, 1-2) articulates this when he writes:

Networks are becoming a favoured organizational form wherever a broad operational field is involved (e.g where links are being made between different regions, or between grassroot to international levels), where problems are so dynamic that rigid structured are not suitable, and where loose ties are preferable to formal organizational bonds. All these features are well known in areas or violent conflicts.

The truth of the matter is that the quantum and quality of knowledge that one is able to access goes a long way in determining one's attitude, action and commitment to the promotion and establishment of a project and ideal and, ditto, to the condemnation and eradication of negative tendencies and manifestations. Thus, knowledge networks which essentially encapsulate knowledge exchange, sharing and dissemination become a veritable tool to engender issues that can

facilitate the promotion of joint action required to prevent violent conflicts and promote the course of peacebuilding.

Indeed, the role of knowledge networks in the promotion of collective agenda and issues of common interest is aptly expressed in Stone's elucidation of the role of knowledge networks. According to him, a knowledge network has two main complementary functions: first, it coordinates the communication and dissemination of knowledge and provides a space for discussion, setting agendas and developing common visions, which enables the network to speak with a collective voice. Second, it can have a greater ability to attract "media attention, political patronage and donor support than an individual or single organization" (Stone 2005,93).

1. Study Area

Nigeria, officially referred to as the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is located in western Africa on the Gulf of Guinea, bordering Niger in the north, Chad in the north east, Cameroun in the east and Benin in the west. The country has a total area of 923,768 square metres. The nation's capital city, Abuja, is located in the centre of the country. It has 6 geo-political zones, namely, North east, North west, North central, South west, South east and South south, which are for administrative purposes broken into 36 states in line with the adopted federal governance system.

2. Methodology

Basically, the study adopted a qualitative approach method which was anchored on explorative research design. Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through focus group discussions held with some members of cooperative credit societies. The cooperative credit societies, it must be observed, are domination Nigeria and aptly depict the popular view of the mass of the Nigerian people about what a cooperative society is. Apparently, it is so because a cooperative society represents a channel through which cheap loans can be obtained as an alternative to the cutthroat lending rates of the conventional banking sector. In-addition to the primary data obtained through FGDs, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews were conducted with some leadership of a number of cooperative credit societies, policy makers and the academia. While secondary data were obtained from extant literature on the elements that define the study. Data harvested from the two sources of data collection were content analysed to understand the modus operandi of the cooperative societies and how the genre of social capital available to these societies can be engaged towards mainstreaming these societies into peacebuilding knowledge network for promotion of the culture of peace in the Nigerian state.

3. The Nature and Character of Cooperative Societies in Nigeria

Before we examine the nature and character of cooperative societies in Nigeria, it is important to attempt to define what cooperative society is. The International Cooperative Alliance in 1995 defines a cooperative society as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”(cited in MPRA,2005,2). The primary objective that informed the formation of cooperative society is aptly expressed thus:”Regardless of the type, size, geographical location or purpose, cooperatives provide a unique tool for achieving one or more economic goals in an increasingly competitive global economy”(MPRA,2005,5). Cooperatives in all climes are formed mainly for the advancement of the socio-economic well-being of its members. Gertler (2001) and Gibson(2005) reiterate the fact that cooperatives are formed to promote socio-economic development of their members. According to them, cooperative principles and values make cooperative societies well-suited as vehicles for poverty reduction, economic growth and social development.

Although the first recorded cooperative started in France around 1750, cooperatives in Nigeria did not gain much popularity until the

mid-1980s when the Babaginda military government introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme(SAP) which was designed to revamp the nation’s economic recession, following the Sheu - led civilian administration’s (1979-1983) plundering of the Nigerian economy. With the inability of the Nigerian state to meet the needs of her people, especially the teachers and civil servants, whose salaries were no longer regularly paid, cooperatives became “a strong, vibrant, and viable economic alternative” (MPRA, 2005,1).

There is a plethora of cooperative societies across the 36 states and the FCT that constitute the nation. In a study carried out by *Enhancing financial Innovation & Access (EFInA)* on cooperative societies in Nigeria, one of the respondents in an IDI was said to have stated: We have up to 10,000 [cooperative] societies in [this state]..... Cooperative activities started from the western part of the country, there are always reasons for people to come together to socialize, that means you will find at least 2 co-operative members in a household, this shows how well spread co-operatives are, even to the remotest villages (EFInA, 14)

As a matter of fact “it was estimated that in 2010, there were 82,460 co-operative groups with over 1.4 million members in 605 local government areas in Nigeria” (EFInA, 2012. 4). Given the progressive decline in the capacity of the Nigerian state to provide basic

necessities of life to her teeming population and the global economic recession, the number of Nigerians participating in co-operative societies has greatly increased. The chances are that there may be not less than 150,000 co-operative groups with not less than 2 million members across the nation today. Indeed, the membership of cooperatives in Nigeria tranverse different age groups and the various trade and professional groups in the nation- artisan,market men/women, civil/public servants, academia and even security agencies.

Cooperative societies in Nigeria can broadly be classified into two categories. The first category has to do with cooperatives formed by workers in either private or public establishments. This represents those on paid employment whose contributions to their respective cooperatives are deducted monthly from their salaries. These cooperative societies provide all kinds of services ranging from providing credit/loans to members to meet financial challenges and execute building projects to making essentials available on credit and at fairly good prices. While the other category is the cooperative credit society. This variant of cooperative societies is largely formed by the artisans and privately employed individuals who are financially weak. For this type of cooperative society, the modus operandi is to collect contributions from the members and use such contributions

to provide loans to members to expand their trade and businesses and to meet other financial challenges. Put differently, "these societies are formed to provide financial support to members. The society accepts deposits from members and grants them loans at reasonable rates of interest in terms of needs". Due to its peculiarities and characteristics, It must be pointed out that the cooperative credit society is the focus of this study.

Indeed, cooperative credit societies are visible across the length and breadth of the nation's geographical space. They are peopled by individuals from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. One of the leaders of a cooperative credit society in Ibadan, Oyo State, described her own group as a "mini-Nigeria". She was obviously referring to the multi-ethnic representation of her cooperative society; there are cooperatives that are particularistic in terms of the individuals who can join, that is, in terms of the religious affiliation or ethnic background of the members. The truth of the matter is that most cooperative credit societies are multi-ethnic and multi-religious and are not averse to gender differences in their composition.

The task of making these cooperative groups as peace constituencies and their members as peace agents is easily achieved in view of the inherent characteristic of these groups as a platform for interethnic dialogue, social

empowerment and collective intentionality. This feature, when observed more critically, is necessary for the attainment of human security and sustainable peace.

4. Interrogating the Constitutive Values of Cooperative Society for Peacebuilding

Let us state here that “peacebuilding is done by the people, and the dynamics of their organization are crucial for its success” (Hilhorst & Leeuwen, 2005: 537). To that extent, it is imperative to interrogate the characteristics of a cooperative society with a view to bringing into fore some of its characteristics that can be leveraged on to make it a vehicle for the promotion of peace in a polity. The point is that the properties of cooperative societies are discussed here in order to draw out the core values that can be explored to facilitate the promotion of peacebuilding activities. Thus, Some of the characteristics of cooperative societies are but not limited to the following: First, the dispersion of a cooperative society is a critical and powerful value that can be tapped into to get the message of peace across to the larger society and thus promote the culture of peace in the Nigerian state. Cooperative society is one of the bodies in the entire country that has a huge population of people that are spread over the length and breadth of the country. As such, cooperative societies record huge membership in both the rural and urban

centres across the country. So, a conglomerate of cooperative societies within the Nigerian state would constitute a mass of individuals that can be engaged and integrated into the peacebuilding networks as agents for turning around the prevalent violent approach to settling differences in many parts of the country.

Second, heterogeneity is another important value that is exhibited by most cooperative societies. This can also be leveraged on to gain some space and channel to promote the culture of peace in the nation's polity. With the exception of cooperative societies that are formed to take care of specific category of people in terms of ethnic, religious and professional affiliations, the term, “heterogeneity” would connote that the membership of most cooperative societies, especially cooperative credit societies, is open to people from a variety of backgrounds and religious inclinations. In these societies, either consciously or unconsciously, the spirit of friendship and togetherness is promoted through regular meetings and other forms of social interaction. So, characteristically, most of these cooperative societies possess some stocks of bridging social capital that can be deployed to strengthen state initiatives and programmes to build peace across the Nigerian state. Third, grass rootedness and accessibility to vital information constitute another important value. Cooperative credit

societies are found in every nook and crannies of Nigeria and, expectedly, they have access to vital information that may be used to curtail latent conflicts and address manifest conflicts. It must be observed that conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes are more effective and successful when they are a product of intense analysis and understanding of the conflict from variety of perspectives. This, by extension, means that strategic action plan and intervention in conflicts require adequate information to draw up reliable and effective peacebuilding programmes. Given their access to information and closeness to the grassroots, cooperative members can actually help in the provision of requisite information and data that can be interrogated not only for the designing of a strategic action plan but also for the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives. The imperativeness of improving the information network between state actors and non-state actors on peace and conflict issues necessitates the integration of a group that has extensive networks and huge stocks of bridging social capital such as the cooperative societies. Fourth, the inclusiveness and strategic relevance of cooperative societies is a potential tool for energising the engagement of multi-track diplomacy in the peace process. This point cannot be overemphasized because membership of cooperative societies is composed of people from all walks of life. It

must be added then that these members can actually serve to trigger the interest and involvement of their primary constituency, in terms of their professional and religious calling in peacebuilding processes. Fifth, the administrative or more technically, governance model of cooperative societies is characteristically democratic. This places the cooperative societies in good stead to contribute significantly to the socio-economic well-being of the people. An improved socio-economic well-being of the people ultimately serves as an antidote to poverty which has been discovered as a major source of conflict ravaging many societies, including Nigeria. Indeed, democratic governance is one of the four Rochdale principles that define cooperative societies. Other principles are open membership, distribution of the surplus to the members in proportion to their transaction and limited interest on capital (Birchall, 1997). The foregoing resonates a value that promotes a sense of belonging and amplifies the stocks of generalized social capital that can be deployed to make members to participate in peacebuilding processes. Lastly, cooperative societies thrive and survive on their intrinsic value of equity and fairness. The truth of the matter is that the distribution of surplus to the members of a given society is done in proportion to their transaction in the society. This is a value that mitigates the competitive spirit that characteristically

causes conflict in a polity. It is not frivolous to say that lack of equity and fairness is most responsible for the incessant conflicts ravaging the multi-ethnic Nigerian state today. The principle of equity and fairness encapsulated in the philosophy that undergirds the distribution of surplus/dividends of investments of members of the cooperative society is, wittingly or unwittingly, being imbibed by the membership as a value for the management of relationships among peoples. The implication of this is that, in no time, this principle is entrenched as a framework for the allocation of resources and privileges in the polity. Beyond this, this principle engenders some values that can actually be leveraged on to promote peaceful co-existence and respect for others in a polity.

5. Integrating Cooperative Society into the Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Processes in Nigeria

Conflict prevention will be mainstreamed to put in place structures and processes that encourage a culture of peace; in which conflicts are addressed before they degenerate into violence, and in which public officers as well as civil society members have the opportunity to be trained in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

NEEDS Nigeria, 2004: 49

The imperativeness of promoting local ownership (bottom-up approach) over and above the western liberal peacebuilding model, otherwise referred to as the top-down approach, in peacebuilding activities has been widely acknowledged by the international community. Hilhorst & Mathijs Leeuwen (2005:537) affirm this when they posit that “.....the international community has discovered the potential of local peacebuilding and aims to strengthen local organisations to do the job...”. Similarly, the Nigerian state, through one of her agencies, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), has mounted a number of conflict prevention and peacebuilding programmes to promote collaboration between the state and the civil society towards the enthronement of peaceful relationships and coexistence between the diverse social, political and ethno-religious groups in the country. Indeed, the national early warning and early response programme of the Institute is anchored on the participation of local civil society organisations.

Having said that, let us engage the *modus operandi* that can be employed to integrate the cooperative societies into the conflict prevention and peacebuilding network of activities.

First and foremost, the members of a given cooperative society must be acquainted with the nexus between conflict and development

in terms of the negative impact of conflict, especially the violent genre on human security in general and socio-economic activities in particular. Indeed, the Report of the Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) of Nigeria, conducted by IPCR in 2002, clearly established that violent conflict is not only a drag on Nigeria's development but also seriously inhibits the country's capacity to promote a culture of peace required for the promotion of sustainable peace in the polity (IPCR,2002). Unfortunately, many people are still oblivious of the need to consciously build peace to prevent and mitigate the reality of social conflict in human interaction. Consequently, the take off point in efforts to mainstream cooperative societies, especially credit unions, with huge membership at the grassroots, is to establish in the consciousness of the members the devastating effects of violent conflicts on the attainment of improved socio-economic conditions.

In addition, integrating cooperative societies into conflict prevention and peacebuilding must be targeted specifically at debriefing the members of the prevalent perception that issues of peace and security are exclusively the responsibility of the state. This perception is reinforced by the nature and character of the post-colonial African states which interact with the society as an instrument of oppression rather than the peoples' state which is meant to promote the welfare of her

citizens. The point here is that a serious attempt to integrate cooperative society into conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities must conscientiously purge the mass of the people of the belief that conflict management and peacebuilding issues in particular and state affairs in general are exclusively the responsibility of the leaders and managers of the state. This is important to facilitate the promotion of a mindset that sees peacebuilding activities as a collective responsibility or task for all among the generality of the people.

Another critical instrument that must be taken into account in mainstreaming the cooperative society into the conflict prevention and peacebuilding knowledge networks is the need for the members of the society to have a basic understanding of the elements that constitute early warning signs of impending conflicts. Indeed, early warning and response system constitute effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding mechanisms. In other words, the capacity of the members of the society should be developed to interrogate social facts and dynamics as they play out in their environment with a view to understanding latent forces and issues that may lead to violent conflicts and ultimately breakdown of public order.

The task of integrating cooperative societies into the conflict prevention and peacebuilding

networks must of necessity take into account the need to develop the capacity of the members to engage in some rudimentary analysis of conflict especially with respect to identifying the parties in conflict, both primary and shadow, and their needs. The knowledge of these, undoubtedly, would enable the members who themselves are rooted in the grassroots to interface with the parties towards instituting a process for the management and ultimate resolution of the conflict. However, it must be observed that the capacity building training programme for the members of the cooperative society must take into cognizance the educational and social backgrounds of the members.

Also, the importance of communication and dialogue as instruments for promoting peaceful coexistence and peacebuilding in a polity cannot be overemphasized. If the members of the cooperative societies are going to make positive and remarkable impact as peace agents and constituencies on the conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives in the Nigerian state, then they must be schooled in communication strategies that engender peaceful coexistence and promote dialogue among the various groups in the polity.

Moreover, the leaders and the generality of the members of cooperative societies need to be equipped with the knowledge of existing local peace resources for conflict prevention and

peacebuilding and how best to engage these local peace resources for peacebuilding activities. For example, conscientious efforts can be made to espouse the underlying the philosophy of *Omoluabi* a Yoruba word for a person of good character, among the members towards making them ambassadors for the propagation of the values and virtues inherent in the *Omoluabi* philosophy. Indeed, there are local peace resources in every community that can be sourced to promote peacebuilding activities. This implies that if members of cooperative societies are properly integrated into the modus operandi for engaging local peace resources, then they can become invaluable vehicle for peacebuilding activities.

For proper integration of cooperative societies into the conflict prevention and peacebuilding network, strategic and programmatic conflict sensitivity should be made a critical element of the training programme. This will enhance the capacity of the concerned cooperative societies to understand the conflict contexts in which they operate. Undoubtedly, the importance of the project of taking into account the positive and negative impacts of interventions, and, conversely, the impacts of these contexts on the peace and conflict dynamics in the polity cannot be over-emphasised. Indeed, this becomes imperative in light of the the fact that developmental and humanitarian assistance can unintentionally trigger and nurture destructive conflict. This

is aptly captured in Anderson's *do no harm proposition*: 'humanitarian assistance sometimes feeds conflict rather than alleviates it, and that development aid sometimes exacerbates tensions' (Anderson, 1996).

In addition, there is also the need for members of the cooperative societies to have rudimentary knowledge of the sources of conflict- competition for inadequate resources, contradicting value systems, psychological needs of groups and individuals and manipulation of information (Albert, 2001: 5). More than any of the sources of conflict listed, manipulation of information, especially in a multi-ethnic polity, can actually produce profound negative and devastating consequences. Indeed, the way information is processed and managed could either cause conflict or build peace. It is the case that "where information is used to stir negative emotions, the result is destructive. Sustainable peace results from situations where information is creatively used to bring people together" (Albert, 2001: 5). To that extent, mainstreaming cooperative societies into the peacebuilding networks should take into account the need to equip the membership with the rudimentary idea of how information can be creatively employed to prevent conflict and build peace in the polity.

Lastly, there is the need to conscientiously promote the intrinsic values of 'joint problem-

solving' as a means of resolving conflict among the members. This method of handling conflict encourages dialogue and engagement of all the parties to the conflict towards a collective and amicable settlement. When the joint problem-solving strategy becomes the preferred mode of addressing conflict by the members of the cooperative society, the stocks of bridging social capital available in the society are increased. This consequently strengthens the capability of the members of the society to make positive contribution to initiatives and programmes targeted at building peace in the polity. Thus, if the cooperative approach to conflict resolution encapsulated in the joint problem-solving style of handling conflict is grafted into the modus operandi of the cooperative society, it would have a tremendous positive impact on its engagement as vehicle for peacebuilding activities.

6. Conclusions

The age long conception of conflict prevention and peacebuilding responsibility as exclusively in the domain of the state has given way to the widely acknowledged position that promoting the cause of peace in a polity is the responsibility of all. This is reiterated by Galtung when he submits that peacebuilding is a task for all. This contemporary perception which is a paradigm shift from the state-centric view of issues of

conflict prevention and peacebuilding is reinforced by the reality of the chronic inability of many nation-states to effectively manage conflict and perform basic functions of a modern state. Consequently, there is the need to integrate cooperative credit societies into peacebuilding knowledge networks in order to sufficiently equip the members as effective agents for promotion of peace works across the country. This becomes imperative in light of its features which are invaluable assets for promotion of peace and security, especially in multi-ethnic Nigerian state. This argument is strengthened by the fact that the people in the grassroots are often best placed to identify the reasons for a conflict, the motivations of those driving it, and to suggest specific actions that could channel it in a more peaceful direction Barnes, (2006.10).

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