

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MITIGATION IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

The increasing spate of armed conflict in Benue State – Nigeria has not only increased the level of vulnerability among women but has also prompted their active involvement and participation in conflict management and peace building mechanisms thereby making them indispensable critical stakeholders. This paper therefore assesses the effectiveness of the role women play in conflict resolution and mitigation with particular focus on Benue State. Data for the study was sourced from 400 respondents using semi-structured questionnaires (SSI) and key informant interviews (KII). The gathered data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings of the study revealed that women play very important roles in conflict resolution and mitigation in Benue State. They are the ones who inculcate the culture of peace into children at the family level; early detection and prompt settlement of conflicts; and welfare services for conflict victims. It also shows that women are counselors and advocate for peace amongst other roles. Despite these, the level of effectiveness of the roles women play in conflict management was found out to be moderately high due to certain constraints such as culture and belief system, poverty, exclusion from decision making processes and lack of women friendly policies among others. The study recommends reorientation and sensitization of communities especially leaders and youths; empowerment of women in all areas of life; formulation and implementation of women friendly policies as well as conflict detection and prevention skills for women as some of the strategies to ensure effectiveness of women's role in conflict mitigation.

Key words: Conflict, Women, Resolution, Mitigation and Management

Introduction

One of the most outstanding contributions of women towards nation building in Nigeria is that of conflict management and peace initiation. Apart from performing their biosocial functions of giving birth, nursing and bringing up humans as mothers, women also have actively engaged themselves in other activities that are geared towards peaceful resolution of conflict as well as peace building. In our society today, women are very instrumental and play important roles in resolving and mitigating lingering conflicts to build peace that enhances mutual coexistence. This is because long before the recognition of the role of women in peace building processes, they had already been very much involved in such activity. As a social group, women have been suitably identified as being pro-peace. Women have been visible in the forefront of movements for non-violence and peace worldwide. They usually assume the roles of peacemakers in families, in communities and in society even though they have often been victims (Munuve, 2012).

Peace is defined as a state of calm, characterized by the lack of violent conflict, commonly understood as the absence of hostility. In other words, peace suggests the existence of healthy or newly healed relationships and prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare. The absence of peace leads to conflict. Conflict on the other hand is construed to be more than a mere disagreement - it is a situation in which people perceive a threat to their well-being, be it physical, emotional, socio-economic, religious or political (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2016).

It is unfortunate that conflict in the 21st Century is becoming part of our everyday life. Every single day, there are news headlines about wars resulting from conflicts across the globe. The agony of the killings all over the world is constantly causing tremendous dysfunction in our communities. It has become common to experience bloodbaths, untold pains and destruction of land rich in mineral and agricultural resources, destruction of youth, emptiness of treasure and poverty with women crying for their vanished loved ones.

Nigeria has had her own fair share of conflicts. In fact, Nigerians have experienced some of the most sordid tragedies arising from differences of opinions and distrust. Thousands of people have been killed in different clashes over the years as a result of conflicts; from riots, rampage, kidnapping, strikes, ethnic clashes, religious war, land disputes and political conflicts (Adeniyi, Nnamchi & Onyia, 2019).

In Benue State, the increasing spate of armed conflicts has not only increased the level of vulnerability among women but has also prompted their active involvement and participation in conflict management and peace building mechanisms thereby making them indispensable critical stakeholders. For instance, between 2017 and 2020 alone, it was estimated that over 8,000 people were violently murdered by suspected 'killer herders' and armed bandits, while over 35,000 residents were displaced in the affected communities (Akpehe et al, 2021). In fact, more than 13 Local Government Areas (LGAs) out of the 23 LGAs of Benue state have experienced various types of conflicts as groups battle themselves over land, border, access and control of natural resources like the case of the herders and farmers conflict which has remained a reoccurring conflict with the scope expanding and widening on a yearly basis (Institute of peace and conflict Resolution, 2016).

Various studies have emphasized the need for the inclusion of women in building peace in conflict zones all over the world. For instance, studies across conflict volatile areas

have revealed that negotiation and peace talks yield better results in areas where women were carried along in the processes than in other areas where they were left out of the processes (United Nations Women, 2018). This has become very necessary because women make up half of the society and they are usually the most affected when conflicts escalate into violence. Thus, women involvement in conflict resolution and mitigation is timely. Despite the vitality and indispensability of women's roles in preventing and managing conflict as well as restoring peace in the affected areas, not much has been done empirically to examine the extent of effectiveness of this role in the study area. Thus, it is important to know these roles as well as how effective women have been playing them. It is also pertinent to find out the challenges that women face while they are playing conflict resolution roles as well as strategize how to make them more effective with this all-important assignment.

Literature Review

Although there is no consensus among scholars on the definition of conflict as each defined it according to the writer's perspective, what seems to be common in the scholarly definitions is that conflict occurs when there is a state of struggle, opposition, incompatibility, interference, divergence of interest, tension, interaction and interdependence among others (Adenyi, Nnamchi & Onyia, 2019). According to Osuchukwu and Udeze (2015), conflict may be defined as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. Conflict on teams is inevitable; however, the results of conflict are not predetermined. Conflict might escalate and lead to non-productive results, or conflict can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products. Although very few people go looking for conflict, more often than not, conflict results because of miscommunication between people with regard to their needs, ideas, beliefs, goals and values.

Akpenpuun (2013) observes that the eruption of communal conflicts usually results in a massive loss of lives and destruction of properties. It also hinders manpower growth, labour strength, socio-economic development, social cohesion, and political stability. Communal conflicts have the proclivity or tendency to undermine the health of society. Such conflict also reduces people's personal security and restricts their access to food, medicines and medical supplies, clean water, sanitation, shelter and health services. People's coping capacities are severely strained: The pattern of this type of conflict has an immediate impact on civilian suffering.

In a similar vein, Enyigwe, Udejahand Ugwuanyi (2017) using Ezza-Ezillo communal conflict as a case study observe that communal conflicts have caused irreparable, immeasurable and irreversible calamities, the cumulative negative effect of which are; loss of millions of human lives, wanton destruction of property worth millions of naira, displacement/dislocation of inhabitants making them homeless or refugees in another land, halting of commercial activities and developments, and creating permanent enemies. Besides, experience has shown that communal conflicts create room for tension, hostility, lack of trust, overreactions and other problems associated with social frictions

Conflict resolution and mitigation viewed from a gender perspective means changing the system and power dynamics that led to conflict in the first place. Sustainable peace requires fully including women and all segments of society as politically viable citizens. Women's participation in resolving and preventing conflict is not an optional, but rather an essential ingredient of peace-building (Munuve, 2012).

Women and Conflict Resolution

It was the former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan who rightly said that:

“We can no longer afford to minimize or ignore the contributions of women and girls to all stages of conflict resolution, peace-making, peace-building, peacekeeping and reconstruction processes. Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men” (United Nations, 2013:23).

The Turkish culture is such that if men are fighting or engaged in violence, all a woman has to do in order to stop the fighting is take her scarf off and put it onto the ground, because the scarf from the woman’s head symbolizes her honour and society’s dignity (United Nations, 2013). So, this means that the Turkish tradition recognizes the role of women and also that when society is in crises, the women’s honour is jeopardized, thus once she removes her veil which represents her honour and dignity, the men are expected to swallow their pride and pain and stop fighting immediately.

The international community also recognizes this important position of women in the society and has made efforts towards ensuring their inclusiveness in peace building processes. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN SC RES 1325) is primarily concerned with international peace and security, and recognizes the following long-neglected facts: that women and men have a different experience of war, both as combatants and noncombatants, and thus different roles, views and needs regarding arrangements to stop violent conflict, recover from it and prevent its recurrence. It recognizes that women have an equal right to participate as agents in the resolution and prevention of conflict; that gender relations within conflict-affected societies may shift during and after, conflict; that the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is a neglected reality which must be responded to, stopped, prevented and prosecuted; that peace processes and their implementation present a special opportunity to promote gender equality in societies and should, in principle, be gender mainstreamed (Osuchukwu & Udeze, 2015).

Munuve (2012) is of the opinion that women’s peace-building efforts must be supported, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because any nation experiencing conflict needs the strength of its women. Women are the ones who hold their families and communities together during the worst of the conflict. They keep a measure of stability during chaos and during displacement. As the attention turns to various methods of conflict resolution those contributions must be recognized.

Women’s Role in conflict Resolutions

Adenyi (2015) listed some of the roles that women play in conflict situations in their communities to include: settling issues when it is still at embryo stage within their groups, wading into family issues and settling cases between parents and children, between community and youths, between daughters and mothers in laws, counseling conflicting parties and advocating for peace, building resilience and insisting on peaceful strategies and also volunteer services in supplying food and other welfare packages to displaced people.

Bigio and Vogelstein (2016) reported that Conflict situation often force women to organize themselves to safeguard their basic needs and as such carry out activities related to education, health care, food distribution, care of the family, internally displaced persons as well as refugees. They added that conflicts have forced many women to become household heads and breadwinners taking over responsibilities traditionally carried out by men. Empirical evidences have shown that women have always played a unique role in the reconciliation process in several societies, their place in society puts them in a strong position to encourage dialogue between disputing parties. According to Nwolisa and Onwuzuruigbo in Igbinijesu (2013), the activities of *Umuada* (women born in an Igbo community who have gone to marry in other areas) led to the resolution of the land dispute between *Umunebo* and *Umuokuzu* communities in Owerri Local government area as well as Aguleri and Umuleri communities in Imo and Anambra states of Nigeria respectively.

Kpae and Masi (2019) further maintained that women in Nigeria have used peaceful protests at various times as a means of calling the needed attention to conflicts. Some of the examples cited include the 'Bring Back Our Girls' campaign to return 276 kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram terrorist group as war strategy since 2014; the 2010 Jos women protest against the killing of Christians; Enugu-North, Enugu-East, Udi and Ezeagu LGAs women joint protest seeking government protection against armed herdsmen, and the 2014 Borno women protest at the gate of a military base on the ground that their husbands and sons were ill-equipped to fight against the Islamist terrorist group.

Furthermore, Munuve (2012) asserted that women organized many prayer meetings and other kinds of social gatherings for themselves, their families, their communities, their countries and the world, to seek help for peace from the supernatural. The findings of Shepherd (2015) also revealed that women have shown the capacity to survive in extremely difficult circumstances characterized by conflicts, by developing ways of coping with life. They usually display a remarkable resilience in adapting to their new living conditions, thereby spreading hope for a better tomorrow and creating room for reconciliation.

Despite these efforts, women's presence as negotiators, mediators and peace agreement signatories in formal peace processes remains negligible (less than 10 percent) and their place in important post-conflict institutions such as commissions on truth and reconciliation, reparations, electoral and constitutional reform is only guaranteed where activism and quotas are in effective operation (Munuve, 2012).

Research Method

This section presents the detailed methodology used in this study using the following sections;

Study Setting

The study was conducted in Benue state which lies within the lower River Benue trough in the middle belt region of Nigeria. Her geographic coordinates are longitude 7° 47' and 10° 0' East, latitude 6° 25' and 8° 8' North. Created on 23rd February 1976, Benue State, which derived its name from River Benue is located in the middle belt region of Nigeria bordering Nasarawa state to the North, Taraba state to the East, Ebonyi, Enugu and Cross-River states to the South and Kogi state to the West. The southeast stretch of the state also shares boundary with the Republic of Cameroon.

Administratively, Benue state is divided into 23 Local Governments namely Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Oju, Okpokwu, Otukpo, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya. The State has a projected population of over 5,741,800 people as at 2019 (NPC, 2019), comprising the Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etulo, and Ufia inhabiting an estimated land area of 32861.25 Square Kilometers.

As an agrarian State, agriculture remains the main occupation of the vast majority of her people engaging over 75% of the entire population. Notably, Benue State is the nation's acclaimed food basket because of her rich agricultural produce which include: yams, rice, cassava, potatoes, maize, soya beans, sorghum, millet, cocoyam, mango, orange, cashew, tomato and pepper. The State has a tropical sub humid climate, with two distinct seasons, namely wet season and dry season. Benue state often experiences a mean annual rainfall of between 1,250 and 2,000 mm and a mean temperature of 32.5 °c. The state is richly endowed with both human and natural resources including minerals such as limestone, coal, kaolin and iron, which are still untapped.

The State had witnessed a considerable number of inter and intra – communal clashes on many occasions with devastating outcomes on human lives (especially women, children and the aged) and property thereby necessitating this study.

Study Population

Though, Benue State has an estimated population more than six (6) million people (NPC, 2019), due to limited time and other resources, only 400 respondents were randomly selected from the 23 LGAs to represent the population using Taro Yamane's (1973) sample size determination formula. Study participants were males and females from 18 years and above.

Sampling Procedure

The study employed both clustered and purposive sampling techniques to draw its actual respondents. Firstly, the State was clustered into three geo - ecological zones namely: Zone A, B and C. Secondly, one Local Government Area was purposively selected from each of the zones due to high number of cases of communal conflicts recorded. These include Logo in Zone A, Guma and Gwer - West in Zone B, Agatu and Oju in Zone C. Thirdly, in each of the LGAs, two council wards noted for high incidences of communal violence were purposively selected. Fourthly, a sampling frame was developed for each of the council ward using proportional allocation of 0.001 across board. The primary data were elicited from the respondents using semi – structured interviews (SSIs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) methods of data collection. The obtained data were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The Taro Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula for finite population was used in determining the sample size for this study. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where:

n = Sample Size (?)

N = Study Population (3,976,700)

e = Error of Precision 95%

1 = Constant

Thus;

$$\frac{43233}{1 + 43233(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{43233}{1 + 43233 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{43233}{1 + 108.0825}$$

$$n = \frac{43233}{109.0825}$$

$$n = \underline{396}$$

n = 400 Approx.

Results and Discussions

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents captured in this study include sex, marital status, age, occupation, educational attainment and income. In terms of sex, all the 400 (100%) respondents were female. In respect to age, the data obtained had indicated that 92 (23%) respondents were within the youth category of 18 – 30 years, 195 (48.8%) respondents aged between 31 and 64 years, whereas 113 (28.2%) respondents had the age bracket of 65 years and above. The marital status of respondents showed that 96 (24%) respondents were single and 199 (49.8%) respondents were married while 105 (26.2%) respondents were widows.

Furthermore, the occupational distribution of the respondents indicated that 245 (61.2%) respondents had farming as their dominant occupation, 96 (23.8%) respondents were traders, 30 (7.5%) respondents were civil servants, and 30 (7.5%) respondents belonged to other various occupations. The study also found out that 102 (26.5%) respondents had attended and/or completed primary level of education, 189 (47.2%) respondents had attained secondary school level, and 47 (11.8%) respondents attained tertiary level of education, while 62 (15.5%) respondents were non-literate. See Table 1 for details.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency N=400	Percentage (100 %)
Age		
14-30	92	23.0
31-64	195	48.8
65 above	113	28.2
Sex		
Male	0	0.00
Female	400	100
Education		
Non-Literate	62	15.5
Primary	102	25.5
Secondary	189	47.2
Tertiary	47	11.8
Marital status		
Single	96	24.0
Married	199	49.8
Widowed	105	26.2
Occupation		
Farmer	245	61.2
business	95	23.8
civil servant	30	7.5
Others	30	7.5

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Mitigation in Benue State

This section discusses the study's findings on the various roles that women play in resolving and mitigating conflicts and its attendant consequences in the study area. The outcome of the survey carried in the study area on the topic under investigation had indicated that all (100%) respondents confirmed the onerous roles that Benue women played in conflict resolution and mitigation as well as post - conflict peace building. These include: embarking on anti - violence crusades as ambassadors of peace during and after conflict incidences, engaging the parties involved in the conflict for timely reconciliation, rendering of advocacy services capable of resolving conflict and suing for peaceful and harmonious relationship, giving care to victims of conflicts at homesteads and/or internally displaced peoples 'camps (IDPCs). Other roles are: engaging the conflicting parties in peaceful negotiations and consequent resolutions, promoting the culture of peace in children and youth during socialization, fasting and praying for peace and harmony between or among parties involved, forming coalitions for peaceful resolution of conflict and its aftermath, as well as organizing protest (sometimes, half - naked) against conflict extremisms. This finding is summarized on Table 2.

Table 2: The Roles That Women play in Conflict Resolution and Mitigation

S/n	The role of women	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Embarking on anti - violence crusades as peace ambassadors	92	67	32	19	3.10	Accepted
2	Engaging the warring parties for timely reconciliation	31	45	9	5	3.0	Accepted
3	Advocacy Services	123	112	41	24	3.11	Accepted
4	Care giving to conflict – based victims	147	71	23	59	3.02	Accepted
5	Engaging in peaceful negotiations and resolutions	31	45	9	5	3.0	Accepted
6	Promotion of pro – peace value orientation and socialization	147	71	23	59	3.02	Accepted
7	Fasting and praying harmony and peace	31	45	9	5	3.0	Accepted
8	Forming coalitions for peace building	92	67	32	19	3.10	Accepted
9	Organizing protest against conflict extremism	31	45	9	5	3.0	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Using a 4-point Likert scale with codes ranging from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD) in Table 2 above gives a critical mean value of 2.50. All items with means above the critical mean of 2.50 are considered accepted by respondents while items with means below the critical mean of 2.50 are considered rejected by respondents. Thus, the Table above gives an item-by-item analysis of the responses given by respondents. Since all the items have means above the critical mean of 2.50, it means therefore that respondents have accepted all the above assertions as various roles that women play in resolving and mitigating conflict in Benue state. Information from this Table revealed that women in the area had engaged themselves in various forms of activities in helping not only to resolve the numbers of conflicts that have engulfed the area but also to mitigate future occurrences. For instance, the Benue women of the Tiv extraction had not only organized peaceful on protests but also embarked on monthly fasting and prayer crusades popularly known as “kwelegh u Onkasev Tiv” (which literally means lamentation of the Tiv women) to help resolve the protracted herder – farmers’ conflict in Benue state – Nigeria.

Corroborating the above assertion, a 50-year-old key informant from Gbem, Vandeikya Local Government Area said thus:

The role of women in conflict resolution and mitigation in our land is indispensable. It is always the women that draw the attention of their husbands about the human cost of conflict and tend to sue for peace to preserve human lives and property. This is so because women are naturally emotional and peaceful with a yearning heart for their loved ones. Since no woman would want to lose her husband and/or children in the tide

of conflict, they are quick to call for peaceful reconciliation which had helped so much in managing conflict in our area (KII, 2021).

Another female key informant from Naka, Gwer – West LGA stressed that:

We women are generally humane, kind – hearted and peaceful but tend to suffer most pain along with our children whenever violent conflict erupts. The more we allow the incidence to degenerate, the severe the pain we undergo. Thus, we tend to be very quick to detect conflict and always look for ways to nip it in the bud before it gets out of hand. Furthermore, we are mostly responsible for inculcating the values of the society in our children therefore we used to build very deliberately, the spirit of peace in our children starting from their early relationships with siblings and peers in order to mold them into peaceful adults that would always employ peaceful measures of resolving conflict should it arise (KII, 2021).

Furthermore, the words of a key informant who was also a victim of violent conflict in Agatu local government area of Benue state – Nigeria were captured thus:

Women organize and hold prayer sessions seeking the face of the almighty God during conflicts in their communities. They are also readily available counselors and advocates for peaceful resolutions whenever conflict erupts. More so, women used to volunteer, help to provide and distribute welfare and relief packages to conflict victims (KII, 2021).

In light of the foregoing, it could be deduced that the role of women in conflict resolution and prevention is equal to none and quite indispensable. Since violent conflict in the study area had brought untold hardship, anguish and misery on people especially, women and children being the most vulnerable victims, active involvement and participation of women in conflict management and post – conflict peace building would be a sure way of minimizing the spate of communal conflict bedeviling our local society especially, the rural areas. This finding therefore corroborates the position of Agbajobi (2010) that there are obvious reasons why women are important to the peace building process. For example, they constitute half of every community and the difficult task of peace building must be done by men and women in partnership. Women are also the central caretakers of families and everyone is affected when they are excluded from peace building. Women are also advocates for peace, as peacekeepers, relief workers and mediators.

The Effectiveness of the Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Mitigation

Findings on the level of effectiveness of the role that Benue women play in conflict resolution and mitigation indicated that their role is moderately effective. Very specifically, 54(13.5%) respondents maintained that the role of women in conflict resolution and mitigation in Benue state was highly effective, 198(49.5%) respondents affirmed that the level of effectiveness of women’s role in conflict resolution and mitigation was moderate, 120(30%) respondents asserted that effectiveness of the role of women in conflict resolution and mitigation was low, while 54(13.5%) respondents were indecisive. This information is displayed on Table 3.

Table 3: Effectiveness of the Roles Women play in Conflict Resolution and Mitigation in Benue State

Level of Effectiveness	Frequency n = 400	Percentage (% = 100)
High	54	13.5
Moderate	198	49.5

Low	120	30.0
Undecided	28	7.0

Source: Field work 2021

Information in Table 3 depicted therefore that the level of effectiveness of the roles of women in conflict management is moderate. Majority (49.5%) of the respondents maintained that women have been playing their roles but its level of effectiveness was not high because of their poor involvement in the core decision making processes that had to do with whether or not their communities go into violent conflict. Though women in these communities often bear the biggest brunt because of their high level of vulnerability in any incident of communal conflict that occurs, men usually dominate the decision – makings process bothering on conflict and post – conflict management activities thereby relegating women to the background. Apart from decision making, findings have also revealed more other factors responsible for the moderate level of women’s role in conflict management in Benue state to include cultural barriers, weak political representation, high poverty level and taking on of more social responsibilities such as primary care - givers and other humanitarian services thereby making participation in conflict and post – conflict management more tedious and difficult.

Further findings from some key informants on the level of effectiveness of women’s role in conflict management in the area according a 35 year – old widow from Tyokpo showed that the efficacy of their role is yet to be optimal. In her words:

We are making frantic efforts in the area of conflict management in our land but some gender – based factors always stand against us in attaining our desired goals. Before a woman could embark on conflict resolution especially, building cross – community coalitions and stepping forward as role models and mediators requires approval of a man under whom such a woman lives. In an event where such request is turned down, the woman has to defer her action and motion thereby affecting timely reconciliation that could risk an escalation to a violent conflict (KII. 2021).

In addition, another Key informant in Jimba community who was also a victim of conflict extremism maintained that:

Women are becoming more conscious of their role in conflict management now than usual. Since women suffer some certain peculiar consequences that are different from men and their roles in conflict management are also not the same, we have to rise to our responsibility. For instance, our men don’t suffer sexual assault and starvation the way we suffer it along with our children. It is high time we stop folding our arms, we have step in and find possible ways of ending the ravaging violent skirmishes engulfing our land (KII, 2021).

In terms of factors confronting the performance of women in conflict management, the study found out that these factors are manifest or existent at both community and state levels. At the local level, the study discovered cultural beliefs, poverty, poor conflict management skills and exclusion of women in decision making mechanisms. At the state level, exclusion of women from peace and negotiations, lack of good representation and women friendly policies as well as institutions responsible for timely detection and reconciliations constituted the bane (See details in Table 4)

Table 4: Factors Affecting Women’s Participation in Conflict Resolution and Mitigation in Benue State

Variable	Freq n = 400	Percentage % = 100
Community Levels		
Culture and belief system	144	36
Poverty	104	26
Lack of conflict detection and prevention skills	72	18
Exclusion of women from decision making in the communities	80	20
State Levels		
Exclusion of women in peace and negotiation talks	96	24
Lack of sizeable number of women in legislative chambers	80	20
Lack of women friendly policies	156	39
Lack of institutions responsible for early conflict resolution	68	17

Source: Field work 2021

Information in Table 4 above showed that at the community level, cultural beliefs (36%) and poverty (26%) are the major challenges that women face in the course of managing conflict and building peace; whereas, at the state level, lack of women friendly policies (39%) and women exclusion (24%) are the more perturbing challenges that women must surmount to gain a firm foot in conflict management. As noted in the earlier finding, the exclusion of women in conflict management might not only be as a result of mere male dominance but also the peculiarities surrounding of their gender roles as mothers and affectionate care – givers. This implies that deliberate and concerted efforts are required direly to surmount and/or minimize these legions of challenges to enhance women’s optimum participation in conflict management in the study area. This finding therefore confirms the findings of Kolawole (2021) who opined that conflict management requires a more inclusive process, one that involves women playing more crucial roles in building peace. It is deduced therefore that women need to be integrated into all levels of governance and decision-making in order to ensure their active participation in peace-making and peace-building, so that they can participate and have their voices heard in decision-making and peace processes and as such help build a more sustainable peaceful world at large.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of women in conflict resolution and mitigation in Benue State and found out that women had played various roles in conflict resolution and mitigation in the area ranging from inculcating the culture of peace in children to volunteer services and welfare packages for conflict victims amongst others. Despite these

achievements, the level of effectiveness of their services was rated moderately since they were more or less, seen only as victims of conflicts needing protection rather than as agents of change for reconciliation and peace. This leaves untapped, the potential and capacities of women whose contributions can be harnessed to promote transformative change and sustainable peace.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and Non-governmental Organizations should mobilize and sensitize communities on measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution that involves women in all processes.
2. The mindset of the stakeholders, especially in some rural communities should be worked on to allow women into the decision-making processes, especially in conflict resolution.
3. Benue state government should follow the footsteps of other states in Nigeria and implement the recommendations of Resolution 1325 (UN SC RES 1325) which will primarily take care of all the policy issues that hinder women from effectively playing their roles in conflict resolution and mitigation.
4. Benue state government should also create and empower organizations in partnership with women and peace to form women networks across the state. Train and closely monitor them to effectively detect and counsel for peace in their respective communities.
5. Women who will be mediators for peace must also be empowered and encouraged in political education and entrepreneurship to ensure viability and sustainability.

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