The Role Of Women In Conflict Management In Benue State

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Abstract

The chapter examines the role of women in conflict resolution with a special focus on Benue State. The paper relied on secondary sources of data collection and the data is analyzed within the arrangement of liberal feminist theory. The study discovered that the patriarchal organization of African societies including Benue State has diminished the critical role that women play in conflict management and rehabilitation. It was also discovered that traditional and religious practices have created great challenges in the efforts of women towards their contribution to conflict management. The work also discovered that despite these challenges, women have demonstrated capacity as peace builders in many cases. To this end, the paper recommends that women should legally be accorded recognized roles in conflict management irrespective of the traditional and religious practices in their communities

Keywords: **Women, conflict, communal conflict, Resolution and conflict management**

Introduction

Conflict has always been part of man's history. Early epochs of society have shown that once men began relating with each other and started life in a communal way, disagreement became inevitable as a result of the differences and sentiments inherent in men. Conflict being part of society has affected the dynamics of society, it has shaped society into a gigantic force and as such generated both possibilities and problems for mankind. Conflict has been able to transform society into a desirous state but has also turned man into a monster and society into hell. Many people have argued and are still emphasizing that development in any society at any period of time is as a result of the contradictions that exist in such a society, that is, conflict (Musa, 2021). Therefore, conflict is seen as the locomotive of societal mobility through it various phases. It is a dosage which either promote development in society or hinders it.

African societies in post-independence era for example have experienced devastating conflicts, becoming the norm rather than exception. The effects of these protracted conflict on men and women have been different with the latter being more adversely affected in terms of deaths, physical injuries, displacement and loss of livelihood. Women form at least 80 percent of refugees in most camps in and out of Africa. We cannot controvert the fact that conflicts have resulted in gross underdevelopment in most parts of the African continent. Looking at Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan, one can only visualize horror in the face of violent conflicts (Herath, 2018).

Nigeria is one of the countries in the world that has experienced lots of violent conflicts and is still experiencing them, these conflicts come with devastating effects leading to massive loss of lives, destruction of properties, destruction of infrastructures (Iloh, Ekeocha, and Ugwu,2018). The prevalence of this menace has necessitated the adoption of different methods to address the issue in form of peacekeeping missions, panels of enquiry, truth and reconciliation commissions. These peace processes have overtime been largely dominated by men with little or no participation from women arising from gender inequality, patriarchal cultural practices that permeate into peacebuilding (Agbu, 2014).

Benue State as a conglomeration of individuals with different ethnic affiliations, religious beliefs, political ideologies, economic interests had in time past has its own share of conflict and its still experiencing it. Since Benue was carved out of the Benue-Plateau in 1976, many points of contestation over land resources as a result of irregular boarders, traditional practices and access to political power has taken center stage in the Benue political

economy. Tsuwa (2014) have exacerbated the phenomenon of conflict within and around Benue State which include boundary contestation as a result of colonial manipulation of who stays where and the creation of indigene-settler dichotomy has resulted to boundary conflict between Benue-Taraba, Benue-Enonyi, Benue Nassarawa, Benue-Kogi and Benue -Enugu. These inter-state conflicts have resulted to devastating levels of human and property development.

Globally, the U.N has developed strategies through various institutions, protocols, and resolution to prevent and manage conflicts. On the African continent, the AU has done same and ECOWAS at the West African sub-region. Despite these various structures, policies and activities, conflict have continued. However, the challenges of managing this various conflict seems overwhelming on the current security architecture and personnel (Issifu, 2014). Discussion on the component or who is more suitable or more committed in the resolution of conflict have emerged. With this new discussion, women have been regarded to be a critical part of managing and resolving conflict. Some have argued that women official inclusion in the mechanism of conflict resolution may just be a penance for the effective management of conflict. This however, is not to say women are not also conflict instigators and combatants, as some took up arms, while others actually perpetrated violence against women and men alike. In all of these contestations, women have played and continue to play prominent roles in ensuring that peace project is sustained. It is against the backdrop the paper examines the role of women in conflict management in Benue State.

Review of Concept

Conflict

As diverse as the perspectives on conflict are, so is what actually constitute conflict. Some scholar conceptualizations of conflict are considered here Stagner as cited in Tsuwa (2014) defines conflict as a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other but not both. Each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal. Wright as cited in Tsuwa (2014) views conflict as opposition among social entities against one another. This view of conflict, he postulates centers on two mutually exclusive social forces of pursuing incompatible goals. Conflict is essentially about needs, interests, positions and goals which are not only scarce but also often fiercely competed for by citizens in a society. Due to the scarce nature of these tangibles and/or intangible resources, competition becomes inevitable and

84

tense. This tense competition usually degenerates into violent conflict especially when parties involved brazenly abuse the prescribed rules.

Osisioma, (2014) conceptualized conflict as the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observations and memory. It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving. Conflict is a 'sine qua non' of reflection and ingenuity. He further affirmed that conflict is an interpersonal dynamic which is shaped by the internal and external environments of the parties involved, and is manifested in a process which affects group performance either functionally or dysfunctional. Conflicts arise when two or more individuals, groups, communities, or nations pursue mutually exclusive or unharmonious goals. Often times, the underlying factors include a scarcity of resources, a clash of interests, incongruence of values, standards and principles, and a perception of being displaced by other parties in pursuit of desired goals. Conflicts can originate within an entity resulting in intra-personal, intra-group or intranational conflicts; or they could reflect incompatible actions between contrasting groups or persons leading to interpersonal, intergroup or international conflicts (Yuguda, & Goni, 2013) Depending on how they are handled, conflicts can serve a constructive role leading to a re-examination of basic assumptions and practices, or in the alternative, to a disruption of life and general wellbeing of a people. The challenge for leaders and managers, is how to make conflicts constructive rather than destructive, overt rather than covert, marginal rather than fundamental, peripheral rather than pivotal

In the context of this work, conflict is defined as a situation of struggle between and/or among opposing individuals, groups, communities or state over certain desirable values arising from action of any of the parties in the quest to realize or secure those values. When there is no superior force or effective regulative mechanism to balance the struggle and thus prevent the situation from becoming more intense and the parties involved employ physical force such that the conflict results in injuries and damages as well as elimination of opponent in the quest to secure values at stake. The above is because man's needs are different and numerous while the resources to get these needs alone are limited thus, there is bound to be conflict.

Communal Conflict

Communal conflicts are those conflicts in which the participants are communal groups. And communal groups are those groups in which their primary identity prevails over other identities. Communal conflicts are threats or actions of one party directed at territory – rights, interests or privileges – of another party, because of differences over economic issues, power or authority, cultural values and beliefs (Coleman, 2017). In this

regards, Mulin (2016) notes that conflicts in any social system(society), results from differences in perception, limited resources, role conflicts, inequitable treatment, violation of territory. Communal conflicts arise over the production and consumption of goods, socialization, social control, and social participation.

Ilvento (2015), in his definition of communal conflict, underscored the importance of components like place, interaction and subsistence which provides an insight into the dynamics of communal life. For instance, people inhabit a geographic area, and work together in turn which provide opportunity for interaction, which engenders conflict. Importantly, even the ubiquity of modern communication technology has not replaced the fundamental relationship between propinquity and interaction. Communal conflicts are therefore products of social relations. Likewise, Dzurgba (2006) had earlier noted communal conflict as conflict which occurs between two or more communities over territorial land, farmland and territorial water for fishing. From the concepts above, one can conclude that communal conflict is more or less community conflict and/or ethnic conflict. Thus, communal conflict is the expression of violent disagreement among communities over allocation of values. It is competition over values between communities that is mostly responsible for communal conflict. Violent interaction among communities poses threat to security**.** Oboh and Hyande (2006) described communal conflict as conflict involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or acts of violence over issues such as claims of land ownership, religion and political differences leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties.

From the foregoing, there are salient, impinging critical variables that can be isolated. Importantly, conflicts are system driven at both social and physical levels. In other words, pluralism and divergencies are fundamental to the development of conflict. But violent conflicts inherent in the organisation and community deserve studying as it can be functional and dysfunctional to the goal of development and so should be properly managed

The Concept of Peace

The concept of peace is defined differently by different scholars and policy makers. However, peace has been defined by most analysts, as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence (Igbuzor, 2011, Francis, 2006). But as Igbuzor (2011) notes correctly, this conception of peace has been criticized by many scholars, such as Ibeanu (2006); Reychler (2006); Wiberg (2006) and Bajpay (2003), for being inadequate for understanding the meaning and nature of peace. To overcome these limitations in the prevailing definitions of peace, the Nowegian peace

theorist, who is certainly one of the leading experts on the issue of peace, Galtung (2011), has distinguished three types of violence that can help to understand the concept of peace. These are:-

First, he considers the issues of direct violence. Direct violence is manifested by physical, emotional and psychological violence. Second, Galtung talks of structural violence. Structural violence, he says, comes in the form of deliberate policies and structures that cause human suffering, death and harm. Finally and thirdly, he talks of cultural violence. Cultural violence involves cultural norms and practices that create discrimination, injustice and human suffering.

In addition, Galtung outlines two dimensions of peace: The first is what he calls "negative peace". Negative peace, according to him, is the absence of direct violence, war, fear and conflict at individual, national, regional and international levels. The second he calls "positive peace". Positive peace depicts the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice and inner peace at individual levels. The obvious implications of Galtung's findings and conclusions are that any useful conceptualization of peace must therefore; go beyond the narrow focus on the absence of war, fear, anxiety, suffering and violence.

Ibeanu (2006), has also attempted to offer a comprehensive and holistic conception of peace. He also links it directly to the issue of sustainable development. He defines peace as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and the wider international community. Ibeanu (2006) points out that there are philosophical, sociological and political definitions of peace. Many philosophers see peace as a natural, original, God-given state of human existence for men and women. Sociologically, as Garuba has pointed out, peace refers to a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms (Garuba, 1999a, 1999b)

Politically, however, Ibeanu explains that peace entails political order. That is, the institutionalization of political structures in a way that makes justice possible. Thus, he argues that it would be wrong to classify a country experiencing pervasive structural violence as peaceful. Garuba, (1999a, 1999b) further argues in effect, that even though war may not be going on in a country, if there are pervasive poverty, oppression of the poor by the rich, police brutality, intimidation of ordinary citizens by those in power, oppression of women or monopolization of resources and power by some social cleavages in the society or nation, it would still be wrong to say that there is peace in such a country or society

Conflict Management as a Concept

Conflict management according to John (2020) connotes containment of conflict through steps introduced to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control the behavior of conflicting parties, in other words, it ensures conflict prevention. To Best (2012) conflict management is a process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. It is sometimes used synonymously with conflict regulation and covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive. It also involves negotiation, mediation, arbitration and reconciliation. For instance, the boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroun, especially over the Bakassi Peninsula went through various stages of conflict management, including the judicial pronouncement by the international court of justice in 2002 and the process is still ongoing.

Conflict management is the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. It is a process that seeks to remove cognitive barriers to agreement and group synergy. It often covers an array of measures of conflict resolution: problem solving, super-ordinate goals, expansion of resources, avoidance, smoothing, compromise, authoritative command, and altering the human and structural variables (Osisioma, 2014).

It can also be seen as a process limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspect of conflict so that in the end, conflicts are identified and handled sensibly, fairly and efficiently with minimal consequences. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in a given situation. The term is perhaps an admission of the reality that conflict is a sine qua non to human affairs, but that not all conflicts can always be resolved, therefore, what practitioners can do is to manage and regulate them.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The study relied on documentary evidence (secondary data). These were data sourced by extracting relevant information from other sources and previous studies. These documents were mainly publications on the role of women in conflict resolution and peace building generally, and their roles in Benue State particularly. Thus, secondary sources such as text books, journal articles and other written works sourced from libraries were utilized. The study also made use of internet materials that contained information on the

role of women in conflict resolution in Benue State. These documents are already in the public domain. What the authors did was to refine, interpret, evaluate and analyze them. To analyze our data, we used content analysis, rooted on systematic logical deductions. This meant that we organized and synthesized the large volumes of textual data we generated from all the documents mentioned above, with a view to searching for patterns and discerning what was relevant from the documents. In other words, we systematically reduced the documents to logical, meaningful and coherent interpretation, and on the basis of that we drew our inferences and conclusions

The work adopts the liberal feminist theory to explain the role of women in the management of conflict in Benue state. The Utopian Socialist and French philosopher Charles Fourier is credited with having originated the word "feminism" in 1837 (Goldstein, 1982). The words "feminism" and "feminist" is purported to have first appeared in France and the Netherlands in 1872, Great Britain in the 1890s, and the United States in 1910. Liberal feminists are seeking to end women's exclusion from or under-representation in office, power and employment, they seek women's equal rights in the military including in combat. They see women Protection as a way of keeping them from power and their dependence on men as compromising their claims to full citizenship which is usually understood to include fighting for one 's country. Other feminists are critical of Liberal feminists as seeking equality in masculinist institutions on men 's terms. In different ways, they seek to change the institutions themselves to be women friendly (Pettin, 2001).

On a general note, liberal feminism is premised on the idea that gender inequality in society is a product of patriarchal and sexist patterning of division of labor (Messer, 2002). Based on the assumptions of liberal feminism, gender is socially constructed and is manifest in the division of labor where domestic work that is devalued and not remunerated is assigned to women while work outside the home is highly remunerated and is assigned to men. This whole phenomenon is perpetuated through patriarchal ideology (Messer, 2002). The theory explains the lack of recognition for the role of women organizations in conflict resolution to our cultural beliefs and attitudes.

However, in spite of the seeming contributions of liberal feminism to the development of the society, it is not without criticisms. To mama and Salo (2001) feminism does not have a sound basis. The central tenet on which feminism built its argument is that both the male and female gender are equal. Since they are equal by nature, they share the same rights and privileges. But the question is; what is the basis for the postulation that the male and female genders are equal. Are they equal because they share the same human nature?

89

If this is so, then animals could also claim to be equal with human since they share the same 'animality' with the humans. Even the stones and other non-living things could have a claim for equality, since they share the same existence with humans. If the feminists are right to claim, that the both sexes are equal because they share the same nature; the same argument could be used to justify our equality with the animals, the plants and the non-living things. This argument by the feminist is clearly faulty, since the conclusion does not follow from the premise, sharing the same nature does not mean equality. The conclusion derived from here is that the feminists have no sound basis for their argument for equality.

The theory is however relevant in explaining the role of women in conflict resolution in Benue State because from the assumption of the theory it is believed that it is the men who are supposed to be involved in outdoor activities such as conflict resolution while women are supposed to be involved in menial jobs such as childcare and housekeeping. Consequently, even though women have played important roles in conflict management, their roles have not been recognized simply because they are women. Perhaps if these organizations were formed by women, their roles would have been acknowledged. This work therefore states that, for the women organizations to be deeply involved in conflict resolution and their contributions to be appreciated, there has to be a change in our cultural beliefs and attitudes.

The Role of Women in conflict management in Benue State

Women and children constitute the most affected and vulnerable group whenever there are conflicts, violence, genocides and wars in any society, According to Mzvondiwa (2007), women suffer the most from the consequences of conflict and social fragmentation in countries ravaged by war devastations. In other words, they are always the major victims of a social condition. A typical case study is in Rwanda where it is estimated that during the genocide, between 250,000 and 500,000 women were exposed to some form of gender-based violence, mainly rape (Mutamba and Izabiliza, 2005). However, despite being the major victims of conflicts, research has shown that women are hardly recognized as stakeholders during peace negotiations for resolution of conflicts. They hardly participate during peace talks as it is often seen as a male affair. This is evidenced in a report by the United Nations which shows that from 1990 to 2017, women only constituted 2 percent of conflict mediators and 8 percent of peace negotiators globally (Sisulu, 2019), an indication that they are relegated to the background when solutions for peaceful resolution of conflicts are being sought. In fact, according to Prentice (2012, p.25), 'women are disproportionately affected by conflict, and… they are disproportionately excluded from processes to resolve it'. This

90

stems from the belief that they have little or nothing to contribute in the peace project.

Contrary to this belief, evidence has shown that women have proven their mettle in conflict resolution and peace building whenever they are given an opportunity to make contributions. Issifu (2015), has articulated few of the major contributions of women in post-conflict peace building, especially in Africa. He noted that as part of peace building measures after the 1991 violent conflicts in Wajir, Kenya, Wajir women established the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC), which played a prominent role to ensure that peace returned to Kenya. Also, the post-apartheid South Africa witnessed the formation of the Harambe Women's Forum, which despite the poverty, trauma and violence its members witnessed, helped in rebuilding and developing their devastated communities and got involved in peace building. As part of their efforts towards peace building during the Liberian conflict, Liberian women advocated for a ceasefire by embarking on 'Mass Action for Peace' campaign. They went further to barricade the entrance to the venue of the peace talks to prevent the participants from walking out of the peace talks in the event of the talks getting heated up.

Sisulu (2019), also noted that during the Libyan conflict, women's contributions to security, development and peace were very evident and were duly acknowledged by the government and the United Nations. In Burundi, pressure from women's organizations contributed to a culture of negotiation for national peace (Agbalajobi, 2009). Few of such women organizations included the Women's Association for Peace and the Women's Network for Peace and Non-Violence. They were involved in a wide range of activities, including workshops on non-violent conflict resolution. In Rwanda also, evidence has equally shown that women contributed immensely in post-conflict peace-building and reconciliation by caring for genocide survivors, providing shelter for orphans, and helping former combatants to reintegrate back into the society, amongst others (Issifu, 2015). In fact, according to the Republic of Rwanda (2015), women represent 45 percent of the total community mediators in Rwanda, where they have been playing visible roles in conflict management structures and justice at the grassroots level.

In Nigeria the women folks have tried in various ways in averting, checking and halting otherwise threatening situations to peace and security in the history of Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta in particular. There were women like: Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Queen Amina of Zaria, Margaret Ekpo of Calabar/Abia, Fumnilayo Kuti, to mention a few. These women held sway, amidst exercising political powers and employing diplomacy, a prominent tool in achieving peace (Ogege, 2009). In the present time, as a result of the women not being part of formal decision making, women have to \rely on

91

alternative mechanisms to voice out their demands. Thus, in spite of the exclusion of the women, they have been influential in peace processes as was the case in the oil-rich Niger Delta where women have contributed individually and jointly with their male counterparts for the resolution of the incessant disturbances that often arise in the Niger Delta (Igube, 2007). However, it is commendable to note that it is non-violent strategies that are always adopted by the women in the quest for social justice. In an attempt to register their displeasures, women have used a variety of resistance forms such as dancing and singing, demonstration and strikes, testimonies and silence, culturally specific responses like stripping naked, refusing to change work routine, participating in women's meeting and struggling to maintain their daily routines amidst the chaos and violence that surrounds them (WARDC, 2006)

In Benue state, women have also played significant roles in conflict resolution and management. Their role has been demonstrated particularly in the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Benue state which has led to loss of lives and property and left a lot of people in refugee camps, towns and other settlements including Agagbe, Naka, Atukpu, Tse-Iorbogo and other missionary centers outside the conflict areas, including Mission Station Ajigba of the NKST Church and other Christian centers like the Catholic Church premises in Agaigbe and the voluntary organization in the Local Government Areas (Women Environmental Programme, 2012). During this conflict, Women Environmental Programme (2012) organized a multi-stake holder meeting that brought together the Benue State government, Miyetti-Allah Cattle Breeders Association, traditional rulers in Benue state, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) - Benue state chapter, Ja'amatu Nasiru Islam (JNI), Benue state and Civil Society Organizations. The forum provided a platform for farmers and herdsmen to come together to discuss how to resolve their differences and to educate both parties on other topical issues in the society like population increase and desertification which has increased the migration of herdsmen into the Benue trough/valley thereby exacerbating the conflict between the two groups.

In a similar vein, women in Benue State through the organizations such as Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) in Benue state have at different times reached out to different groups for prayers deliberation, negotiation, compromises, and agreements on conflict resolution (Bia-Tachia,2015). Apart from helping to resolve conflict in Benue state, the organization has been able to provide a neutral ground where parties involved in conflict can come together to build bridges of trust, understanding and confidence. They have also participated in providing relief materials to victims of conflict. For instance, during the herdsmen and farmers conflict in the state from 2011 to

2015 for which many citizens of the state particularly women were living in refugee camps across the state, the CWO donated relief materials such as food items, clothing, and free medical treatment to the victims of the conflict. Other women organizations such as Market Women Associations have at different times in the course of the farmers-herdsmen conflict in Benue state used different strategies such as street protests and closing of shops in the market places to draw the attention of local, state and Federal government for peace to return to the state (Bai-Tachia, 2015).

There are several other associations and groups that have women as members and are involved in conflict resolution and peace process in Benue State. There are also women organizations that exclusively champion the progress of women in Benue State. Examples of women organizations in Benue State include the Asase mothers, concerned Benue mothers, Agatu progressive Women Union, Women Development Association Benue State, Oluepe women Association. These women and their associations came up with different strategies to resolve crises and build peace in Benue State. For example (Agbu, 2021) affirmed that the women under the auspices of Asase Mothers stormed the Palace of HRH Chief Simon Ajo (Dsp Rtd), Mueter U Ihyarev, in all-black outfits on I October 2021 to register their dissatisfaction with the security situation of Asase community especially the menace of cultism that is escalating in the area. The women carried different anti-cultism placards and chanted peace songs as they marched around the palace and streets of Asese. The Chief of the area, HRH. Simon Ajo (Dsp Rtd), who addressed the women promised to call the attention of the relevant authorities to the disturbing issue. The monarch also joined the protesting women to pray for peace in the area.

Luise (2021) confirmed the statement above thus, women in Benue State came up with strategies to restore peace such as on the 21/06.2021, the concerned Benue mothers mobilized themselves in large numbers dressed in sack cloths (Black) carrying placards and chanting songs of peace trooped into the Doo Palace Hotel, venue for a press conference to protest the constant attacks by herdsmen and bandits that have led to the death of hundreds of people, including women and children. The venue was tensed and charged as the women dressed in traditional mourning clothes and tearful faces expressed anger over the heinous killings while the leaders of the country kept mute.

However, what really caught the attention of the world was the action of the women on the 6th to 7th November 2021 when all the women Ukpeta community of Oju LGA of Benue State matched out, dressed in black cloths accused the security operatives of fueling the crises between the Ukpute

93

prople of Oju and the Bonta people of Konshisha LGA and thus demanded for their withdrawal (Luise, 2021). The women organized a peaceful demonstration, moving from traditional ruler's palace to the police area command and demanded for the withdrawal of military personnel along the axis and they went to the extent of removing the road blocks mounted by the military within the town and called for the cancellation of curfews imposed in the community. The protest or demonstration above, became a turning point in the search for peace in the community of Ukpute and Bonta. Their strategies were very effective as it brought about a lasting peace between the two communities. Luise (2021), also noted that the action of the women was so effective that an emergency security meeting was held at the Benue peoples house to resolve the problem. Danasabe (2021) noted that, their strategies were effective because they got the attention of sympathizers both from within and outside government and other security agencies, Human Right organization . that led to the relaxation and subsequent cancellation of the long curfew imposed on the Bonta and Ukputa community and finally they had the chance io embark on other peace building process that finally restored peace

The above shows that women have continued to involve themselves in peace building process in Benue State through their organizations and associations. Similarly, through peaceful protest, they have added momentum to the peace building process in the State. This calls for them to be properly incorporated into the entire peace building process in Benue State. The fact that women in Benue State did and are still doing a lot for peace process in Benue State is not enough. There is the need for their actions to be fully supported by the government, the traditional institutions and even the private organizations for the consolidations of peace in Benue State. The above shows that women have continued to be involved in peace building processes in Benue State over time.

Challenges to Women Involvement in Conflict Management in Nigeria

Culture and religion inevitably create serious challenges to women involvement in conflict resolution and peace building globally, including Nigeria and Benue State. In Nigeria, women are still generally stereotyped. Even Nigeria's President was once quoted as saying that women's role is 'in the other room'. Some cultures in Nigeria still do not permit women to talk when their male counterparts are talking. They are only meant to listen. Even in resolving family conflicts, some cultures do not allow women to sit and argue with their husbands. They can only make their case and leave while their husbands and the mediators sit back to take decisions involving women

(Alaga, 2010).

Religion is also another potent challenge where more conservative religious sects do not see women as equal partners to men, and thus, have some clearly-delineated roles prescribed for women, which of course, do not include meddling in conflict resolution. Culture and religion are, therefore, a twin obstacle in this regard. The experience of Monica McWilliams, a female peace negotiator, illustrates this. According to her: Our society was very conservative and religious and I was often told, your place is in the home, your place is not at this table. I was told often to go home and have babies and I often said, I have had my babies - I have a brain as well as other parts of my body that I want to use to make a contribution at this time, to this table (McWilliams, 2012,   p.48). McWilliams said this to underscore the extent of the challenges posed by culture and religion to women who intend to make contributions to peace building in their societies. However, despite how popular the culture and religion argument are, it has been made less powerful by women's constructive activism in such places as Afghanistan or Yemen which are highly conservative societies. This is underlined by the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize awards to Tawakkol Karman of Yemen and the two Liberians, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee (Prentice, 2012). If women could break the culture and religious barrier in such society as Yemen, Nigerian women can do more.

Another obstacle is widespread poverty manifested by acute shortage of resources to sustain their families. Because of poverty, women whose husbands, sons or relatives are involved in insurgent activities such as those of Boko Haram cannot persuade them from such if that is probably their only source of income. There have been suggestions that conflict mongers and their likes are sponsored or paid to cause trouble in society. If such women are financially independent or if they could provide for their families without their husbands' income, they can make meaningful impact in influencing their husbands, since there is an alternative source of income. Poverty is, therefore, a major challenge (Agbu, 2014).

Another major challenge is poor coordination, networking and monitoring system of women's initiatives. If women's voices must be heard in this regard, they must be properly coordinated, and there must be networking between and among women non-governmental organizations. There are several women NGOs in Nigeria but only few are actually looking towards the direction of conflict resolution and peace building (Agbu,2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations
The chapter is centered on the role of women in conflict management in Benue State. Though Benue State has experienced a lot of conflicts, these

crises have been very devastating, and led to the killing of thousands of peoples, and property worth millions of naira destroyed; as well as loss of social trust among the inhabitants of the State. The work unveils that women in Benue State have been involved in trying to resolve the conflicts and build peace. In their efforts to resolve and build peace, they have fasted and prayed to God, organized rallies and protest marches, all to restore peace among the various groups in the conflict communities. Even though through women's efforts and other strategies temporary peace has been restored, there is the need to consolidate on it. Through tolerance and organisation of social activities, peace process would continue and peace would be consolidated among the people of Benue State. It is important to mention categorically that women should not be always relegated to the background in peace building and socio-political issues, for they can add their voice for the development of the society.

Society can only progress if there are no stereotypes, the wide range of obstacles, both obvious and hidden that undermine women's ability to use their powers and capacity to bring about change in peace building processes. The discrepancy of influence, control and power between women and men in all aspects of their societal life particularly in decision making processes and representations is still a global problem, where certain positions are meant for the men alone. Therefore, the study recommended the following

Recommendations
i.   In Nigeria there is lack of gender Awareness among those responsible for Gender Mainstreaming in Government Bodies and Public Administrations. Therefore, creating awareness on gender equality and women empowerment for development is one to get more women into conflict resolution and peace building process.

Ii. Time has come for everybody to be aware of gender equality and participation in conflict resolution and peace building. However, mothers should teach their children skills of anger management from home because this can lead to a peaceful state and globe peace which is among the ways the world can be safe, peaceful and enjoyable.

iii. Women should be allowed to attend meetings and their contributions should not be over ruled in meetings where conflict matters are discussed.

iv. . Women should be given recognized leadership roles in the communities to make them relevant and their impact felt in the communities.

v.   Women should be encouraged to attain higher education which will make them exposed and bold to speak out in conflict issues.

vi. Peace keeping associations or disciplinary committees should be established in the communities with a percentage of women as members.

vii. Proactive strategies should be adopted to manage conflict particularly at the local government areas where majority of citizens of the country reside

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