

## **The challenge of Peace and conflict Resolution a clue from Igbo cultural Group of Nigeria**

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**Abstract :** *Conflict and conflict situations are by nature inevitable facts of human existence as such man's desire for resolutions and peaceful coexistence has become the challenge facing all organized societies. Civil society neglect for the effective role of culture and gender in conflict resolution in societies. Taking the lead from a cultural perspective the Umuada Igbo as a building block for peace, Elders-In- Council, Ozo –In-Council, Umunna. These cultural identified and respected offices are fundamental cultural blocks for an enduring peace in any society.*

**Key words:** *Conflict Resolution, Gender, Culture, organized societies, and peaceful coexistence.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Conflict resolution and peace building are essential conditions for sustainable development initiatives; the cultural explicit and systematic consideration of a gender perspective in peace building and conflict resolution have either been ignored or marginalized by agencies in their efforts and strategic approaches towards crisis prevention and management. Conflict resolution and peace building are however, highly gendered activities. (Beth Speake,2013)

It has been over a decade since the passage of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which is a land mark document restating the importance of women involvement and participation at all levels of peace building and conflict management. Informal contributions of women have been shown to be insufficient to resolving conflict and building sustainable peace (Pratt and Richtar-Devroe, 2011:490). However, formal building and conflict resolution initiatives have continued to ignore or marginalize issues of gender, and women's involvement in formal peace missions and talks (Diaz, 2010:1).

Stricklaw and Duwury (2003) have also identified that those who do take into account issues of gender, have generally failed to address the structural inequalities and power relations which are the basis for gender discrimination. Most of the arguments put forward in support of women involvement in conflict management come from a variety of disciplines, with different political opinions and recommended methods. Some see women as important in bringing about sustainable peace, others employed techniques that confine them to their roles as mothers and caregivers, and thus denying access to a more formal and wider agenda of peace building and conflict resolution. (Puechguirbal, 2010:177).

### **II. Gender**

Gender is defined in contrast to sex, as the social roles and interactions between men and women rather than their biological differences. (Eschborn 2001:6). It draws attention to the social roles and interactions between women and men, rather than their biological differences. Gender relations are social relations, which include the ways in which the social categories of male and female interact in every sphere of social activity, such as those which determine access to resources, power and participation in cultural and religious activities. Gender also denotes the social meanings of male and female, and what different societies regards as normal and appropriate behaviour, attitudes for women and men, although the details vary from society to society, and change over time. Gender relations always include a strong element of inequality between men and women and are strongly influenced by ideology.

On the other hand, what is biologically determined gender differences is still vaguely defined and subject of debate. (Jill, S. 1998:81). Some contend that women tend to be less-predisposed to aggressive and violent behaviour because of certain biological characteristics. These include that women have lower testosterone

levels than men, and the ways women's brain is structured and developed and other biological characteristics constitute academic debates, that are responsible why most women behave the way they do in challenging and competitive ways than most men. Therefore, they posit and argue that science cannot explain all forms of different behavioural patterns and roles in society. (ibid)

For Stean and Jill (1998), It is not sufficient to focus on women alone. The ways in which men are socialised to become part of a male gender are also important. Egotistical, aggressive and dominant behaviours are common features of cultural definitions of masculinity, as is men's dominance over women at a general level (Byrne ad Bridget,1996:33). Therefore, male and female roles and relations between men and women are subject to constant change because they are shaped by society. Yet, in all societies the gender relations between women and men tend to be clearly to the disadvantage of women. For example different rights and decision making powers; ability to make choices; which are determined by the existing cultural norms and values relating to masculinity and femininity.

### **III. Issues and Perspectives**

We live our lives as gendered human beings. As children, we are either boys or girls. As adults, we are either men or women. The fact that we are gendered simply means that we are called upon to think about certain issues and make decisions about them. Many of these issues are very important to us on a daily basis as we live our lives. We are confronted with choices in life; the choice as whether we want to be married or single, whom we are pairing with or whether we should have children; the kind of job we want to do. In all these choices, we would at the end of the day be able to determine whether they were the right choices (Minas,1993)

Many issues involving gender arise in what is sometimes called "personal life" (ibid). This is comprised of the activities a person decides upon taking alone and others she considers other people to whom she is related by personalities. In personal relations, gender can make a difference. Our choice of spouse depends on gender, and also the qualities we think that are important to us for a valuable relationship, and often we see these qualities as gender related.

Gender issues are not, however confined to only aspects of our life different from the rest human activity. We take our gender with us into the workplace and the rest of public life. Gender affects our perspectives on others as well as the way others perceive us; even when our relationships with them cannot be seen as 'personal'.

Very early in our lives, we learn whether we are girls or boys and accordingly, what we are expected to do or not to do. Gender expectations for children (e.g., what types of clothing are appropriate for which gender) are somehow simple, compared to what is expected of adult men and women. Societal expectations for adults can be very limiting with restrictions, for example a particular kind of behaviour can attract a more severe sanction or penalty for one gender than for the other. Also a certain posture or sitting position may pass as normal for a man but may attract unwelcome sexual attention if taken by women. Career paths in the work place are laid out according to gender; it is much easier for one gender than the other to join particular careers and to remain and progress in them. In all, it is difficult to find any segment or area of human life where gender fails to make a difference.

society in a word is sexist. It systematically favours men over women, it continuously maintain and encourage structures that ensure men receive better treatment and have more available options than women. These structures are well found in both private and public life. Gender is a social acquisition that creates many differences between men and women. (Minas, 1993:2)

### **IV. Social theory and Gender**

Historically classical sociologists and other social theorists did not give much insight into the social differences between men and women. Marx, Weber and Durkheim are not noted for their insights and attention to 'sex' inequality (the word gender was not known to them in its present usage) women's subordinate social role as naturally 'given' (Sydie, 1987) Durkheim, saw these distinction in 'sex roles' as a form of biologically based evolution that was brought about by the changing forces of a shift from mechanical solidarity peculiar to the early society to that of organic solidarity which is associated with the modern complex society. These differences in roles translated into division of labour which made the society more efficient and stronger.

Max Webber also saw women's dependence on men as determined by the natural superiority brought about by the physical and intellectual strength of men over the women. (Webber cited in Sydie, 1987:59). It seems somehow odd that, these early thinkers should see 'sex roles' as naturally determined, and failed to examine sex as an important social division but this does not mean that inequality between men and women were completely ignored. Max recognized these inequalities between sexes as a social problem. It is also note worthy that as early as 18<sup>th</sup> century, women have been forces to reckon with in terms of early writings on social positions of women and their place in the society, but not much is being mentioned about these women as regards recent

understandings of gender. (Holmes 2007:4) Before the concept of 'gender' came into usage in 1970's, functionalists argued about 'sex role differences' but the focus was on how the 'complimentary roles' performed by women and men helped to keep the society running smoothly.

Talcott Parsons the major 20<sup>th</sup> century functionalist writer who argued that modern social life, and in particular the modern organization of work is separate from home, which means that someone needs to stay at home to care for young children and perform most importantly the duty of early socialization of children that starts from the home. This emotional 'expressive role' is assigned to women and the role of paid work is associated with men. These different 'sex roles' become the social norms and Parsons carefully describes how children became nurtured and socialized in them. Parson's work showed more of gender expectations than an implication of inequalities that go with the differences in these 'sex roles' (Ibid: 5). For Parsons, much of the study on sociology of family focused more on how the breadwinner/housewife model of family life has been restricted to the women as being their "primary role" but for others, it has remained a luxury they cannot afford for the wife to stay at home, only those families where the men earn very high wages could afford the wife to stay at home. The fact that the content 'sex role' is different in other cultures does not change his argument that one sex is assigned different tasks from the other, which is a functional thing.

In some other cultures, both roles are similar, in that both women and men contribute to child rearing, which can also support family stability. The need for social stability has continuously justified the different 'sex roles' which has been identified as also threatening social stability. Various feminists have examined these differences in role between men and women as socially produced inequalities. (Holmes, 2007:6)

## **V. Understanding Gender Inequalities**

If you are a woman, you may feel that you have a lot of choices about what you do with your life. It probably seem like you have less opportunities than your sibling brothers in terms of certain privileges which are culturally and socially allowed. Male domination has characterized the gender relations of these societies, such that it seems like men have legal powers over the lives of their wives and children, and while wife beating is not condoned by any society, it is practically not illegal and their offenders rarely punished or sanctioned. Critics of patriarchy (rule by men over women and children) had emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the movement for the right of women to vote and be voted for came by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, by the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the practice of patriarchy was taken for granted by most people and backed by religious doctrines; which sees a man as the head of the family as ordained by God.

By 21<sup>st</sup> century only a small minority of people still holds to the view that women should be subordinated to men. While all sorts of gender inequalities continue to exist, and some of these seem resistant to change, they exist in completely different forms in cultural norms, political and social life. Male domination has not disappeared but it is on the defensive, but the underlying root of it or foundations are gradually crumbling.

The inequalities that exist in different labour for men and women have great impact in the labour market and employment, many jobs have been designated for men, not allowing women to get such job opportunities, which has created a widening gap in the number of employed women to men. There is also the issue of difference in wage and payment scale for identical or equivalent work between men and women. Equal pay for equivalent work would go much further in eliminating gender inequality in the employment earnings; which would also discourage the tendency for jobs that are associated with "women".

Culturally, women are expected to pursue the welfare of others in a group rather than to pursue their individual goals. Thus caring roles at home are still promoted as the proper course for many less privileged women. (Kodoth and Eapen 2005).

There is also wide range of gap between men and women, e.g. in areas of science and engineering, continuing beliefs about women's responsibility for their families play a part in determining the extent to which women participate in paid jobs that require skills and greater time off from home. Women are rare in higher positions within occupations. There is an invisible barrier that exists which prevents women from being promoted to upper management levels. (Hymowitz and Schellhardt, 1986).

Evidence indicates that women are poorer than men. (Ibid). They do not earn as much and generally have less access to the material rewards available in society. There is difficulty for women trying to combine paid work with family responsibilities. In a world of real gender equality, men tend to have variety of richer life choice around parenting and work, the dominant role of masculinity makes it difficult for men to interrupt their careers to take care of family and domestic roles.

## **VI. Women, Gender and Conflict**

Most approaches to peace building have either ignored or side-lined issues of gender and women. Women have consistently been excluded as participants in most communal negotiations and peace-making meetings, despite their traditional roles as care-givers and peace-makers. They often receive less attention than men in peace building policies and meetings. Infact in certain cultures, it is not normal for a woman to speak in

a gathering of both genders. Their voices are most times suppressed during meetings; even when they have superior opinions to issues, they are often ignored, especially when there is conflict of interests.

The inequality in decision making and involvement in peace building have generated a haphazard approach to conflict resolution, that has left issues unresolved with parties not fully convinced of the outcome of many peace negotiations. Therefore, in order to promote sustainable peace, the principle of democratic participation based on social justice and equity should be the crucial elements for a long term peace process of building. Gender equality, or equal involvement of men and women in political economic and social aspects of the society are essential to the building of sustainable and long term development. (MainstreaminggenderinPeacebuilding-aframeworkforaction.pdf)

One very advantage of looking at gender, masculinity and femininity, rather than merely looking at men and women, is that it focuses on the relationship between women and men at a social rather than personal level. It allows the relationships between women and men to be a focus for peace building not as people who are in competition with each other or rivals. Bringing gender into conflict resolution and peace building opens up possibility for a change in gender roles as opposed to 'sex role' that this brought a divide and conflicting opinions about gender relations. (Ibid).

Research has shown that many institutions across the world are not gender neutral (Enloe and Cynthia,1993), but they rather tend to be male dominated which is a cultural factor practiced all over the world. State bureaucracies, security services, and international bodies are all structured or managed according to these norms of masculinity rather than having a gender neutral culture of their own. They have a system of hierarchy that does not encourage cooperation and consultation in decision making and work patterns; more individualistic and competitive attitude towards work. Their administrative structures have a top-down leadership and management style of "one boss" to many others. The key institutions that are responsible for managing conflict and ensure peace are also arranged according to such norms of masculinity i.e. having a male egoistic pattern of leadership, which is a problem that needs to be addressed in peace building and conflict resolution strategies.

It is however, difficult to see how positive peace could be achieved without significant or obvious changes in the way certain institutions and policy making bodies operate; whereas such institutions are of course dominated by men with few women being responsible at the decision making positions. Nevertheless, it will be fair to say; that the representation and participation of a good number of women is an essential precondition for changing the existing notions of male dominance in decision making and peace building; one very clear advantage of looking at gender (masculinity and femininity) rather than at men and women is that allows the relationship of both to be more focused on peace building, rather than a type of explanation for violent conflict.

Therefore initiating gender relations in policies and programmes of institutions has far reaching advantages for a conducive and violent free environment; as challenging the nature of gender relations head on (whether by women in groups or as individuals by men or even by state) is neither easy nor without risk. Such attempts could result in conflicts, and even violence as has occurred in countries where liberation movements, and individual women attempted to take forward the ideals of gender equality that were frustrated in the time of crisis and war into the era of peace. For example in Zimbabwe, government legislation and attempts by women to speak out against unequal gender participations have triggered off high levels of public antagonism as hatred towards women on several occasions since their independence. (Enloe and Cynthia,1998)

### **Working with Women as Peace-makers:**

Traditionally, the roles of peace-makers are attributed to women, also their timely interventions at critical times in the family cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, considering the option of working with women for peace building and developing a gender-awareness programs and peace building initiatives is the way to effective peace and conflict remedies.

There are many examples where women have courageously intervened in battles. For instance in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. (B-selassie and Tsehai, 1994).

Many women activists have expressed their values as a factor of their gender...

A Philippine female activist wrote:

"Both men and women have the potentials for peace-making and the responsibility to build and keep peace. The women, however, seem more creative and effective in waging peace... It is the women's emotional strength to rise above pain and suffering and their openness and tendency to embrace peace that provide them greater potentials for peacemaking. (Garcia, 1994:45)

### **Women's Organizations for Peace:**

Another way of bringing women into the process of peace building is to identify them as group of women organization. (UN Report: EqualityDev& Peace 1886: para 281). There are many types of women's organization that have useful activities and objectives directed towards peace building and settlement of disputes. They have been useful at different places and times in ensuing peace. Although, there may be few ones noted to have developed with problems but some have been a useful tool in protecting human rights, some of these women organizations have attempted to challenge women's oppression and all form of discrimination.

Furthermore, these organizations have been noted for their efforts in increasing the number of women who become leaders, and inculcate the capacities and abilities to participate in public, political and other civil societies processes, and at the same time strengthening their efforts in challenging masculine cultures in institutions and society at large. But at present this has not met with success as many of these organizations face difficulties in their bid to survive when met with stronger masculine forces of opposition. There is need for external support for them to achieve their objectives; Some of them that exist in communities also experience harassments from local securities and other community/family headships where gender conflicts are inbuilt in cultures. Outside support can increase greatly their chances to succeed in their role in peace building. Some of the notable women's organization for peace building amongst the igbo people of Nigeria has been identified as follows : (Ugo-EmekaNwobia, 2015)

#### **i. Umuada Igbo and Peace building:**

Since pre-colonial times, Igbo women have developed various methods and ways of resolving conflicts and building peace. They organize into groups based on the notion "the daughters of the clan or Umuada", who usually meet on specific occasions or at least once a year. They help to foster peaceful co-existence within the extended family, the clan, the community, and the town.

Igbo women have been remarkable in their ability to organize themselves around their natal and matrimonial homes. In their natal homes, they are referred to as "Umuada" (daughters of the clan who are married within or outside the community), while at their marital homes, they are called "Nwunye di" (Co-wives – the married women within a family, kindred, clan or community).

The 'Umuada' exercise remarkable powers in their matanal homes as peace builders, more so than in their marital homes.(Nwoye, 2015). This is so because of the immunity and respect accorded by culture as "daughters of the soil". Nwolise (2004) also noted the unique roles of women in the reconciliation and peace building process, they form formidable force against an erring party or group and establish strong opposition between the disputing parties with a view to ensuing peace among them.

The "Umuada" usually meet and deliberate on actions taken by members of the community that they feel will work against community interests and harmony. They sometimes stage a protest around the offenders' homes. This is done until the offender succumbs to their collective demands to change the offensive behaviour. They have the power to take action against their erring fellow wives "Nwunye di", especially in cases of adultery, they can organize and send unfaithful wives packing or wives that have been adjudged to be maltreating their husbands or mother-in-law out of their marital homes or impose fines on them to forestall similar issues manifesting elsewhere.

#### **ii. Women Meeting (Home and Abroad) Popularly "August Meeting"**

The 'Home and Abroad' popularly held in the month of August was an initiative that started after the Nigeria-Biafran Civil War that ended in 1970. This annual meeting of both 'Umuada and Nwunye di' (daughters and wives) of the community, wives born or married into the community wherever one resides is a platform for addressing issues and challenges facing Igbo communities. Today, the August Meeting has helped to foster unity and a sense of belonging between Igbo Women and other women married into the community. Aside their role in peace building and conflict resolution, they also engage in community development projects to engage youths meaningfully. The educated and affluent ones among them set up trust funds, and other support projects to help indigents ones among them.

These roles underscore how women in south-eastern Nigeria use collective pressure and persuasion to resolve conflicts and foster peace at community or local level, but despite their pivotal role in peace building, women have neither been accorded any formal or official recognition as peace builders in formal peace building initiatives.

iii. The list is inexhaustible looking at the forms of female activism among Nigerian women, which includes the mass movement of Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) and protest against flat rate tax of the Egba Women (Mba, 1982). The Yoruba women folk also enjoy enormous powers and judicial authorities like "*Lisa-Lobun, Jumo-Lobun, and Odumwo-Lobun*". The 'OtuUmuada' in Igbo society also wield judicial and political power among fellow married women, and also check the excesses of stern husbands. There are also groups of market women, Christian women and Moslem. Their duties are to ensure constantly peaceful co-existence

amongst themselves and other members of the society. Madam Tinubu, mother of the past Governor of Lagos State was among the most powerful women activists in Yoruba history. Her powerful impact in Yoruba politics and commerce remain visible in the city of Lagos.

In Jos crises of 2010, the recurrent maiming of children at homes and in schools and the rape and killing of women and young girls led the Jos women into a demonstration march, dressed in mourning cloths into the National Assembly which awoke the consciousness of both government and media to negotiate for a lasting peaceful settlement in the protracted conflict. (Adichie,2007).

There are numerous associations, educational institutions and community organizations that provide training and resources for community based mediations and others, there is an indisputable gender imbalance in favour of men, it is clear that women intend to contribute more effectively to peace building but their efforts are beginning to gain grounds but not appropriately reported; one of the reasons for this is that women and men have different access to resources, power and decision making before, during and after conflicts (<https://www.ucalgary.ca/peacestudies>), accompanied by some prejudiced attitudes and patriotically standards in the society. Women's perception of peace, security and violence differs from that of men, opens up new opportunities for dialogue and paves the way for new way of negotiation.

Therefore any process that will engage women in an equal basis with men in any peace dialogue means developing an understanding which would acknowledge different viewpoints and positions based on gender roles and at the same time acknowledging the often neglected results achieved by women and their efforts as peace makers.

## **VII. The Role of Men as Peace Agents**

On the other hand, the role men play in building safe communities and strategies that promote equality, build communities and prevent violence against women and children cannot be overemphasized. Their standing in the community and the respect they earn through courage and sacrifice give them the credibility to influence those involved in conflict which has helped to achieve real change. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Elders\(organization\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Elders(organization)))

### **i. Elders in Council**

Globally, men have championed several peace building initiatives, for example, the Elders initiative, formerly chaired by Kofi Annan is an independent group of global leaders who work together for peace and human rights. They were brought together in 2007 by Nelson Mandela of South Africa.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu served for six years as Chair before stepping down in May, 2013 and remains as Honorary Elder. The Burmese Pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was also an Honorary Elder, until her election to the Burmese parliament in April 2012.

### **What makes an Elder?**

Elders no longer hold public office; they are independent of any national government or other vested interest. They should have earned international trust, demonstrated integrity and built a reputation for progressive leadership.

The Elders share a common commitment to peace and universal human rights, they also bring with them a wealth of diverse expertise and experience:

- The Peace Makers: with decades of experience mediating and resolving conflicts around the world.
- The Peace builders: who have helped post-conflict societies to heal wounds and rebuild.
- The Social Revolutionaries: who transformed their own countries – whether by reducing poverty, improving the status of women, or championing non violent struggle.
- The Pioneering Women: who have governed their countries, led international institutions and spearheaded movements to empower women.
- An Elder is also a Change-maker – Someone who can lead by example, creating positive social change and inspiring others to do same.

The concept originates from a conversation between the entrepreneur Richard Branson and the musician Peter Gabriel. The idea they discussed was simple: many communities look to their elders for guidance or to help resolve conflicts. In an increasingly interdependent world – a global village – could a small, dedicated group of individuals use their collective experience and influence to help tackle some of the most pressing problems facing the world today?

Richard Branson and Peter Gabriel took their idea of a group of 'global elders' to Nelson Mandela who agreed to support it. With the help of Desmond Tutu, Mandela set about bringing the Elders together and formally launched the group in Johannesburg in 2007.

- The Elders represent an independent voice, not bound by the interests of any nation, government or institution.

- They are committed to promoting the shared interests of humanity, and the universal human rights we all share.
- They believe that in any conflict, it is important to listen to everyone, no matter how unpalatable or unpopular this may be.
- They aim to act boldly, speaking the truths and tackling taboos.
- They work to support the work of people affected by conflict or working for peace.

In Nigeria, some traditional political systems have over time been at the forefront of peace building and conflict resolutions among communities.

By traditional institutions, we refer to the indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs. (Orji and Olali, 2010:402). The essence of the institutions is to preserve the customs and traditions of the people to manage conflicts arising among or between members of the community by the instruments of laws and customs of the people.

In Africa traditional societies just like in Nigeria communities, the traditional institutions are charged with legislative, executive and judicial functions. They make laws, execute them and interpret the laws, customs and traditions of the people for the smooth running of their communities. Conflicts are usually managed and resolved based on the customs and traditions of the people. Traditional institutions have different approaches to conflict management and resolution depending on the community. What is suitable in one community may not be to another. Boege (2006:6) agrees with this position when he argued that traditional approaches to conflict resolution vary from society to society.

It has been observed that all societies, the world over, have a variety of traditional ways of managing and resolving conflicts and building peace whether formal or informal. In the formal settings, respected chiefs, elders within family and community, clan, religion, groups etc for example, peace building through traditional institutions in the post-amnesty era in the Niger-Delta has become very necessary in order to avert a reoccurrence of the conflicts that have almost destroyed the region for decades.

#### **ii. Ozo in council**

NdiOzo title holders – Ozo title is one of the oldest and highest social institutions in Igbo land, Anambra state to be precise. It is a prestigious traditional Igbo title which has assumed an important position in the traditional inclination of the people of Igbo land.

In many places in Igbo land especially Onitsha, the functions attached to Ozo institutions is immense, particularly the role of adjudication, and peace building initiatives. They play important role in the maintenance of law and order in the society. This is because men of this title are highly regarded and demonstrate a symbol of authority and influence amongst people in Igbo society. They have the authority to pronounce punishment for any person that commits serious crimes in the society. They adjudicate over land disputes and inter-community crisis. Okigbo (2004:156), defined Ozo as traditional chieftaincy or honorary chieftaincy title. Ugwu and Oji (2014) also observed that Ozo title is religious as well as political leadership institution in Igbo traditional society that helped in the maintenance of peace, order and tranquillity” political leaders mainly the elders, the king, the chiefs, Ozo titled men and the Nze titled men stand to protect and guard our traditional institution from being destroyed. This they were able to achieve through their representatives who deal with minor grass root issues and apply sanctions where necessary.

**iii. Umunna:** The Umu-nna is made of elders of families bond by some ancestral ties. These men have overtime stood as peace builders that built strong and virile communities that have witnessed a prolonged peaceful co-existence.

For the Igbo, the largest political unit was usually the village group each member of the village being in fact largely autonomous. Therefore, the Igbo political system operated through a complex unit which balanced central authority of the village group or “OgbakoUmunna” with more locally derived authority of the village or “Umunna”, elders, Ozo title holders and Okparas who are also the ‘Ofo’ title holders.

The term village group council and village assembly are used interchangeably to refer to the Igbo central authority, while Umunna village-group and “Ndiamaala” refer to the more locally derived authority made up of the ‘Okparas’, elders and Ozo title holders at the village level. Onwuka et al (1997:128) describes the Igbo political systems as a system whereby political participation starts from the family which is the smallest social unit. The next is the compound which consists of a number of families and house-holds of common descent held commonly together economically, politically and culturally. Here the “Okpara” (first born) of the most senior family member exercised political authority.

Thus the family and the compound form the political units at the local level, other higher level political units are the kindred assembly, the village assembly and the village group council. The family meeting

maintains order within the extended family by ensuring that family members behave in a manner that is conducive to interpersonal relations within the family. Family meetings also ensure smooth allocation of common resources. In very rare cases a flagrant breach of the family code may attract ostracization especially in cases when the offender will need the support of other family members. This foregoing arrangement has served as checks and balances and most importantly an instrument for maintenance of law and order within the system. However, an aggrieved member, dissatisfied with the family decision many appeal to the kindred union or invite some elders to examine the case between him and the family group.

The kindred is made up of related family groups which share a common ancestry (or founder). It is the next political structure above the family. The kindred assembly is presided over by the eldest Okpara. The kindred union is similar to the family meeting except that it ordinarily deals with issues that affect the kindred.

The village union handles issues and problems that concern the entire village. Individuals can nevertheless take their complaints to the village union especially if they are not satisfied with the decisions taken at the kindred union, or if the dispute is between people from different kindreds within the village. Nwosu (2013). The town group union is what Afigbo (1972:17) referred to as the village-group councils, which enjoyed relative autonomy in its own affairs but matters which involved outside interests go to the village-group council, a body which comprised all the village heads (of which mostly are men) of all other segments as well as other elders. Infact, any adult male member of the village group could attend and insist on being head. Onwuka et al (1997:130) maintains that "His body could by rightly describe as the supreme body of Igbo". Towns whose actions in conflict resolutions and peace building have been acknowledged by all.

Having carefully analyzed the roles played by men and women in peace building, it is pertinent to note also that these roles have persisted with hindrances and shortcomings. Some of which will be highlighted further. But most importantly, inclusion of gender analysis in all peace building processes is key to any sustainable peace initiatives and processes.

### **Obstacles to the Role of Women and Men in Conflict Prevention and Peace Building**

Gender equality agenda should be seen as most important for all concerned in a peace building process. On the one hand, it has to be defined by women and men in different cultural setting while respecting their cultural standards; on the other hand, the integration of a gender perspective in all peace building and conflict prevention and resolution agenda of any government or agencies. This will include a gender balance in decision making processes at all levels of participation. As women and men do not have equal opportunities, peace building programmes need to ensure that this inequality is remedied or even avoided.

Another important gender-mainstreaming issue is women's representation. Women leaders and women's organizations need to have an active relationship with all those responsible for peace building. There is evidence that women can influence political decisions and agendas when they constitute a greater number in decision making. Although there is a committed network of women and men carrying the "women in peace building" agenda forward, much still remains to be done. Also, there is still very little knowledge of gender specific outcomes, and of the challenges affecting them. Much of these challenges are experienced in everyday life which is as result of people's attitude and ignorance.

#### **a. Stereotyping**

Stereotypes are widespread obstacle and concern for achieving conflict resolution and peace building, since they influence the way in which people (sex/genders, religious and cultural communities,etc) perceive, remember, think about, response to other people. When another group is the target, to stereotype means to label, or to associate certain attributes, usually personality traits that may be either positive or negative (e.g. intelligent, lazy, energetic, weak, stupid) with a particular population, gender or ethnic, religious group, or other community.

Concerning gender stereotyping concerning women, they are perceived as weak-willed and cannot adequately take important decisions when faced with difficulties, less capable of leadership positions and this has prevented women from optimizing their potentials and may often end up as low achievers.

#### **b. Gender Inequality**

There is a 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 imbalance of power between women and men in all spheres of societal life especially at top decision making bodies and representations.

The gender hierarchy problem that permits male political and social domination is a form of discrimination that give undue advantage to men than women. There is obvious lack of political will to change existing patriarchal patterns.

#### **c. Lack of Gender Awareness among those responsible for Gender Mainstreaming in Government Bodies and Public Administrations:**

It seems evident that there is lack of political commitment on the part of governments and decision making bodies (at both national and international level) to promoting changes in favour of gender balance and mainstreaming into decision making bodies such as peace building committees and etc.

- d. There is also lack of comprehensive, systematic national strategy for implementing all the measure connected with a peace building agenda. In many countries, political authorities lack the capacity and/or are unaware the need to address peace building projects and platforms, and mobilize resources for such gender awareness training. They are also unable to influence policy at community level.
- e. One of the major obstacles to the peace building process and especially role of peace makers, is the failure not only to acknowledge and accept the respective interests and priorities of all the parties concerned and their willingness to also cooperate and negotiate which ultimately hinder negotiations.
- f. Patriarchal cultural pattern that rely on certain traditional beliefs, assumptions and expectations with regards to men's and women's role in dialogue and peace building may become a major obstacle in affirming new gender roles and approaches to sustainable development as conflict free environment.

### VIII. Conclusions

The principle of equality between women and men is, however considered an integral part of human rights and accordingly, balanced participation of both in peace building processes and conflict prevention strategies is justified. There is need for a change towards a focus on gender involvement in peace building, taking into account policies that put one gender at a disadvantageous position than the other. There is also need to work with men as change agents in the society in order to tackle some of the violent and aggressive behaviours which is rooted in forms of masculinity, entrenched in the traditions and norms of the society.

Agencies and government should also look at specific policies for women which help them to improve their own situations, and which the capacities to respond to the specific needs of women. All forms of gendered place building and policies should be avoided, such that address the needs of women less adequately than those of men.

There is also need for training and education of women to enable them become viable candidates for leadership and decision making positions in a wide range of institutions (including government bureaucracies). At the same time, training for men in gender awareness issues, and in the same skills identified for women so that they may directly contribute to peace building and be better placed to assist in reforming gender relations.

Finally, while both men and women are affected by conflict, crisis situations have a differentiated impact on them. Therefore, monitoring all forms of violence against women and recommending appropriate mechanisms to address needs created by violence such as counselling, legal, medical and other forms of materials support is important in creating a peaceful atmosphere. Also consulting with both men and women in dealing with issues concerning them will reduce vulnerability to exploitation and violence.

The paper recommends the need to inculcate gender mainstreaming alongside policies and other developmental processes geared towards sustainable and conflict free society. In other to achieve this, this question may become important in policy formulation.

- Does this policy affect women and men differently? If the answer is in affirmative; steps to explore remedial actions to prevent women's disadvantage should be considered. Asking this question may lead to a complete re-think in the way a public policy.

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