

Umuada Women Association as Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Southeastern Nigeria

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Abstract

Studies on conflicts resolution are largely driven by Clausewitzian conception of male dominance and thus, contributions by the women are often glossed over. There are historical cases of women peacemakers in Africa. One of such instances is Umuada Women Association of Southeastern Nigeria, which has come a long way as a veritable means of conflict resolution both in the ancient and contemporary times. Umuada is an association formed by a group of women from one village or town who are married to other villages to sustain their matrilineal lineage. Formed as a complex network of women married outside their kindred, Umuada has been known historically as women association that successfully nips conflicts in the bud or rein in on warring factions when conflicts become intractable. Umuada association showcases a strong indigenous practice that is highly resilient and efficacious in conflict management and resolution. The practice can be harnessed to deal with contemporary conflicts that pervade African socio-political space. What is the historical content of this age-old practice? How do they organize and operate? What is the contemporary relevance of the tradition? Using fieldwork conducted amongst the Igbo speaking people of southeastern Nigeria, this study interrogates the Umuada women peace makers.

Keywords: Conflict, Umuada Women, conflict resolution, peace and Southeastern Nigeria.

Introduction

Studies on conflicts resolution in Africa have largely focused on the role of men to the neglect of the contributions by the women. Yet, there are historical cases of women peacemakers in Africa. One of such instances is Umuada Women Association in Igboland, southeastern Nigeria, which has come a long way as a veritable means of conflict resolution both in the ancient and contemporary times. Formed as a complex network of women married outside their kindred, umuada has been known historically as women association successfully nipping conflicts in the bud or reining in on warring factions when conflicts become intractable. Contrary to previous studies on conflict in Africa that largely present women as endangered species, this study shows Umuada as a powerful instrument of conflict resolution.

The end of the cold war raised hope that the solution to Africa's numerous problems, especially humanitarian emergencies often triggered by security challenges, would begin to attract serious attention. This has not been the case as the specter of violent conflicts not only continues to multiply but also defy resolution in many instances. Stephen Ellis (1996) presented a critical argument which shows that African states are worst hit because of the failure of post-colonial states to fulfill the economic expectations of her citizenry¹. In the same vein, Archie Mafeje (1999:3) argued that "this was not simply an expression of general disillusionment with independence whose leaders had failed to deliver but a revulsion against African governments which had become unbearably autocratic and oppressive" Claude Ake (2003:3) argued that "although political independence brought some changes to the composition of the state managers, the character of the state remained much as it was in the colonial era. It continued to be totalistic in scope, constituting a statist economy. It presented itself as an apparatus of violence, had a narrow social base, and relied on coercion for compliance rather than authority. Crawford Young (2004:23) posited that "the serious erosion of the stateness of many African polities by the 1990s limited the scope for effective reform and opened the door for a complex web of novel civil conflicts; there was also a renewed saliency of informal politics, as local societies adapted to diminished state presence and service provision" (Dederling, 2002:271). To him, the basis for the existence of African states can be queried. The argument is that Africa's existence is largely sustained by the juridical definition propagated by the international community and not on the basis that the states in Africa are able to meet the economic and security challenges facing them.

Michael Chege (1992:147) argued that "for much of the world, Africa remained little more than an unflinching source of bad news; famine; dictatorship and economic collapse; blatant violations of human rights and gross carnage wreaked by merciless warlords; a region where unashamed autocrats still tightened the screws of their despotism while their counterparts around the globe were being hounded out of presidential palaces by popular revolts." The consequences of these

¹ Ellis argued in the paper that in most extreme cases, the combination of these and other factors has weakened some African States to the extent that they can hardly fulfill the basic duties expected of them by the national community (that is, their own citizens) or by international community. Such duties include the maintenance of an effective monopoly of violence over national territory. P⁸

conflicts as argued by Adejumobi (2001:149) have been deleterious to the development and security of the whole continent. In 1996, armed conflicts in Africa accounted for half of all war-related deaths worldwide and resulted in more than 8 million displaced persons, refugees and returnees. Economic growth has continued to elude Africa, with most of the world's least developed and heavily indebted countries also located in the continent. This is not surprising in the sense that countries engaged in conflicts and wars generally have dismal records of socio-economic growth compared with those at peace.

Worried by these intractable conflicts Munkner (1998:79) asked, going by the “destruction of African values,” if there could be any institutions to address the various challenges the continent is facing? According to Munkner, there is an ongoing “destruction” of Africa’s mechanisms of social control. The work further asked if there is African value which needs to be preserved, developed further and adjusted to our time of rapid change. Lederach (1997) had earlier argued that people practicing conflict resolution must draw upon participants’ tradition and symbols, their way of being and doing and their natural knowledge which are often available in the form of metaphors, stories and proverbs. Cohen (2001) posited that modern mechanism for conflict resolution has relied on the existence of a fixed linguistic and behavioural framework, permitting the drawing of conclusion valid for all nations which proves to be inadequate in dealing with conflicts that occur at different cultural settings; for Zartman (2000) traditional methods of conflict resolution has to be sought despite its shortcomings which can also be established against modern techniques of conflict resolution; and similarly, Eke (1992) argues that many Africans probably consider the so called “primordial public realm” even though it may appear unorganized to outsiders, to be far more significant than the formally organized civil society promoted by scholars and donors. This perhaps influenced the position of Malan (1997) who argues that the virtues obtained from the insights perhaps of less known but probably very relevant perspectives of indigenous structures cannot be undermined. Building on anthropological perspectives, this study seeks to: (1) Historicize the evolution of Umuada association in Igboland. (2) Identify and analyze the factors that account for its salience and resilience. (3) Identify and describe the type of conflicts Umuada association can resolve and (4) highlights the challenges encountered by Umuada association in conflict management and resolution in contemporary Igboland

Women in contemporary discourse

Works on women have focused more on showing their despicable conditions *vis-à-vis* their quest to occupy the same political space with men (McCurry, 2004, Palmer and Simon, 2006, Schlyter 2009) or on socio-cultural and economic subjugation of the female gender by the male (Higginbotham 1977, Odejide, 1997). Kirkpatrick (1974: ix) raised a political question that sought to examine why, when women in increasing numbers are asserting themselves, training themselves, seeking equal rights, equal opportunities and equal responsibilities in every aspect of American life, have so few entered the political arena. Palmer and Simon, (2006: 2), argues that for women entry into the inner world of politics is largely blocked. Specifically women who were interested in politics faced numerous barriers, including cultural norms and gender

stereotypes that limited their choices. This position was clearly buttressed by Kirkpatrick (1974: 15) as thus:

Like men, women gain status for effective responsible performance of culturally sanctioned roles. Any effort to perform roles assigned by the culture to the opposite sex is likely to result in a loss of status on the sex specific status ladder. The values on which women are expected to concentrate are those of affection, rectitude, well-being; the skills relevant to the pursuit of these values are those associated with nurturing, serving, and pleasing a family and community; homemaking, personal adornment, preparing and serving food, nursing the ill, comforting the down cast, aiding and pleasing a husband, caring for and educating the young. It is assumed furthermore that these activities will consume all a woman's that to perform them well is both a full time and a life time job (Kirkpatrick, 1974: 15).

Building on liberal perspectives, some scholars (Buvinic, Morrison, Waafas and Sjoblom 2008, Darby 1997, Kerber and De Hart 2004, Taiwo 1997, and Akanji 1997) support position on equal treatment of individuals regardless of their gender. This liberal feminist posture therefore aim to breakdown the legal and social pressures that restrict women from pursuing careers and being politically active. The works by Odejide, Taiwo and Akanji showed specifically how structural adjustment programme (SAP) introduced in the wake of economic policy reform affected or widened the already existing gap between women and men in Nigeria.

This long tradition of feminist theorizing about economic issues argues that patriarchy and capitalism are overlapping and interlocking systems of oppression. The sexual division of labour through which men dominate the public sphere while women are customarily confined to the private sphere has served the economic interest of the capitalism. The women can be recruited into the workforce when there is need for increased production but easily shed off and returned to domestic life during a depression without imposing a burden on employers or the State. Women are less likely to constitute themselves into groups with intension to engage the State or the employers in protest movements and can easily relapse to domestic life under the care of the husbands. Therefore, the capitalist finds it favourably to dispense or pay them low wages. Economic globalization also led to the feminization of labour migration. Pressures from both developed and developing nations contribute to this development. In such instances women have been pulled by some labour demand in urban cities to do work like baby sitters or nannies. More worrisome is that this era has witnessed boost in the sex industry on both national and global level with alarming numbers of women and girls being trafficked by smugglers and sold into bondage.

The second strand of the discourse focuses on both domestic violence and other forms of violence suffered by women gender. As captured by Lockton and Ward (1997:7), domestic violence characteristically includes acts of physical and mental cruelty progressing from a slap or shove to a punch or kick and to the more extreme manifestation of violence in suffocation,

strangulation, attempted murder and murder. The prefix 'domestic' serves to neutralize the full horror, viciousness and habituation of the violence. The domestic violence can take different dimensions such as physical assault, sexual violence, threats of violence, psychological abuse and emotional consequences. It is not confined to any one socio-economic group nor can it be said to be caused by any one factor. In this circumstance, circumcision as the removal of genital body parts is seen as violence against women. The end of the cold war has resulted in international changes and diminished competition between the super powers. As the threat of a global armed conflict diminished and international relations improved and prospects for peace among nations have increased. Although the threat of global conflict has been reduced, wars of aggression, armed conflicts, civil wars, and terrorism continue to plague many parts of the world. The grave violations of rights of women occur, particularly in times of armed conflict which include murder, torture, systematic rape, forced pregnancy and forced abortion, in particular under policies of ethnic cleansing. The maintenance of peace and security at the global, regional and local levels, together with the prevention of policies of aggression and ethnic cleansing and the resolution of armed conflict, is crucial for the protection of the human rights of women and girl children, as well as for the elimination of all forms of violence against them and of their use as a weapon of war. Women are taken as 'war booty' or camp followers by the military or rebels in what is generally referred to as military prostitution.

The third strand of the discourse focus on how women have tried to contain these various challenges encountered. Largely unaware of the consequences scholars who try to showcase women gallantry as soldiers in war situation lays foundation for women to believe that they can liberate themselves from political subjugation and violence against their gender. This goes beyond advocacy by women group for cessation of hostilities against them at both national and local levels. Across African continents women have been subjugated to rape and sexual slavery as discovered in Nigeria civil war, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Chad, Somalia and recently in Nigeria in the areas controlled by Boko Haram terrorist group in the northern part of Nigeria. Maloba (2007) highlighted the role played by African women in the revolutionary struggle that took place in post World War II Africa in countries like Algeria, Kenya, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Though the data was raised from the travelogues by European explorers, dispatches and reflections by missionaries, official colonial reporters, 'scholarship' by colonial administrators and other authorities on colonial rule, writings by anthropologists during colonial rule, some of the post-World War II scholarly writing, critiques and observations by many feminists, and finally the portrayal of them in the mass media. Though this study is meant to historicize women's role as not been mere passive to the emancipation of these African countries but the danger is that it tends to rejuvenate their combative spirit in the wake of strong push by western feminist protagonist calling for a radical re-ordering or restructuring of assumed patriarchal society. Obioma Nnaemeka (1998:6) argued that Western and African feminists differ in their language of engagement. Whereas African feminism challenges the patriarchal society through negotiation and compromise, Western feminism is more strident and combative. It is hence not surprising that African feminism resists radical feminism in general and especially its stridency against motherhood.

Evident from a number of conflicts in Africa suggests that women can readily assume combative posture. Women were recruited to have participated as combatants in the wars in Sierra Leone and Rwanda. For example, the number of combatants with RUF was put at 10,000 by September, 1997 but nine thousand and five of them were believed to have been abducted and few donated by their kinsmen; and like their men counterpart, women also participated in looting and occupation of territories (*Conciliation Resources*, 1997). In the case of Rwanda, African Rights illustrates how women helped in the perpetuation of the violent conflicts. In the report, it was argued that

Some women including young girls in their teens were participants in the carnage, hacking other women and children, and sometimes even men, to death. Some of these women joined the killings willingly. Others were forced in the same manner that men forced, at the point of a gun, by treats and other forms of intimidation. They participated in the massacre and in the murder of their neighbours as well as strangers. They joined the crowds that surrounded churches, hospitals and other places of refuge, wielding machetes, nail studded clubs and spears. They excelled as “cheerleaders” of the genocide, singing and jubilating the killers into action. They entered churches, schools, football stadiums and hospitals to finish off the wounded. Above all, women and girls stripped the dead – and the barely living – stealing their jewellery, money and clothes. Most victims of the massacres were buried completely naked because of women’s looting sprees inside the places of massacres (*African Rights*, 1992:1-2).

Both educated and peasant women were said to have helped in identifying who were to be killed, and some people given out to be killed included refugees, neighbours, and friends, colleagues at work and even close relatives. They provided those carrying out the killings with petrol. Some of the women who later became refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania, later became spies for their husbands and other militants wishing to kill more people. Similar situation might have taken place in Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone and other conflict area in Africa. It is important to state that the above position did not focus on women, who are properly recruited into the armed forces of African States; who show more prowess than their men counterparts in their discharge of duties. No doubt it was the prowess exhibited by African soldiers who alongside with their Western counterparts that motivated them into struggle for decolonization of Africa. Therefore, the Clausewitzian theorization of male dominance of war can be queried against the backdrop of women being involved in war crime and other atrocities as in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and many of them used as terrorist or suicide bombers in contemporary northern Nigeria.

That women are getting involved in combative engagement as a result of ‘push factors’ coming from men either through forceful conscription by insurgent groups or by formal government to ensure gender equity does not becloud that women can contribute to peace building both at local

and international level. After all, combative spirit in women is blamed on the fact that female leaders operate in a 'man's world' and so are encouraged to adopt hyper-masculine behavioural pattern of men. This stems from a tendency amongst men to see the world in terms of conflicts, rivalry and competition whether this arises from the influence of masculine gender stereotypes or from deeper biological based drive. Women in this analysis are less war-like than men, having a greater inclination towards cooperation, consensus building and the use of non-confrontational strategies in conflict problem-solving arrangement. Kegley Jr and Blanton wrote that:

While recognizing the influence of a masculine tradition of thought in world politics, some feminist scholarship posits that in practice there is on average no significant difference in the capabilities of men and women. Others, however, claim that differences exist and are contextual, with each gender being more capable than the other in certain endeavours, raising question on whether women bring strength to the bargaining table and enhance the prospects for conflict resolution or not (Kegley Jr and Blanton, 2011: 349-350)).

Stressing the argument further, the work stated that as a product of their traditional social roles, the tendency of women to have interdependent self-schemata and a nurturing orientation provides them with valuable perspectives that are asset to conflict negotiation and mediation. How women frame and conduct negotiation is influenced by 'a relational view of others, an embedded view of agency, and understanding of control through empowerment and problem-solving through dialogue (Kolb 1996: 139). Since women are likely to 'define themselves more through their relationships than men do, their actions and rhetoric within the negotiation process may be more oriented toward maintaining and protecting these relationships (Boyer et al 2009: 27).

Anderlini (2007) argued that since gender perspective may produce different outcomes in international negotiation, many hypothesize that increasing the number of women involved in decision making may bring a fresh perspective to conflict management. These new values to negotiation and mediation process derived from women socialization experiences, argued by Hudson (2005) have been absent due to the exclusionary nature of international negotiation. Kegley and Blanton (2011:350) posits that the intent of UN Resolution 1325 seeks to 'increase the participation of women at decision making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes' in the interest of generating new perspectives and options for lasting conflict resolution. In his book, *Anatomy of Female power*, Chinweizu (1990: 14) tried to establish the five pillars of women over men which tend to be applicable to all cultures. These pillars when examined tend to corroborate the feminine characteristics which can influence men in conflict resolution workshop in participation with women. Chinweizu posits thus:

Female powers exist; it hangs over every man like ubiquitous shadow. Indeed the life cycle of man, from cradle to grave may be divided into three phases each of which is defined by form of female power which dominates him: mother power, bride power, or wife power. From birth to puberty, he is ruled by mother power as

exercised over him by his one and only 'mummy dearest'. Then he passes into the territory of bride power as exercised over him by his bride-to-be, that cuddlesome and tender wench he feels he cannot live without. This phase lasts from puberty to that wedding day when the last of his potential bride finally makes herself his wife. He then passes into the domain of wife power as exercised over him by his own resident matriarch, alias his darling wife. This phase last till he is divorced, widowed or dead. In each phase female is established over him through peculiar weakness in that stage of life. Motherhood is established over him while he is a helpless infant. Bride power holds sway over him through his great need for a womb in which to procreate; if he didn't feel this need he wouldn't put himself into the power of any owner of a womb. There are five conditions that enable women to get what they want from men. Women's control of the womb, women's control of kitchen, women's control of the cradle, the psychological immaturity of man relative to woman, and man's tendency to be deranged by his own excited penis (Chinweizu, 1990:14).

These characteristic as observed by Chinweizu is largely universal and most dominate within local communities. It is on the premise of the foregoing that women are important forces in conflict resolution in both historical and contemporary phases, particularly in Africa.

Umuada Women Association in Historical Perspectives

In Igbo culture, two aspects can be established regarding women association. The first is based on the area the woman is married to. Here women form associations almost running parallel with the men or their husbands' associations starting form kindred to village and town level. However, the parallel association does not depict antagonistic relations between the male and female group rather both are mutually complementary and often decisions from the male group have influenced outcome in the female's group. The second association is referred to as 'Umuada'. Fundamentally, *Umuada* association is formed to sustain the patrilineal lineage of the women (daughters) married outside. The husbands of the women to a large extent do not have influence on the decisions reached by *Umuada*. In most circumstances *umuada* have focused on issues that have to do with their patrilineal families, especially when there is abuse or violations of the norms by women (wives) married to their patrilineal families. However, *Umuada* associations have shown, to be very effective in managing and resolving conflicts between their patrilineal village or community and the village where they are married to. The whole effort to manage or to resolve conflicts is based on the premise that if a conflict is lost or won by either of the villages or communities it would definitely translate to casualty on part of *Umuada* (either she loses a person or property from the husband's side or from her patrilineal family), therefore a concerted effort is made to intervene and resolve any conflicts between the two communities. The venue for the *Umuada* gathering (meetings) have always been their patrilineal villages or communities, usually every eight market days and that confers on them some form of leverage to take decisions especially with regard to the realm of "good ethics of the wives of their siblings at their father's home".

The relevance of *Umuada* association notwithstanding, Korieh (1996) and Anigbo (1991) cited some problems associated with the institution. Korieh focused on the often-humiliating widowhood practices in Igboland. Several feminist groups have often challenged the practice of compelling a widow to drink the water used to bath the dead body of her husband; made to cross the casket (coffin); sleep inside the room where the lifeless body of her husband is kept for a night; and made to pass through evil forest crying or shouting one incantation or the other as a violation of human rights. The practices are enforced where there is dispute over the cause of the death of husband of a woman. This is carried out to justify or as a proof of the innocence of the widow over the cause of the husband's death when she is accused of been responsible for her husband death.

It is important to note that the above position has focused on the practices considered inhuman and not on the institution itself as other practices of the *Umuada* are mostly appreciated by the people especially on conflict management and resolutions. The attack or complain against the practice often come from outside, that is, championed by non-governmental organizations in the urban areas and not necessarily by the local women themselves. The reason for relative non-resistance by the local women (Igbo women) is that the widow too is also a member of *Umuada* association in her patrilineal lineages, therefore member of the association that also exert such practices on suspected erring widow in her patrilineal lineages. Anigbo focused on the ongoing debates about the proper place for a woman's burial. The burial rites connected with women are usually controversial and often trigger intra communal crisis. Though this practice has reduced significantly as most death women are buried in husband's family however, some elderly women still make resolution before their death she will be buried in her husband compound but in some occasions the corpse has to be laid in state at her patrilineal compound or buried there if she has made such decision before her death. But in some places, it is a tradition that the dead woman must be buried in her own father's home. However, the tradition appears to be losing its resilience in contemporary times. This study searches for what serves as motivation why the elderly women using walking stick in defilement of any hash weather condition to attend meeting of *Umuada* in their patrilineal homes? What is the significant of eight market days for its meetings? Why are some young women who perceive the activities of as somehow meddlesome still join the group? Why is burial rites not consummated in the absence of *Umuada*? Why is the institution revered by Igbo people irrespective of status, creed or profession? This study interrogates these questions and examines the efficacy of *Umuada* institution in resolving communal conflicts South-East Nigeria.

Umuada and conflict management in the southeastern Nigeria

Southeastern Nigeria is in particular a hotbed for communal conflicts. Empirical evidence suggests that conflicts have posed a great threat to peace and security and have shattered some progress made by people, causing high level of hunger and starvation among the indigenes of the area. Few examples can be cited to illustrate the conflicts that occur in contemporary southeast Nigeria: the extensive loss of about five thousands lives and other valuable properties in Aguleri-

Umuleri war in Anambra State (*Daily Times* 1991:1); the Ezillo and Ezza communal clashes with hundreds of houses torched and six hundred lives lost in Ebonyi State (Agbo 2010); the Ogbunike conflicts in Osile Anambra State which caused serious destruction in both persons and properties (Chukwujekwe 2008:IV); the serious damage to property and loss of lives in Ebonyi State which prompted a former governor to order police to shoot at sight at the warring groups of Inyimagu and Agbaje (Gill, Nasa, 2003:1); the Umuode and Oruku in Enugu communal clash where AK-47 rifles were used in the same way as civil wars (Igwe Moses, 2009:15); the 2003 violent election crisis in Anambra State that appeared like a civilian coup d'état. Where political tugs stormed Government House to abduct the then governor of the State, who managed to escape from the government house (Ezeogu 2005); the gory scene where children and women, especially the aged ones (unlike the conventional war where most could be taken as prisoners of war) are mostly raped and slaughtered on the ground that they are either children or members of the enemy camp. This situation cannot but create worrisome state and urgent need for study and to identify its implications.

Also, some extant works on the area show that the area under study is characterized by conflicts. The work by Basden aptly describes Igbo society presently known as southeastern Nigeria under the present political arrangement as characterized by conflicts. Basden (1921: 167-171) in his book *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, described the people as warriors, always fighting wars. He wrote that “with all savage peoples, the Ibos, prior to the British occupation of the country occupied their spare time with fighting, generally town against town. The impact of this was not so much on the bloodshed, but rather the paralyzing of trade and intercourse.” Though describe as such but we can argue that the description of the people as being involved in perpetual wars falls short of capturing all aspect of their social life. The anthropological report about the Igbo’s which portrays them as always seeking for war goes to show that more study is needed to discover those mechanisms which provided social harmony and continued existence before the coming of the colonialist. It is important to argue that without such mechanisms “war of all against all” would have exterminated the entire race before the coming of the Whiteman. However, the pertinent question that begs for answer is what sustains the warlike manner to present time?

Ibeanu (2003:167-222) in his work *Aguleri-Umuleri Conflict in Anambra State* which is more recent, undertook a survey of the major cause of conflicts in Igbo society in which the study presented that a total of 75 major conflicts of varying degrees of violence, 49 of the 75 or 65% involved land. The work also contained a case study of Aguleri-Umuleri war over boundary demarcation. It presented account of the intractability and the violence that followed the 1995 and 2000 conflicts. It shows that modern approaches for conflict management and resolution like the court system and intervention by state government did not resolve the conflict. We therefore ask why government intervention is not able to resolve the conflicts. Are there forms of partiality on the part of government? How do parties to conflicts perceive government intervention in conflict situation? Onwuzuruigbo’s (2011:567-87) work titled: *Horizontal Inequalities and Communal Conflicts: The Case of Aguleri and Umuleri Communities of South-Easter Nigeria* shows how horizontal inequalities between Aguleri and Umuleri (which the author presented to

have come up when Aguleri community had the privilege of being the first to come in contact with the colonial masters. Accepting Christian missionaries it afforded them the opportunity of early Western education, including job opportunities) became the triggering factor for the conflict in the area. Aguleri became the first to sell land to European companies such as Royal Niger Company, John Holt and CFAO thereby enhancing their financial status as against Umuleri that inhabits the same area with them. It is equally important to point out that the work revealed that relative deprivation could be a source of violent conflict and struggle over land was highlighted to have contributed largely to the conflicts. This goes to confirm that increase in dependence on land will tend to exacerbate more conflicts. But the present paper is about how umuada contributes to peace building in Igboland southeast Nigeria.

Research findings

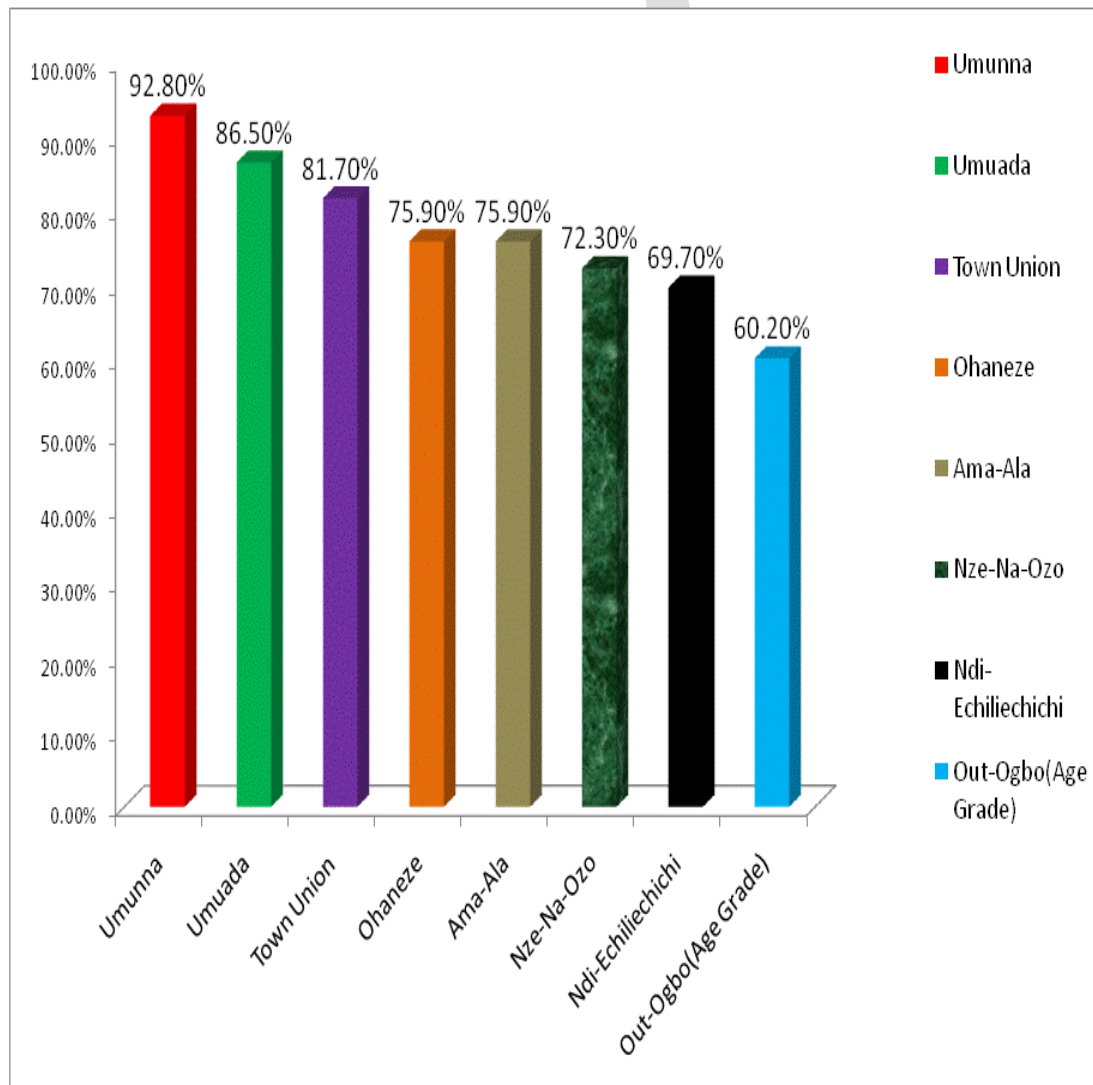
Cross-sectional survey research was carried out to examine the relevance of traditional institutions for conflict management and resolution in the South East of Nigeria, comprising of the five States, Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo. The sources of the data have both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered from the various traditional institutions and their leaders such as the Ezes', Chiefs, paramount chiefs, titled men, youth and women organizations through questionnaires and interviews. The same group constituted the target for the focused group discussion (FGD). Some key traditional rulers that constitute key informant interviewee (KII) were interviewed because they are the custodians of the peoples' culture; they helped us to elicit in-depth information (IDI). 1000 questionnaire was used to capture the opinion of the sample population selected for the study. The secondary data for the study was sourced through library search, examination of archival materials, and information from other sundry materials written on Igbo people.

For the purpose of this paper analysis is focused on the responses from Umiada. The first part of the question sought to elicit the intensity and factors responsible for conflicts in the area. The respondents showed that land disputes 47.2%: Ezeship tussle 16.2%: Domestic conflicts 13.1%: Struggle over Asset sharing 7.1%: Stuggle over Social stratification 5.3%: Religious intolerance 3.4%: Competitions over Political postions 3.4%: Struggle for the creation of Autonomous communities 2.5%: and Youths unrest 1.8% conyributes to conflicts that occur in the area. Another question was asked to elicit which of the conflicts are best resolved by the traditional institutions and responses were land disputes 53.1%: Domestic conflicts 22.7%: Ezeship tussle 8.9%: Struggle over Asset sharing 7.2%: Competitions over Political postion 3.4%: Religious intolerance 1.7%: Youths unrest 1.5%: Struggle over Social stratifiction 1.3%: and Struggle for the creation of Autonomous communities 0%. The reponses showed that domestic conflicts ranked 13.1% of the conflicts that occur in the area. But it also showed that 22.7% of the respondents indicated that traditional institutions can best resolve domestic conflicts.

The study discovered that Umuada as an institution is most efficacious at nipping conflicts in the bud because of its early warning detection and intervention. It has majorly focused on domestic conflicts as it is largely gender based but have been very successful at initiating and resolving communal wars in the southeast Nigeria. This study discovered that the peace process which led to the resolution of Umuleri/Aguleri war, the most violent after the Nigeria civil war in the area,

was initiated by Umuada. Though the process posed serious dangers on umuada as their husbands suspected that their crossing war lines to meet with their kits and kins on the other parts could lead them to reveal some war or army location to other side, yet such suspicion and danger did not debar them from carrying out their traditional role of peace making. Strong custom like rites of passage cannot be consummated in the southeast in the absence of Umuada. Strong belief in procreation or blessing of new born baby, reincarnation and material blessings are weaved around umuada institution. As a result, warring factions often found it impossible to resist peace proposals from Umuada. The figure below shows the ranking by the respondents on the efficacy of traditional conflict resolution institutions.

Figure 1



Source: Field Study (2011)

The figure showed that umuada ranked 86.5% of the institutions used for conflict resolution. It goes without saying that umuada has been very instrumental to conflict resolution in the southeast Nigeria. FGDs conducted on women affirmed that they play a very crucial role in conflict management and resolution in Igboland. All the women in the FGDs argued that men are mostly responsible for the conflicts that occur in the community:

We are more united in the resolution to handle conflicts in our communities because we know that when the crises occur it is our children or husbands that are killed. Whenever there is any decision to deal with any conflict in the community we have strict rules that no woman should leak the decision to her husband's (FGDs/Women/Anambra/Imo/Enugu/Abia/Ebonyi 2011)

We found out during FGDs conducted on women that there are certain procedures used by them to resolve conflicts which are common among them. The measures according to them are used to deal with larger conflicts that occur in the communities. The following procedures were affirmed by women to be highly efficacious in resolving conflicts:

First is *iyi-ma-miri* (to urinate) all over the compound of any member of the community who insist on causing trouble. Second is *itonkpo* (throwing walking stick) all over the compound. Third is *igba-oto* (to walk nude) all over the compound. Fourth is *Igba Oso* (to collectively run away from home). Immediately we commence the first measure, the deviant member usually hastens to comply because of the dire consequences (mostly spiritual) of the application of the second and the third measures (FGD/Women Leaders/Abia/ 2011).

We also found gossips as one of the factors that cause conflict mostly among women. For instance, in Arochukwu gossips is one of the problems that confront women. To ensure that gossips peddling are reduced in the community any person found guilty of propelling false rumour is made to go around the whole town with gong (ekwe or ogene) to denounce the false rumour initially spread by him or her. Consensus among women is guaranteed because every woman is both a member of *Umuada* and also a member of other women group; therefore, there is synergy in both making of rules and implementation of rules from *Umuada* and other women groups. According to them:

We have strong mechanisms to control younger women or those who are affected by western values which sometimes make them to oppose our rules. There are some of us who are stubborn especially the ones who reside in foreign countries. We have been treating such cases here

in this union and make sure appropriate sanctions are imposed on them, which they must later comply with. We have a network to coordinate affairs of our people in the whole countries where our people are found (FGDs/WomenLeaders/Imo/Abia/Anambra/Enugu/Ebonyi /2011).

Conclusion

Though the analysis in the foregoing was based on study carried in the southeast Nigeria but it also confirms the theorizations made in this paper that shows that women have universal nature that supports peace and eschew violence. Which it requires is a more rigorous search for similar institutions elsewhere or constructs one where none exists. Though their efforts have been limited to local conflicts, even at that Salim (1997) argued that despite the nature of their localizations, the conflicts challenge regional security and pose threat to global security; efforts to manage them, even at the level of the United Nations (UN), have been grossly inadequate. And Albert (2005:1) argued that resources which would have been used for the development of Africa are wasted on the very expensive peacemaking operation and management of displaced persons.

It is highly appreciative to discover that African people have consciously preserved institutions used for conflict resolutions in pre-colonial African societies. These institutions are used extensively and successfully in resolving conflicts today. There is the need to examine how modern institutions have crippled the operations of these indigenous institutions of Africans. The great challenge is indentify and interrogate why African choose to ignore the norms of their old cherished institutions. Do they choose to ignore the norms of traditional institutions because modern institutions provide them the opportunity to use their acquired power to actualize their personal contrary to communal orientation of original African communities? Since information technology is not sparing any society but rather creating a world of its own. There is need to consciously examine how long these traditional institutions can cope with the onslaught before it finally cave in. That umuada is very salience to Igbo women have made them to chose every eight market days for the meeting in which those who even use walking stick walk to their matrilineal homes for the all important meetings.

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