

The Role of Women in Conflict Management in Rumuekpe Community in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This thesis has attempted to examine how the inclusion of women in conflict management processes, and decision making in conflict related programmes, could contribute to effective result, using Rumuekpe as a case study. By employing qualitative and descriptive approaches to derive data from primary and secondary sources, the study argues that in spite of the traditional challenges' women are faced with, the glass ceiling and discrimination of the women continues to pose formidable huddles to women participation in major issues in Nigeria, they are still able to bring about groundbreaking roles, in conflict management. The Rumuekpe women has contributed significantly to the conclusion of the 5-year conflict in the community, and have since earned a position of respect in society. This did not give them a larger role to play in government, politics and private sector. Major barriers remain, but a brighter future has been created. Furthermore, the thesis recommends constructive actions that should be taken to ensure that the productive involvement of women continues.

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Introduction

Conflict is a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals [1]. Conflict can happen in practically any social setting, be it between or within individuals, groups, communities, tribes, states or country. Conflict brings about change and change also brings conflict and both are an inevitable part of life [2]. It is absolutely necessary to tackle conflict at its nursery stage because if allowed to escalate, can be a serious problem and could make peaceful co-existence almost impossible. Therefore, one school of management thought views it as a dysfunctional outcome that threatens economic growth and development, social harmony, peaceful co-existence. As such, it is dangerous and should be avoided as it has a negative connotation synonymous with such term as violence, destruction and irrationality.

Various studies treat conflict as a negative condition which creates friction between relationships and causes struggle and breakdown of law and order in the society. Another study shows that school of management thought posits that it is a functional outcome, and argues that it is natural and inevitable in all social settings, endeavours and organizations, and has the potential to be a positive force in determining and fostering community harmony, peaceful co-existence, and national development [2]. This perception considers conflict sacrosanct in our social life and treats it as a means that addresses issues which includes marginalization, exploitation, injustice and abuse of power and

resources. The belief is that it strengthens equity and fairness, social interaction, economic growth and development. Conflict management, therefore, connotes actions taken to keep a conflict from escalating beyond control. It implies the ability to control the intensity of a conflict and its negative effects, through negotiation, intervention, and other institutional mechanisms including traditional diplomatic methods [3].

In River State, Rumuekpe community is just one of many communities across the Niger Delta region that suffered from the effects of deadly conflict caused by poor governance and oil exploration that neglects basic human rights. This community is noted for the peace they maintained between themselves and strangers therein. Their peaceful environment attracted countless International oil firms and the establishment of several oil installations in Rumuekpe community. The people are law-abiding and committed to the course of the international oil firms operating in the locality, until recently when the international oil firms and Nigerian State began interfering in the politics of the people's leadership as an approach to destabilize Rumuekpe leadership. Their intention was targeted at giving the international oil firms the privilege to exploit and take-away Rumuekpe oil resources without any interference.

The Niger Delta Regions are blessed with natural resources and these resources account for majority of revenues generated from oil and gas exportation in Nigeria but Sadly, the Niger Delta Regions that ought to have been the most developed Regions in the country based on its economic value and impact now suffers a great deal of poverty, poor education, poor power supply, inadequate security and limited employment and access to basic services. This is in

spite of its enormous resources – the region makes up only 7.5 percent of Nigeria’s land, but contains more than 90 percent of its proven gas and oil reserves, and contains one of the world’s most vital wetland and coastal marine ecosystems [4].

While that can be said about Niger Delta region, the same cannot be said about Rumuekpe community. Rumuekpe community is home to the biggest Shell Petroleum Development Firm Eastern Division, with a processing station of between 10, 000 and 15, 000-barrel oil daily. Smith (2011:14) claims that the community is home to crisscrossing oil and gas pipelines via which 100,000 barrels of oil flow daily. This barrel of oil that flow per day amount to 10 percent of Shell Petroleum Development firm daily production in the nation. It is worth mentioning that, with the strategic importance of Rumuekpe community to both the multinational oil firms and Nigeria, one could anticipate that Rumuekpe community could be an epitome of socio-economic development on the account of the anticipated dividends from the petroleum profits that is been gotten from the community. Contrarily, claims that instead of Rumuekpe natural resources to be a blessing, it has become a curse because the revenue from the resources facilitate corruption that has crippled the government’s capacity to deliver basic amenities such as health, education and infrastructure the community desperately needs [5].

This stark economic inequality, extreme deprivation and the dearth of distribution of the region’s wealth (how oil revenues are shared or not shared) means that inequality, poverty and lack of access to basic service has been central to the decades of conflict between locals, fuel grievances across the region, and hold back development. Based on Chigbo (2011:2) study, arguably, the Rumuekpe conflict of 2004 was principally stimulated by Shell and other state agencies in the community because of their inability to establish and implement effectively, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for effective community development for Rumuekpe community.

This practice led to a supremacy struggle between local gangs in order to have access to oil contracts and handouts. It is worth noting that the International oil firms fueled conflicts by distributing handouts to the most powerful group at a time, making international oil firms the key conflict actors. While oil firms frame this as an instance of responsible corporate social policy, in practice, it has handed money to a small elite, who often have not redistributed it or invested it in the community, leaving communities divided and distrustful. [6] This has reinforced inequality, has led to violent winner-takes-all battles within the community and has established a predatory culture where violence pays – the well-documented instance of the Rumuekpe crisis offers a vital insight into how these processes have emerged at the local level [7].

It soon became clear to gangs that they just needed to proclaim themselves as leaders and prove their strength to be able to extort money from the Shell oil company. Rumuekpe was an extreme embodiment of this pattern of the misappropriation of oil handouts in a community with no service or infrastructure, community fragmentation and tensions, and a subsequent violent struggle over resources. No wonder some experts attribute the conflict to marginalization and frustration among local communities [2, 8-13]. While some refer to it as a clamor for more oil revenue [2, 14, 15]. Yet, others have seen it within the broad context of environmental degradation resulting from oil extraction [2, 16-18].

Women have been particularly targeted with rape, forced pregnancies, sexual slavery and assault becoming deliberate

instruments of war. Women have also played other varied role such as being agents of destruction as well as an inspiring force that instigates transitions from violent and conflict into peaceful negotiated settlements. Given these varied roles played by women in this kind of conflict, it has become of extreme importance that any attempts at managing conflicts or preventing them, must bring women into the process at an early stage as contributors and active participants in all stage as contributors and active participants in all stages of conflict management. Women themselves have answered to this clarion call and have turn out to be part of the process by undertaking activities starting from grassroots, including humanitarian assistance, demobilization and disarmament, child and health care, hostage exchange and using traditional conflict management approaches such as the peace tent and so on. They have often extended their roles to a wider political agenda, clamoring for a representation of women in politics in their respective communities and state.

The conflict in Rumuekpe, how it started and how it played out, is a testament to the conditions described above. The conflict brought untold suffering to Rumuekpe community, with women disproportionately the victims of the worst forms of abuses. In the face of their ordeal, women also developed varied skills and strategies to ensure their survival. They became involved positively and negatively. They were both active participants, contributing to the planning and execution of the war, and passive and abused victims serving as bush wives, and sorcerers etc.

Of profound importance was the role of women and in women’s organizations in the clamor for peace in the face of massive destruction of lives and properties and egregious human rights violations. The women of Rumuekpe community emerged from their former dormant role in society to take center stage in the push for a negotiated settlement when all seemed lost. Experience in the Rumuekpe conflict indicates that women have specific skills that make them natural conflict managers. It indicates that efforts resolve to conflicts can only be successful when all who are affected by it are involved in the solution. This especially includes women because they have been excluded from prominent roles for countless years. The aim of this thesis is to bring the role of women into clearer focus, and to discuss the accomplishments they have attained.

Reviewing Past Studies on Women and Conflict Management Process

Conflict is a gendered activity: women and men have different access to resources, power and decision-making before, during and after conflicts. The experience of women and men in situations of tension, war and post-conflict reconstruction is significantly different. Almost 80 percent of nowadays civilian casualties are women and 80 percent of all refugees and internally displaced people globally are women and children (Parliamentary Assembly, 2004). As noted in the Platform for Action of the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, “while entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society as well as their sex”. As such, women are thus caught in a vicious paradox: while, on the other hand, they are the main civilian victims of conflicts, they are, on the other hand, often powerless to prevent them, excluded from the negotiating tables when it comes to their resolution and marginalized in the post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. The general exclusion of women from decision-making positions prior to, during and following the violent conflict, reinforces their victimization.

It is clear that the changing circumstances are bringing a new urgency to the cause of gender equality as it is imperative to include all segments of society in conflict management, peace-building and reconciliation efforts. For instance, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), an overwhelming majority of internally displaced persons are women and are in urgent need of assistance that is properly targeted to their requirements. Therefore, enhancing the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace-building efforts is key to achieving security and stability globally. No wonder the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing offered a platform for discussions on the role of women at two levels. First, it followed up on concerns about snowballing decision-making roles of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels. The conference specifically called for including a gender standpoint in the resolution of armed and other conflicts: to ensure they are able to address gender issues properly. More significantly, this conference offered a rationale for looking beyond high politics to the grassroots level.

There was a unanimous agreement from the participants that the participation of women in conflict management and reconciliation efforts globally is required [19]. The conference aimed to include women in crushing the prevailing logic of war and moving towards a culture of peace. The conference was a major step in recognizing and legitimating the role of women in conflict resolution and peacemaking at the grassroots level (UNESCO, 2007). Since the conference in Beijing, the participation of women in conflict management has received special attention for the reason that, it is argued, women represent a vital resource for sustaining peace efforts at all level. With that said, the meaningful inclusion of women in peace and management processes – where women have decision-making authority – not only better reflects the diversity of the society, inclusive peace frameworks surge the durability and quality of peace.

According to Krause and, who investigated 82 peace pacts in 42 armed conflicts between 1989 and 2011, indicated that peace pacts with female signatories were linked with lasting peace [20]. Their investigation also indicated that peace pacts signed by female delegates demonstrated higher implementation rates for pact provisions. On top of that, women bring diverse insight into the structure of power relations and different values to the process of peacebuilding. Additionally, argue that women not only reclaim space but create their own scenarios to influence peace negotiations, and even more, to push the societal change required for a sense of sustainable peace [21, 22]. As such, UNESCO programme is expanding to include women participation at the lowest levels in areas afflicted by conflicts. Also, UNIFEM has embarked on programmes that give backing to women's concrete efforts in peace-building, governance, and consolidating international partnerships. UNIFEM supports documentation and distribution of information about such activities as well [23].

Over the past decade, the significance of women's involvement in peace processes has been identified via countless global institutions, resolutions and Member State commitments. In October 2000, the UN Security Council via SCR 1325 formally identified the relationship between women, peace and security and the critical significance of women inclusion as mirrored in leadership, empowerment and decision-making (USAID, 2000). The recognition of the "use of sexual violence" as a tactic of World War II led the Council to adopt two other women, peace and security resolutions 1820 and 1888; which focus on gender-based violence and emphasize the need for women's participation in

fighting this violence [23]. The Security Council further continued the participation theme in October 2009 with Resolution 1889, urging the international community to take further measures to improve women inclusion during all stages of peace processes, especially in conflict resolution, post-conflict planning and peace-building, including by enhancing their involvement in economic and political decision-making at early stages of the recovery process, via promoting women's leadership and capacity and given backing to women's organizations and countering negative societal attitudes about women's capacity to participate equally [23].

Within these resolutions and continued dialogue, there is a growing recognition that women in conflict management must not be viewed as victims, but as powerful agents for peace and security in their communities [23]. Peace and security are vital for economic advancement, development and the empowerment of women; and women need to play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace. As such, it is necessary to empower women economically and politically and allow them to be represented adequately at all levels of decision-making. This has been reaffirmed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Peace Platform for Action and Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which requests the Member States to surge the political representation of women; protect them in armed conflict given that women represent one of the most vulnerable segments of the society during conflicts and wars, involve them during decision-making and in peace negotiations [24]. A study from the Geneva Graduate Institute's Broadening Participation Process, which analyzed the roles of women's groups and other groups in 40 peace and transition processes, suggested that when women's group were able to effectively influence the process, a peace pact was nearly always reached and the pact was more likely implemented [3, 25]. A pact is 20 percent more likely to last at least 2 years and 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years if women participate in its creation and management process [10].

Women contribute to building the capacity of their communities and nations to prevent violent conflict by acting as educators and participants in the development process. The recent surge in government representation of women, as in post-genocide Rwanda, is an exemplary trend and can aid conflict management efforts. In Burundi, women's inclusion in conflict management assisted to integrate gender equality into democratic governance and the peace-building framework. This was as a result of the quotas in the peace pact and Burundi's novel constitution. Pressure from the Burundi women's organization contributed to a culture of negotiation for national peace. The inclusion of women was initially inconsistent because of the dearth of political will be all sides and in some situation strong resistance by political parties [26]. Based on a Somali study that in some regions, older women who could no longer conceive were used as peace envoys [27]. In times of war and conflict, the older women were the only people who could move across the zones of conflict freely and without much danger. It was the older women who studied the situation, assessed the prospects for peace, and facilitated contact and communication between the two warring parties [28]. Responsibility for the selection and deployment of peace envoy rested with prominent leaders, religious figures and women [29].

In Rumuekpe community, women have been engaged in peace-making and conflict resolution. During the past community conflicts that rocked Rumuekpe community, women were significant social actors generally and in particular in peace-making. A study carried out in Rumuekpe community to determine

the role played by women as told through stories about the conflict, indicated the great contribution of women towards conflict resolution [4]. The research discovered that although their stories were consistent with the theories on war and peace, it challenges feminist critique by painting a picture of how they were able to create a place for themselves in their community through their role in peace-making, a role not necessarily defined through men. In conclusion, the research provided suggestions for further research on women's roles in conflict management and peace-making. In spite of the growing number of researches that underline the importance and value of inclusive peace processes, women remain significantly underrepresented in high-level peacemaking and conflict management processes. Between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only 2 percent of mediators, 5 percent of witnesses and signatories, and 8 percent of negotiators in all major peace processes (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018).

In a report published by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs (Women's role in peace processes. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union), the authors ask why are so few women included in high-level peacemaking and conflict management? The authors gave the following three reasons. First, based on O'Reilly et. al argument, women's inclusion relates to a broader dilemma about the ends and means of peacemaking and conflict management: if the purpose of a peace and conflict management process is only to end violence, then women – who are seldom the belligerents – are unlikely to be considered legitimate participants [30]. Second, traditional security narratives in the international system remain largely focused on state security rather than human security, undervaluing non-military and non-state centric perspectives on peace and security matters. Third, while multilateral organizations like the United Nations (UN) and its Member States have committed to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the absence of political will and appropriate allocation of funding to influence and disrupt the traditional structures that secure warring parties a place at the negotiations table is hindering women's meaningful participation across the peacemaking and conflict management process landscape. For example, as talks between the United States and the Taliban move forward, warring parties remain reluctant to include Afghan women as members of the negotiation team.

At the same time, some western governments who promote the WPS agenda have acquiesced to the dominant conflict actors in spite of the strong link between the meaningful inclusion of Afghan women in the peace process and the future stability, prosperity and peace of Afghanistan (Ahmadi, 2019). With that said, Women need to build up a firm movement before war or conflict begins and to sustain it via the war or conflict after ceasefire [31]. In summary, most of the research reviewed fail to clearly highlight the specific strategies used by women in conflict management. Moreover, some researches reviewed connect the women to the conflicts and consider them as victims rather than possible peace champions. With that said, to make these women possible peace champions, the Parliamentary Assembly should break this vicious circle by calling on the governments and parliaments of member states to ensure that women are empowered and made part of conflict management initiatives and are involved in preventive diplomacy, conflict resolution, peace-making and post-conflict peace-building debates and activities at all levels.

Root Causes of Rumuekpe Conflict

This part aims to find out the root causes of Rumuekpe conflict that

led to the destruction of the building, loss of lives and properties. During the conflict, almost everyone was destroyed. As such, nowadays, most of the homes lining Rumuekpe's roads are now merely scorched concrete walls, with gaping holes. In one village, they have replaced the roof on the three-room school, but there are no windows, floors, chairs, or desks. Students sit on rough boards balanced on bricks and rocks. In another village, the chief shows visitors the site of the school, now completely overgrown by tall grasses, and merely a memory for him and his neighbors. Notably, the conflict in Rumuekpe community can be de-constructed in a large number of overlapping conflicts (in order of intensity) that deal with: (i) Self-determination; (ii) Resource control; (iii) Citing of community development projects; (iv) Oil spills and pipeline explosions; (v) Conflict between elders and youth; (vi) Community disputes in associations; (vii) Chieftaincy tussle; and (viii) Land dispute.

Based on the above, a respondent who is an elder in the community and also a community leader, Elder Akale said:

“The conflict has many layers to it and the causes are struggle over power, resource, control access to the multinational firms' leadership and power tussle between the youth leadership for the position of Liaison Officer [4].”

Another respondent, Mr. Felix Aoma said:

“That the root cause of Rumuekpe conflict is economical social, political factors that led to the conflict in Rumuekpe [7].”

An indigene of Rumuekpe, a human right activist, whose name is John said:

“The root cause of Rumuekpe conflict is marginalization, exploitation by Shell company and other multinational companies operating in Rumuekpe and the Nigerian government. Shell company has always oppressed the people of Rumuekpe by suppressing them with the heavy military presence. He lamented that anytime there is an oil spill, they repair their facility and do nothing to help the community. He explained that the group's armed struggle is the only choice to force foreign oil firms and the government to listen to their demands for development. This is what caused the problem in the community. No development, lack of work, no better education - while we have four major multinational oil firms in our community. On top of that, he accused the multinational firms and the government of the abuse of human rights in the community [22].”

The Rumuekpe Youth Council argues that neither the government nor the foreign oil firms have helped develop the town, aggravating tensions over the only source of profit from the oil industry - land ownership and the rents paid to the individuals who own the land. Those tensions have erupted into bloody conflicts between rival factions in Rumuekpe, resulting in the deaths of more than 200 people [22]. Residents destroyed their own homes in the battle over land ownership, turning Rumuekpe into a ghost town. Based on this, Mr. Frank, another respondent who is an Engineer to one of the multinational Corporations said:

“Most of the community leaders and youth leaders are the spoilers in the community. Their greed for oil money led to the conflict because they want to acquire all without putting the people's interest at heart.” Multinationals offer youth of Rumuekpe community money to protect oil installations. These arrangements, while understandable from the side of the oil firm, only reinforce the conflict. The firm is caught in a zero-sum game; if the oil firm awards surveillance contracts, it will lead to conflict, if it does not, it will lead to vandalization of their equipment. That has

led to a situation whereby the faction that is in control receives royalties from the oil firms and they used that one to eat, but other people who were displaced took up arms to force them out so as to enjoy from the oil firm. They declare that for peace to be restored back to the community, they are demanding that oil firms stop paying money to individual landlords, and invest in the entire community. Meaning, the oil firms operating in the community are one of the causes of the prolonged crisis. Frank accuses the Nigerian government and the foreign oil firms for trying to divide and conquer the local population. He added that Rumuekpe was a very peaceful community before the multinationals came in [22]."

Conflict in Rumuekpe community is the result of a complex dynamic between foreign and state-owned firms, different levels of government, communities and increasingly armed militia. Military and private security agencies are deemed to be under respectively government and firm control but, at times, can also be interpreted as conflict actors by themselves. Based on this, another respondent, who wished to remain anonymous has this to say;

"I am an indigene of Rumuekpe community and was among the boys that started the war. In pain he told me that, the idea that most Westerners have of the relations between state and society is that (i) diverse actors in society (State, business and civil society) share power; (ii) the State represents the interests of the population via implementing laws that protect the populace; (iii) the State plays a role as an arbiter in disputes and makes judgements according to a transparent set of rules. He asserts that, the reality in a community like Rumuekpe does not correspond to this model. The State for instance does not represent the interests of the entire population but only the interests of a narrow elite, there is a collusion between political leaders and business actors, and while legislation intended to protect social and economic rights of citizens exists, it is not applied. A combination of frustration over the extraction of oil and lack of development in Rumuekpe on the hand and the lack of political space to express grievances and demand for accountability has led to increasing levels of violence in the community. These were the same reasons I became part of the people that started the conflict. The conflict has changed over time and people whose frustrations are not being addressed seek other ways of expressing themselves that cannot be ignored. The tragedy of the conflict in Rumuekpe is that violence seems to be the only language that actors pick up from each other, without having the capacity to decipher the message behind the violence. However, I had to run away when they brutally murdered my best friend."

In line with the above statement, during the focus group discussions, Peace, Matthew, Bridget, Alale, Chiboy, And Jonah all agreed that the multinationals, government and the community leaders are the cause of the conflict in their community. They also agreed that marginalization and exploitation was also a part of the root cause, because the government and the multinational firms are not interested in providing basic amenities for the community. They comment, however, that community development has been largely unsuccessful and the stories about failed, abandoned and obsolete projects are numerous. These multinationals have falsely (or at least, controversially) reported some activities as community development; an instance would be the building of roads to their own facilities, roads that were of no use to the villagers. On the other hand, development efforts have often been undertaken on the basis of demands from a community, rather than an assessment of the needs of this community. This has led to some curious decisions regarding priorities.

Women Experience in Rumuekpe Conflict

Frank Amugo and Izeoma Chinda, citing Owugah (2009: 114) gave

a story in their paper of a British Petroleum Engineer who said, "I have explored oil in Venezuela, I have explored for oil in Kuwait, I have never seen an oil-rich town as impoverished as Oloibiri". They gave another story of how David Pass, a Chadian, said, "if I had been born in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta, I would have since become a revolutionary" [32]. This reveals the stark neglect of the region where the bulk of Nigeria's oil and gas resources are located.

The exclusion of the Rumuekpe people from the benefits of the oil economy, the abysmal under development in the midst of plenty, and the multi-dimensional struggle for the control of the resource in the community sharpened the revolutionary tendency of the people and ignited the struggle for resource control, self-determination, political advancement, environmental protection, and sustainable development among others which take ferocious forms. According to, the import of trickle resources flows from the Nigerian State and the oil companies, and the consequences of gross degradation and socio-economic dislocation, have been massive poverty, unemployment and malnutrition among the populace [13]. These have led to frustration, restiveness, anger, bitterness and aggression against the state and the oil companies.

As with women in other parts of the world, Rumuekpe women maintain certain economic responsibilities within the family as wives, mothers and agriculturalists. On top of that, they are the main care-benefactor of their children, husband and aged parents. Despite the fact that they are known to be the "food producers, procurers and preparers," in every household, they are anticipated to be important wage earners as well. This is because the intra-household income distribution patterns and the rise of women-headed households in every community, nation or region, coupled with servile poverty, force these women to take an active financial role in their various families. With all these responsibilities, yet, these women suffered great hardship in times of conflict. For instance, most time they watch their husbands, sons, fathers being killed and become female head of their household by providing for their families.

No wonder majority of the participants interviewed affirm that women are more victims of the conflict in Rumuekpe. One of the victims of the conflict in Rumuekpe, madam Bridget an active member of the women prayer warrior group lamented about her husband and father's death during the conflict. As a result of that, she and her mother are now widows; up till now, she has not recovered from the shock. Also, the wife of a community leader lamented how she lost her first son and her husband in the conflict. Since then, she has not been able to survive the hardship; on top of that, all her husband properties were taken away from her. Today, she can hardly feed or train her remaining children in school; she further lamented that as a result of the incident, she is suffering from severe health issue with no financial support to access healthcare. Other stories show that during the Rumuekpe conflicts, women were subjected to different kinds of violence – sexual such as rape; physical violence such as beatings, maiming, murder, and destruction of properties.

Concerning rape and prostitution, it is worth noting that in a chaotic situation like the one that existed in Rumuekpe community, rape and prostitution is rampant throughout the community. First of all, the angry and hungry youth who are fighting for their rights will make do with any women around. Secondly, the soldiers usually sent by the Federal Government to calm rioting villagers use the women in the community as their resting place. At night, they invade private homes, terrorizing residents with beatings and

raping women and girls. Thirdly, girls and young women who are looking for economic survival hang around the oil firms and keep themselves at the service of both the national and international oil staffs who are believed to be the 'rich dudes'. These Rumuekpe women are given few naira or at most few dollars at the end of every sexual meeting. Rape leaves a terrible scar in the heart of its victim.

Some studies identified members of the security forces as primarily responsible for the gender-based violence (including rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy) committed against Rumuekpe women. A 2001 report published by the non-governmental organization Center for Democracy and Development documented gender-based violence in the Niger Delta, perpetrated for the most part by the military. The government's investigation into human rights violations (covering the period of 1966-1999) by the security forces in Ogoni land has been limited to the work of the Oputa Panel, whose public hearings included sessions in the nation's chief oil-refining city, Port Harcourt, where the experiences of victims and their families were documented [13, 18].

One victim, Gladys, a Rumuekpe human rights defender in her late 30s, described how soldiers had gang-raped her thirteen times. She was raped by three uniformed men with guns as well as angry and hungry youth of the community. They broke into her house and hit her on the face, threw her on the bed and raped her using a gun. When her son tried to run away from the perpetrators (e.g soldiers), they held and beat him up. However, she could not report the case to the police since there was no police in Rumuekpe community at that time. She had no money to seek redress in court.

Judith was raped in the heat of the Rumuekpe conflict of 2005 by men deployed by the community leaders to control the crisis. She later resulted in offering herself for commercial sex for little token given to her by her clients. Currently, she is into drugs and finds herself helpless with no hope for the future. Tamara, on the other hand, could not absorb the shame and humiliation suffered after she was raped by six armed men who came to her house close to a flow-station. She later committed suicide after raining curses on the men who raped and abused her. In the case of 12-year-old Preye, who was raped by seven men, she later found out she was pregnant after three months. Being an orphan, she went through the suffering of pregnancy and childbearing alone. She gave birth through caesarian section. There was no identity or paternity of the child, a stigma she will have to carry all her life.

Another victim, Blessing, an indigene of Rumuekpe accepted that women and children suffered most in conflict. The 15-year-old girl affirmed that she was in class 3 (junior secondary) when the conflict started and she became a victim of the conflict. She was gang-raped seven times by different angry and hungry gang groups. And till date, the trauma still remains with her and her dream of becoming a medical doctor was taken away from her because she became a school drop-out. The sad part of her story is that her pride as a woman was taken as well. The narrative goes on and on. The ungodly act committed by oil workers, military men and gang groups end up with Children and the women are left alone to carry the burden of bringing up these 'fatherless babies'. Rumuekpe women suffer unimaginable human rights abuses for which redress is unattainable because the agents of government who perpetrate the abuses cannot be subjected to the rule of law. Husbands, fathers and sons have been killed or maimed in the conflict and women have had to assume additional burdens of home responsibilities as heads of households (Salaam-Ogunniran, 2007). To end this evil act against women, the Association of

Niger Delta Women for Justice (NDWJ) has been fighting for a law making it mandatory for those responsible to claim their offspring (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Did the Traditional Institution Played any Role in Managing the Conflict?

This part of the study intends to find out the role traditional institutions played in the management of the conflict in Rumuekpe. 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. The essence of the institutions is to preserve the customs and traditions of the people and to manage conflicts arising among or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people.

Oil wealth enriches Nigeria, but it has not alleviated the poverty and deprivation in the oil-rich Rumuekpe communities of Niger Delta. The Rumuekpe crisis which had claimed lives and crippled all socio-economic activities including oil exploration and exploitation in the community for years is yet another violent social conflict in the Niger Delta communities. It becomes imperative to observe that as the federal government's amnesty programme, driven by internal capital, has brought relative peace in the region, there is the need to redefine the role of traditional institutions of governance in conflict prevention, management and resolution in Rumuekpe community to ensure that the peace already achieved by the programme is sustained. It is in the light of the above, that this research aims to appraise the role of traditional institutions of governance in managing social conflicts in Rumuekpe community as opposed to the western sponsored formal/conventional methods which have been quite ephemeral in sustaining the peace which the region deserves with a view to avoiding relapse to the old days of militancy.

Most of the participants noted that they did try to help out but their best was not good enough, hence, many of the elders and community leaders were busy filling their pockets with money from the multinationals and building houses everywhere and never cared about the people. That was why the gang group killed many of the elders brutally during the conflict because they felt they are responsible for the suffering of the people. A community leader, who wishes to remain anonymous said:

"The traditional institution tried all they could to stop the conflict by holding a meeting with youth leaders at the earlier stage but when the conflict started, we all ran away because elders were their targets"[1].

Another respondent, Mrs. Love said:

"Since it was the leaders that caused the conflict, they were unable to manage it. She lamented that she is suffering because the leaders failed to come together to face their common enemy which is the multinationals [1]."

A pastor in the community came from another angle and said: *"The multinationals were the ones that destroyed the traditional institution to the extent that leaders who were supposed to uphold the truth and be men of integrity are now tools that are being used by the multinational against their own people, they should protect. Every leader wants quick money, no matter the position or clause. As a result, greed did not allow them to think of the repercussion and devastating effect it will have on their people. The traditional institutions have sold their birthright to the multinationals and have become puppets in their hands; as such, they dearth the technique to manage conflict [1]."*

During the focus group discussion, Amaechi, Rose, Joel, Favour, Bridget and Chiboy all agreed that the traditional institution did not play an active role in the management of the conflict. They added that they failed in their duty to uphold the truth; as such, nobody trusted them. Their integrity became at stake because their words and actions were not matched. They said the women groups were more sincere and had a better strategy in managing the conflict.

Did Rumuekpe Women Group Played any Role in Managing the Conflict?

Globally, women are increasingly coming together as networks to bring about peace. Women play critical roles in peace and conflict resolution at local, national and international levels. At the same time, women have been the unfortunate victims of crises arising from political and environmental wars. This part of the research sought to find out the role women group played in the management of conflict in Rumuekpe. Most of the respondents agreed that women played a very vital role in the management of the conflict and their approach to restore peace was very significant and commendable.

A respondent, Mr. Segun, who is a staff with one of the multinationals (Shell) said:

“The women group helped in the management of conflict in Rumuekpe due to their roles as mothers. They also helped in making sure that, their motherly qualities were been felt in their community. The women group is organized and dedicated to bringing about peace in Rumuekpe and had genuine intentions for the development of their community [1].”

Another respondent, Mrs. Augusta has this to say,

“We the women of Rumuekpe were able to manage the conflict by going to God in prayers. We believe that God can restore peace; as such, we prayed for peace to return and for God to touch the heart of our sons to drop their weapons and embrace peace [1].”

Another respondent, Mr. Paul, a young father of 3 children said:

“Our mothers through their prayers are the reason peace returned to Rumuekpe today. The prayer warriors and women leadership sacrifice and labour of love will not be forgotten. As a result, the women made history in Rumuekpe with their courageous decision to talk to their sons begging them to drop their arms. This signifies the active role Rumuekpe women played in the entire peace process [1].”

Another respondent, Mrs. Victoria Godspower, who is a woman leader in the community said:

“Women played an important role in managing the conflict because they suffered most in conflict. It was their terrible experiences and being lovers of peace that propelled them to come together to try and manage the conflict. I mobilized women to talk to their sons to drop arms and embrace peace because war does not bring development but destroy it. I was involved in the entire peace process and will not stop preaching peace and looking out for the good and progress of our community [1].”

As survivors, perpetrators, victims, combatants, activists and advocates, women play active and multiple roles in peace processes. However, their roles in conflicts are not highlighted and their long involvement in mediation and peace processes is barely discussed in the literature. Their mediatory roles at the informal levels have served as blueprints for negotiations. This is because the competence of women in dealing with rebel groups and other conflict parties has set the pace for official negotiations that were organized by the African Union and other regional bodies.

Rumuekpe women have these features too. As such, during the focus group discussion, Mrs. Blessing, Madam Bridget, Mrs. Elichi, Mrs. Augusta, Mrs. Mercy Obulor and Mrs. Rose all agreed that women played a significant role in managing the conflict in Rumuekpe community. They affirmed that their involvement as an impartial mediator due to the way they mobilized families, communities and other women for the peaceful resolution of conflicts made them the hero of the peace process. Also, women's role as mothers and sisters to the victims and the perpetrators of violence made the women step in by not only praying and fasting for peace to return to Rumuekpe but also tried to convince their sons, brothers and husbands to embrace peace. When the gang groups saw the genuine interest of the women to preserve peace and rebuild the community, they were convinced and they embraced peace. This reveals the roles women played as peace actors at the heart of deadly conflicts – where they defy the threats to their lives, mobilize their scarce resources and challenge their under-representation at decision making and implementation levels in order to contribute to peace.

Did Rumuekpe Women used any Technique in Achieving Peace in Rumuekpe?

Peace always has been and will always remain the key precondition for living a life of dignity. Peace is accordingly one of the dominant pillars of the 2030 Agenda, the centerpiece of the global community's efforts under United Nations auspices to foster global sustainable development. The various crises around the globe give us cause for worry, but they should above all spur us to action. About 1.5 billion persons live in unstable political environments in nations torn by violence. It is a matter of common sense and of common humanity that we should not accept this as a normal state of affairs. Armed conflicts cause immeasurable suffering, set nations and entire regions back years economically and impede development. Our lives have turned out to be so intertwined that the effects of state fragility, of crises and bloodshed, can be felt even in a small community as Rumuekpe.

Therefore, the researcher sought to find out the technique that was employed by women to bring about peace in Rumuekpe community. Study shows that times are changing so also new concepts are coming to play with regards to the technique Rumuekpe women used to manage Rumuekpe conflict. Notably, they used dialogue, reconciliation and advocacy. As mothers, they played a vital role at home since they are central to the households; in the same way, they use similar qualities for peace-building and peacekeeping in Rumuekpe.

A respondent, Mr. Richard said:

“Rumuekpe women used peaceful dialogue just the way they manage their homes to deal with the conflict and enhance peace. Their peace-building role can be seen in their loving and caring nature as mothers. This feature made them great mediators, negotiators, and a great advocate of peace. Based on this, they were able to assist in managing the Rumuekpe conflict since they are great managers of their homes [24].”

“Women have the highest degree of marginalization, neglect and outright discrimination in economic resource rights and privileges. In the case of Rumuekpe, the women, in spite of all these factors that tend to militate against women, these limitations made them even stronger. Men in Rumuekpe have trust issues and so, even with all the power they have, they could not trust themselves to resolve the conflict. Women stepped in with their peaceful techniques, and were seen as better mediators due to their impartial and neutral ground; this made them the best fit for the restoration of peace

in our communities. The women employed transparency and neutrality as some of their techniques to bring about peace in Rumuekpe. They have a group known as the prayer warriors who come together to pray and fast for the peace of the community. Their prayers had an invaluable impact on the peace process and the management of the conflict in the community [22]."

Another respondent, Madam Joy, who is an indigene in Rumuekpe community said:

"Women never had a share of the oil money, contract or employment with Shell and other multinationals. and so, where trusted by their sons and brothers in the fraction to drop arms and embrace peace hence they employed the technique of impartiality and neutrality without looking for what to gain but was looking for peace in Rumuekpe community. She added that they prayed and fasted and as mothers were genuinely interested in preserving peace and rebuilding the community. She said about 20 women were trained to help them in building their confidence capacity building positive conflict resolution and were also trained to use dialogue to reconcile opposing factors. She claims that the training helped because many women have lost their confidence due to their low socio-economic status, but with the training and their faith in God, they were able to achieve peace and manage the conflict in Rumuekpe [33]."

During the focus group discussion, Mrs. Godwin, Mr. Henry, Mrs. Elechi, Mr. Paul, Mrs. Augusta and Mr. Joel all agreed that women used various technique in achieving peace and managing the conflict. Mrs. Godwin, a woman leader said: "we trusted God to restore peace that was why we fasted, prayed and appeal to our children to embrace peace." Mr. Henry said: "dialogue reconciliation and advocacy were employed by the women to restore peace [12]."

Mrs. Eliche said: "women are the champions for peace in any society; and as mothers, they used their technique of running their homes in achieving peace." Mr. Joel said: "transparency, neutrality and dedication were the techniques used by the women to manage the conflict and restored peace to Rumuekpe community [21]."

Conclusion

From the study, the researcher found out that women due to their peaceful nature and role as mothers have the capacity of resolving conflict. Their advisory roles as mothers transcend to the society and the way they perceived conflict, as what cannot bring development, this has helped to sharpen their mind to form the prayer warrior group, and made them more committed to restoring peace. It has been rightly observed that the women of Rumuekpe stepped in as an impartial mediation to remedy the situation and restore peace back to the community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Although many studies have been done in drawing issues regarding conflict management, this research recommends that an inclusive and broader process be instituted that can generate information from the social-cultural perspective rather than economic driven perspective with regards to women especially within Rumuekpe community.
2. Government should establish mechanisms for enforcing and monitoring international instruments for the protection of women's rights in post-conflict situations.
3. Government should support and strengthen women's organizations in their peace-building efforts by providing

adequate and sustained financial and technical support.

4. Government should ensure that women play a key role in the design and implementation of post-conflict resolution and peace-building activities.
5. Nigerian government, including the Niger Delta government, should involve women in all endeavours that bring peace to conflict situations. This includes negotiations, post-war reconstruction, reintegration and peace-building and management. The role of women in managing the conflict in Rumuekpe presents a perfect lesson that managing conflicts and rebuilding societies are no longer the exclusive preserve of men. Without equal and fair participation of women in conflict management and decision-making, we will never achieve the vision of a world free of the scourge of war, poverty and gender discrimination
6. While women face unique challenges in the conundrum of conflict management and peace building, there is growing urgency to create civic education programs that have awareness and sensitization components in which women are the key targets of information and empowerment not just economically but also on constitution matters pertaining to the protection of their rights.
7. It was established that local communities are willing to incorporate women in decision-making processes but are torn between cultural demands and constitutional demands. Reason being that Rumuekpe culture is still very much preserved, the elderly still makes major decisions and there are fears that women may not play their roles at home if their status is elevated. This should be undertaken in a broader perspective of the conflict management programs which must not be reactive but proactively designed or structured to address issues facing women without disregard for the values and traditions of the Rumuekpe people [34-38].

Looking at all the viewpoints provided in this study, there is the necessity for the development, redesigning and reconstructing of the legal and policy regime that represents the interests of men and women separately in creating purposeful synergy to effectively deliver results in the process of conflict management in Rumuekpe community. The broad legal and policy regime must endeavor to define conflict management in social-cultural perspective as well as security perspective, with the opinion to create legislation that addresses the root causes of conflicts within the Rumuekpe community. In this regard, the study recommends the consolidation of the various policies and laws that guide conflict management to one comprehensive framework which can practically enhance conflict management processes within the Rumuekpe community.

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