

Introduction

Conflicts in the world have hindered peaceful coexistence among nations and have made living in society more difficult than ever before (Joshua, 2017; Yahaya, 2021). In the estimate, over a hundred (100) major conflicts have occurred in the world, leading to more than twenty million (20,000,000) deaths, several million wounded, and millions of displaced persons (Joshua, 2014). Since the end of the Cold War, the nature of conflicts in the world after the end of the cold war changed dramatically from interstate conflicts to intra-state conflicts due to intense struggle for power and scarce resources between and among groups (Joshua, 2017).

In Africa, Conflict on sub sub-national level between communities or local militias tends to be a widespread problem. The continent experienced 386 conflicts between the period 1989 and 2014, with an estimated 131,563 people who lost their lives during the same period. The countries affected most include Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Elfverson, 2013). Peace-building efforts have included mediation by the African Union and calls for ceasefires, but a lasting resolution remains challenging (African Union, 2022).

Nigeria has been plagued by multiple conflicts, like the Kafanchan uprising that spread to other parts of Kaduna state in 1987. The Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria began in 2009 with unending widespread violence and displacement (UNICEF, 2022).

In the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, beginning from 1991 to 2023, a lot of violent conflicts have engulfed the area, such as the Tiv-Jukun conflicts of 1990/92, 2019/2020, the Jukun/Fulani-Tiv conflict of 2001/2002, and the 2013-2015 ethno-religious conflict. In all these conflicts, women, children, and girls have been worst hit, and women's rights have been severely violated (Muhammad, 2017).

Though women play a significant role in conflict mediation, their involvement is informal, and women's presence at the mediation table is very negligible. However, some notable Nigerian women who had championed women's rights include: Chief Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Senator Florence Ita-Giwa "Mama Bakassi", Senator Aisha Alhassan "Maman Taraba" (Amesi, 2023; Britannica, National Library, 2023, The Nation News, 2023, Madugba, 2015). It is posited that, were the efforts of these women leaders magnified and amplified, there would have been more women leaders involved in conflict mediation and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

During the Kona-Fulani conflict of May 2019, hundreds of Kona women took to the streets of Jalingo, the state capital, to protest the killing of their people by suspected Fulani herdsmen and harassment from security agencies. The then-President Buhari had to order security forces to end attacks on the communities immediately (Jonathan, 2019). In their quest for finding lasting peace in Wukari Local Government Area, Tiv/Jukun women had a peace building conference to dialogue on thorny issues affecting their community, organized for them by the Most Rev. Ignatius A. Kaigama Foundation for Peace, Hope and Conflict Management (FPHCM) to serve as a strategy for women peace involvement (ignatiускаigama.com, 2020).

The toll the Tiv-Jukun conflict has taken on women in Wukari, particularly, as is the case all over the world, while undermining their involvement in conflict mediation and peacebuilding, is the essence of this work, which spotlights the struggles of women in conflict mediation and peacebuilding in Wukari society.

Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict

Conflict is highly controversial, and its definition is not excluded from this controversy. Conflict is simply defined as the pursuit of incompatible goals or interests by different groups or individuals

(Best, 2008). This definition by implication asserts the intrinsic and inevitable nature of conflict in any society. Conflict could also be seen as a state of hostility between two parties. In political terms, conflict refers to an ongoing state of hostility between two groups of people (Speake, 2014). Just as it is difficult to point to a single factor as being responsible for order within society, it is difficult to point to a single explanation for the emergence, escalation, or protraction of conflict, whether violent or otherwise. It is mostly depicted as if it is negative. Depending on how it is handled, it can either be constructive {positive} or destructive {negative}. The term Conflict resolution is seen as a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict (Speake, 2014).

It could be deduced from the above definition that through conflict resolution, deep-seated sources of conflict would be addressed and resolved. It connotes that the behaviour of actors involved in conflict would no longer be violent as a result of the peaceful resolution of conflict. The Interdisciplinary Research Programme on Causes of Human Rights Violation sees conflict resolution as an antagonistic situation or adversarial process between at least two individuals or collective actors over means or ends such as resources, power, status, values, goals, relations, or interests (Dadiowei, 2014). Conflict resolution speaks more of the elimination of the causes of the underlying conflict, generally with the consent of the parties involved, whereas conflict management refers to the elimination, neutralization, or control of the means of pursuing the conflict (Boiling Point, 2000). Looking at it from another perspective, conflict resolution connotes a sense of finality, where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and conflict is resolved in a true sense. From the point of view of need, a conflict is resolved when the basic needs of parties have been met with necessary satisfaction and their fears

have been allayed (Best, 2008). This study sees conflict as a state of animosity between parties who are advancing their different interests.

Mediation

Due to the inevitability of conflicts, in society, formal conflict resolution mediums like courts were developed and have been in use to date. However, due to increasing challenges of delay, high cost, among others, society began to utilize alternative dispute resolution methods outside of litigation. Mediation is one of the informal methods of conflict resolution, used in conflict prevention, management, resolution, and peacebuilding. Lynch (2001) and Alexander (2009) define mediation as a facilitative form of conflict resolution, which focuses on the parties' commercial, financial, as well as social and personal interests, to reach a mutually acceptable agreement while promoting the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent in decision-making.

The concept of mediation involves several key principles and characteristics. Participation in mediation is voluntary, and parties enter into the process willingly. Unlike some legal proceedings, mediation does not impose decisions on the parties; rather, it encourages them to actively engage in finding solutions (Bush and Folger, 2005).

The mediator is an impartial and neutral facilitator, not aligned with any party. This neutrality helps create an environment of trust and fairness, allowing parties to express their concerns openly. (Moore, 2014). The study defines mediation as an effort that focuses on a group of conflicting interests in a bid to reduce tension and animosity amongst parties.

Peace Building

Peacebuilding is essentially the process of achieving peace. Depending on one's understanding of peace, peacebuilding differs considerably in terms of approaches, scope of activities, and time

frame. It is therefore not astonishing that the term and the concept of peacebuilding are nowadays used in research and practice with varying understandings and definitions (Barash, 2000).

According to Bendana (2003), peacebuilding is a relatively new field. It is, therefore, not surprising that there are numerous and sometimes confusing definitions of peacebuilding. However, most interesting is that various scholars' definition connects peace building to mean a 'process' with a range of activities and stakeholders involved. According to Chetail (2009), peace building is "the various concurrent and integrated actions undertaken at the end of a conflict to consolidate and prevent a recurrence of armed confrontation". Lederach (1997) characterises peacebuilding as the attempt to address the underlying structural, relational, and cultural root causes of conflict. These two definitions have a common meaning and understanding of peacebuilding as a process.

The term "peace building" was first used by Galtung (1996). He defined the term as one of three approaches to peace: peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Galtung's understanding of peacebuilding is based on his conceptual distinction between negative peace (end of violence) and positive peace (peaceful society at all levels). While negative peace achieves the absence of physical violence through peacekeeping, only positive peace can achieve the absence of structural violence through peacemaking and peacebuilding.

Gender, Peace, and Security in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society. Nigeria has a long and very rich history of supporting peacekeeping operations. Nigeria has made contributions to peacekeeping operations in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East region. Despite these international achievements of peacekeeping, the existence of multi-religious and multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria has disrupted the peace and resulted in perennial crises that often degenerate into civil disturbances and religious violence in some parts of the country. The crises have resulted in deaths, destruction of livelihood,

constant displacements, insecurity, and disruption of production, diversion of the country's resources, both money and human, from development purposes to service the ravages resulting from the crises.

Just like other nations in the world, women in Nigeria are often very vulnerable in any crisis, as their properties are either destroyed or looted, or they are victims of sexual humiliation, exploitation, and loss of lives, including that of their fathers, husbands, and sons. This raises a serious alert on the issue of 'peace and security' in the country, as there is no formal recognition of the involvement of women in high-level peacemaking efforts, even though at the local level, women are generally recognized as peacekeepers. The reason for the above is not far-fetched, as Nigeria is a patriarchal society. Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigerian society are major causes of women's deprivation. Most societies, especially Nigerian societies, are inherently patriarchal societies that give little or no importance to women, while placing so much importance on men (Ekhtator, 2020).

Another limitation to gender participation in peace and security in Nigeria is the issue of perception. It is generally perceived that only men fight wars; women do not go to battle. Therefore, men should be the ones to discuss and implement mechanisms to resolve the conflict. Thus, discredits the efforts women are making in the informal sector. However, this perception is misconceived. Women are perceived as not eligible to be key participants in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, but rather function under heteronormative assumptions where women are dedicated to "women's "tasks such as cooking and cleaning, or are used as wives and sexual slaves (Ekhtator, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is important to any research because of the role it plays in promoting an understanding of the factors that may impact, or are related to, an identified problem. This research adapted systems theory to explain women in conflict mediation and peacebuilding among the Tiv-Jukun in Wukari society. Women often occupy multiple roles within a society, such as caregivers, community organizers, and peacemakers. These roles are interconnected and contribute to the overall functioning of the social system.

Systems theory analyzes conflicts in terms of roles, processes, and patterns. It seeks to discover the rules that govern the system's behavior, and the function that the conflict serves within the system. Systems theory is an understanding related to these definitions developed in the years after 1940, based on suggestions from biology (the General System Theory of Ludwig von Bertalanffy). The systems theory approach starts with some basic principles. The first is that systems operate as an interdependent unit with no villains, heroes, good and bad people, healthy or unhealthy members (Bertalanffy, 1969). Systems theory provides a valuable lens through which we can understand the intricate dynamics of conflict mediation and peacebuilding among the Tiv-Jukun communities in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. From a holistic perspective, systems Theory views conflict and peacebuilding as interconnected components within a larger system. In our case, this system includes the Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups, their historical context, cultural norms, and the local government structure. Women play multifaceted roles within this system, acting as nodes that connect various elements. Their involvement is not isolated but rather embedded in the broader social fabric.

Conflict mediation and peacebuilding involve intricate feedback loops. Women, as community members, interact with other actors (men, elders, religious leaders, etc.) and influence the system. Women's actions in conflict mediation create ripple effects. Their efforts impact family

dynamics, community cohesion, and overall stability. The Tiv-Jukun conflict has distinct boundaries: geographical, cultural, and historical. Women navigate these boundaries, bridging gaps between the two groups. Women operate within subsystems (e.g., family, women's associations, informal networks). These subsystems intersect with larger systems, affecting conflict dynamics. Systems theory recognizes that different paths can lead to similar outcomes (equifinality) and that similar actions may yield diverse results (multifinality). Women employ various strategies: dialogue, negotiation, advocacy, and community mobilization. Some succeed in peacebuilding, while others face challenges.

Women's agency emerges from their collective efforts. They organize peace dialogues, advocate for reconciliation, and address root causes. Self-organization occurs as women collaborate, share knowledge, and adapt their approaches based on context. Women receive feedback from the community. Their effectiveness in conflict mediation influences their credibility and trust. Positive feedback reinforces their role, while negative feedback prompts adjustments. Systems theory acknowledges nonlinear relationships. Small actions by women can lead to significant shifts. Unintended consequences may arise: Women's peacebuilding efforts might inadvertently exacerbate tensions or disrupt existing power dynamics.

Women exhibit resilience by persistently engaging in peacebuilding despite challenges. Adaptability is crucial. Women adjust their strategies based on changing circumstances, such as shifts in conflict intensity or community dynamics. In summary, women in conflict mediation and peacebuilding among the Tiv-Jukun communities form an integral part of a complex system. Their actions reverberate through interconnected networks, shaping the path toward sustainable peace.

Mediation and Peacebuilding Efforts Among Tiv/Jukun Women

The findings from literary sources show enormous and multi-dimensional effects of the Tiv/Jukun conflicts on women and children, most especially. Even though women are the most vulnerable whenever violence erupts in society, their contributions to conflict mediation and peacebuilding go largely unnoticed. Again, even though women play traditional roles in mediating conflicts and building peace within their families, social groups, and immediate environments, they are rarely consulted or included in formal peace-building processes initiated to address the myriad conflicts, particularly in Wukari, which is more of a patriarchal society. This is because the men assume that women lack appropriate skills for peace interventions and are not well informed about conflicts to fully engage with men at the negotiation tables. Therefore, the need to explore the parts played by women in trying to mediate conflicts and build peace.

There are several women's associations and groups involved in informal conflict mediation and peacebuilding in Wukari. Some women's organizations exclusively champion the progress of women in society. Examples of women's organizations in Wukari include, but are not limited to, the following: Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Christian Women Fellowship (Zumuntan Mata), National Council of Women Society, Women Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria (WOWICAN), and several others.

The aims and objectives of these women's associations are, among others, to promote economic development and maintenance of peace and stability, not only among women, but in society generally. In their resolve to promote peace and stability, women's associations, collectively and individually, have been working around the clock to see that law and order are not broken down.

About the Wukari inter-ethnic crises, most of the informants agreed that women were seriously affected. Atoshi (1992); Agbu (2012); Haruna, Atando, and Danjuma (2021) confirmed that the crises affected women enormously, in their words, "women were seriously affected, some were

even burnt in the villages, while their farm produce was destroyed. Many lost their husbands, children, and property".

In carrying out their mediation work, members of women's associations face a number of challenges. These are both individual and structural. Women face barriers arising from religious, cultural, and social norms that question the place of women in the mediation field. They also operate within a policy context that does not always provide the support they need in order to develop their work.

Many women must work twice as hard to establish their right to work as mediators and be seen as equal to men in that role. Many women mediators at local, national, and international levels experience routine resistance to the idea that they could be effective mediators or that they should be entitled to discuss peace with men or elders (UN Women, 2015).

In some places, women cannot even be called 'mediators' and so must describe their work in other terms that do not convey the value of what they do (WMC, 2020).

Negative attitudes towards women mediators can also create a risk to their security. It poses a risk to go into a community, and you can get caught in the middle. As a woman mediator, you have to always assess the security situation, as you may get caught in it. Mediators take great personal risks to intervene in conflict, at times placing their own lives at risk. The spaces in which mediation takes place can be highly masculine environments that women mediators must learn to navigate. They often face unwanted sexual advances, and institutions supporting mediation processes need to recognise this and protect women mediators from such harassment (Turner, 2018).

The resistance to recognising the work of women mediators results in the lack of a platform to promote their work and limits their ability to use and share their experiences and insights in other forums, including international mediation processes. Women mediators who are women are

frustrated about the lack of connections that would enable them to contribute to formal processes either within their own countries or internationally. The absence of opportunities to be involved with international work is a commonly cited frustration among women mediators. There is a real lack of giving women the opportunity to participate. We need to enable women to be part of the mediation and peace process. If only women were given the opportunity like their male counterparts (WMC, 2020).

A related challenge for women mediators is the lack of sustainable funding to enable them to develop the impact of their work. This problem has deeper roots in the unequal distribution of funding for Women, Peace, and Security within foreign policy budgets, and economic inequalities that create barriers to women's participation in peace processes or decision-making bodies in any role. The Commonwealth, through its Women's Forum, has explicitly acknowledged that the lack of economic security and resulting poverty, and women's disproportionate role as caregivers, are some of the barriers to women's leadership and participation across sectors.

Even though most countries in Africa are signatories to treaties such as the Convention on the elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1971, Beijing Conference on women 1995, and the UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, which emphasizes the protection of women's fundamental human rights, and increased participation of women in decision making processes including those on mediation and conflict resolution, there seems to be slow or non-implementation of such treaties. Unfortunately, women do not 'voice out' on the enforcement of such treaties. Men, on the other hand, dominate in parliaments and government, but do not prioritise the implementation of treaties on women, especially with the 'weak voices' of women in lobbying for such implementations.

Finally, to enable women to participate meaningfully in mediation requires support not only in terms of verbal commitments to policies, but also in the form of specific measures to address the practical barriers that women face. It is not enough to create opportunities for women to participate in mediation if the everyday realities of their lives make that participation impossible. Recognising the professional contribution of women mediators in all spaces means addressing structural issues such as access to education, the division of domestic responsibilities, and women's financial independence that would allow them to develop their work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the involvement of women in conflict mediation and peacebuilding among the Tiv-Jukun in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria, is crucial yet significantly underutilized. The findings of this study highlight that women play vital roles in fostering peace and resolving conflicts at both the community and household levels. However, their contributions are often overshadowed by deep-rooted sociocultural barriers, including patriarchy, cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and limited access to formal decision-making platforms.

Despite these challenges, the resilience and unique perspectives that women bring to peacebuilding processes cannot be ignored. To enhance their participation, there is a need for deliberate efforts to dismantle these barriers through awareness campaigns, policy interventions, and the inclusion of women in peace processes. By addressing these sociocultural challenges, the full potential of women in conflict mediation and peacebuilding can be realized, leading to more sustainable peace and harmony within the Tiv-Jukun communities.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

The Traditional Authority in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State can revive, re-invent the traditional roles of Magajiya, Mutsi (Women leader), and Wakuku, head of Ayokus, i.e., head of the King's wives; to become functional institutions in traditional administration as in the pre-colonial period. For instance, Magajiya and Mutsi functioned in Palace administration, and Wakuku was involved in the crowning of a new king.

Plans and Programs of Government Ministries, Departments, Agencies, and Parastatals should reflect the National Gender Policy in their various women's initiatives to ensure women's active involvement in formal conflict mediation and peacebuilding. This could include setting gender quotas in peace committees, conflict resolution units, or training women for leadership roles in conflict resolution.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) should conduct community-based campaigns to address cultural norms that restrict women's roles in peacebuilding.