An Assessment of the Contribution of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peace Process: A Case of Wukari LGA of Taraba State, 2013-2020.

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Abstract

Conflict is a major problem in any given society and it is often inevitable. Since the re-emergence of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, Nigeria has become a permanent flashpoint of violent conflicts. These conflicts take the forms of either political, ethnic, or religion and so on, and the consequences are devastating. Taraba State has not been an exception since creation in 1991, witnessing incessant communal clashes across ethnic and religious lines. The effects have been so severe, particularly on women and children. It is against this background that this article explores the contribution of women in conflict resolution and peace process, focusing on Wukari LGA of Taraba State between 1991 and 2020. Adopting a multi-disciplinary approach, the article reveals that ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari LGA have had severe effect on women, causing not only the death of their husbands, parents and loved ones, but destruction of their homes, amenities, social contracts and so on. There is also high number of Internally Displaced Persons, particularly women and children consequent of the conflicts. However, the article further investigates how women have contributed in conflict resolution and peace

process for restoration and sustenance of peace in not only Wukari LGA, but Taraba State as a whole.

Key words: Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Ethno-religious conflict, Peace process, Role & Wukari Women.

Introduction

One of the primary fabrics of all human communities throughout the world from the earliest Stone age up till this period has been the provision of a sustained basis of the security of life and of the means of livelihood to the members of every community. Even from that very ancient period of human development, one of the most difficult political problems that human communities and polities had faced before the inception of this present dispensation had been that of establishing on a feasible and operational basis to determine who is either a member of a community or not.

One of the most common features of human development has been that territorial boundaries have kept changing and greatly expanding in order to incorporate others who do not have the same ancestry, but who have moved in due to all sort of factors. This constitutes a dynamic factor in improving the cultural, technological economic and even political spheres of live of communities. In some cases, the immigration and the inter-mixing of different groups resulted in the formation of new groups. In some cases, however, the process poses some challenges to the existing order, which in some cases have resulted in conflicts.

Conflicts are lessons of history we have to face in Nigeria, as other heterogeneous countries or societies are facing across the world. Indeed, nurturing complex ethno religious societies is a difficult task that most often tend to give birth to crises. This is one of the reasons why conflicts have become a common feature of Nigeria's fledging civil dispensations.

There is a complex set of structural causes underlying Nigeria's conflicts. Prominent the causes include issues such as access to social, economic and political resources. These factors have led to violent clashes between ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria generally, and particularly in Taraba State. This is why any attempt to understand the causes of conflicts in Nigeria, specifically focusing on Taraba State, cannot escape a study of ethnicity and religion as some of the main challenges to the development of democracy, nation building and national integration.

It is imperative to state that conflict is an attitude a behaviour or an action or a process that introduces strains and stresses in the relationship between two or more parties on say the attainment of a set of interests or goals. Conflicts is, indeed a feature of every social relationship from marriage to international diplomacy. Generally, wherever two or more people are gathered, there is bound to be conflict or potential for conflict. The real issue is not the existence of conflict, but how it is handled (Resolution and Management).

Marxist metaphor for conflict or struggle is founded on the concepts of dialectical materialism, historical, and internal contradictions expressed in class struggles. According to this perspective, conflict is seen as a situation when two or more parties, with perceived incompatible goals, seek to undermine each other's goals seeking capability. In other words, it results from antagonistic approach in the attempts to achieve group interests or goals.

Taraba State since her creation has witnessed violent ethnic and religious clashes across the state. These conflicts have claimed thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands of others, and fostered a climate of instability throughout the surrounding areas (Ajibu 2020, p2). Examples of these ethnic and religious conflicts in Taraba State, since her creation, are reflected in studies by Alubo (2006), Yuguda and Goni (2013), and Muhammad (2017), among others.

In Wukari Local Government Area, beginning from 1991 to 2020, a lot of violent conflicts have engulfed the area, such as the Tiv-Jukun crises of 1990/92, 2019/2020, the Jukun/Fulani-Tiv crisis of 2001/2002, the 2013-2015 ethno-religious crisis and the 2019/2020 crisis. In all these crisis, women's rights have been violated and they have been the worst hit.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that women have unique opportunities for conflict resolution and peace process due to the unique role they play in the society. It is against the background above that this research is positioned at discussing or examining the role of women in conflict resolution and peace process with emphasis on Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State from 1990/91 to 2020.

Cases of Conflicts in Wukari LGA and Effects on Women

Wukari Local Government Area has experienced several conflicts and their effects are devastating on women and children, particularly. These conflicts are inter-ethno-religious in nature. The conflicts include the Tiv-Jukun conflict of 1990-1992; Tiv-Jukun conflict of

2001-2002; Wukari Ethno-religious conflicts of 2013-2015 and Tiv-Jukun/Fulani conflict of 2019-2020.

In 1990-1992 violent conflict erupted between the Tiv and the Jukun in mostly Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas, affecting almost all settlements. According to Alubo (2006), the immediate trigger revolved around land, which, in many ways, is only one of the several dimensions the politics of Tiv-Jukun relationship is played out. Furthermore, Best, Idyorough and Shehu (2004) see the causes of the 1990-1992 conflict from different perspectives to include political issues (political participation in, and control of, Wukari Local Government Council as well as political appointments and other resources); agitation to the membership of the Wukari Traditional Council, precisely the desire by the Tiv to be part of the Council (Best, Idyorough and Shehu 2004, Pp.99-100). Other factors included land, rapid population growth among the Tiv, renaming of settlements in Tiv settlements, and so on.

The foregoing factors put together led to the emergence of the Tiv-Jukun communal conflict of 1990-1992, which Alubo (2006, p.104) considers as the longest running conflict in which whole villages were razed and there were wide spread of killings and looting. Maier (2000. Pp.199-207) notes that the 1990/92 crises recorded widespread devastation: burnt out villages, littered corpses in various stages of decomposition and household items strewn all over. The crisis also triggered large-scale refugees both of Jukun fleeing areas of violence seeking sanctuary in Wukari town and of the Tiv fleeing into Benue State. In the course of the crisis, statistics in Agbu (2012, Pp98-102) show that almost all settlements along Wukari-Ibi-Sarkin/Kudu; Wukari-Tella; Wukari-Jootar; Wukari-Rafin/Kada-Abako; and Wukari-Tsokundi were burnt down either by the Tiv or the Jukun, affecting severely women and children.

Another very disturbing crisis was the 2001/2002 Jukun/Fulani-Tiv crisis. The immediate cause of the crisis, according to Agbu (2012, p.97), was an encounter between Fulani herdsmen and Tiv farmers, but later involved the Jukun when Chonku, a Jukun settlement on the border between Benue and Taraba States was attacked by the Tiv on the reason that the Jukun were supporting the Fulani.

Nevertheless, there were other remote causes of the 2001/2002 crisis. As acknowledged by Alubo (2006, Pp.109-110), the factors include, among others, Tiv demand for a place in the Wukari Traditional Council, a demand that the Jukun rejected on the basis of cultural differences; Tiv demanding to be recognised as indigenes of Wukari LGA and Taraba State generally, with all rights and privileges rather than as settlers with limited rights; and Tiv

proclivity for domination of Jukun land and viewing wherever they settle as part of Tivland. The Jukun contended that the Tor Tiv regards himself as the leader of the Tiv Worldwide and has therefore sought to control Tiv people everywhere. Consequent on all the remote and immediate causes explained, violent conflict broke out and escalated all-over Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas of Taraba State with devastating effects on women and children (Ajibu 2019 & Stella 2021).

In the years 2013 to 2015, Wukari Local Government Area experienced series of ethno-religious crises leading to wanton loss of lives and destruction of property with thousands of people displaced. According to Aku-Uka, late Dr. Shekarau Angyu Masa-Ibi, Kuvyo II, in Adamu (2016, p.151), "by far, the most devastating event that afflicted my domain was the ethno-religious crisis between the Muslim Hausa/Fulani and non-Muslims, especially the Jukun, which led to wanton killings and destruction of lives and property in Wukari town between 2013 and 2015".

Occurrences of crises inside Wukari town include the Feb. 23rd, 2013, Football Field Incident Crisis; the 15th April, 2014, Crisis, 15th June, 2014, Crisis, 23rd/24th September, 2014, Crisis; and 8th Nov, 2014, Crisis; then finally the 8th Nov, 2015 (see Adamu 2016, p.158; Zhema and Agbu 2015, Pp.289-290). In addition, there were series of attacks on most Jukun villages in Wukari and Ibi LGAs in the name of Armed-Herdsmen attacks. Jukun villages such as *Ndo-Ikwe, Riti, Sondi, Nwuban, Ndo-Yaku, Nwukyon, Yamini, Nayinawa, Nwunyun (Gidin-Dorowa), Tunari, Rafin-Kada, Nwuko, Nyankwala, Byepyi, Ndo-Idi, Tapari, Ando-Manu,* and other smaller Jukun settlements all came under attacks, leading to people abandoning their ancestral homes. Zhema and Agbu (2015, p.283) notes that in this manner, the state of the attacks seemed to be endless. The perpetrators were armed with sophisticated weapons. In the wake of the attacks, there were loss of lives and property, as well as mass exodus of people from the affected communities into Wukari town.

In April, 2019, another Tiv and Jukun violence started at Kente, in Wukari Local Government Area, and escalated to other parts of Wukari LGA and subsequently to other Local Government Areas in Southern Taraba (except Ussa), and Central Taraba. This violence lasted till 2020, causing wanton loss of lives, property and livelihood.

Effects of the Conflicts on Women and Children in Wukari LGA.

The effects of the conflicts mentioned above are enormous and multi-dimensional. Apart from the fact that they affected not only the people of the area of discussion, but the State and the nation at large. This section of the paper focuses on how women and children felt the negative impact of the conflicts.

Best (2008) provides a clear headway or instances on how conflicts generally affect women and children focusing on the Southern Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria. In the case of Wukari Local Government Area, the ethno-religious crises surveyed, so far, led to the death of several men who were husbands of women that are now widows and fathers of children that are now orphans. It also led to death of several women and children in the area.

Not only did the crises lead to the death of men, women and children, but they also led to destruction of homes, social amenities, places of worship, social contract, and so on. The consequences are enormous such as increased number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), disruption of socio-economic activities and much more distrust between the different identity groups.

During the Tiv-Jukun crisis of 1991/92, as reported by Agbu (1992), Adi (1992), and Atoshi (1992), towns and villages in Wukari LGA were razed down and many women and children were severely affected. Adi (1992, p.5) notes that the land issue manifested itself glaringly during the 1991/92 clashes when the whole towns of Kente and Fyayi were completely plundered and burnt on the 10th and 11th of November, 1991, with many of their Jukun inhabitants, most of them women and children, murdered by the Tiv. Agbu (1992, p.16) puts the number of those murdered at 40, mostly women and children.

More so, during the 1991/92 crisis, Hon. Kasuwa Agbu, the only female member of Taraba State House of Assembly then was killed by the Tiv on her way from Akwana to Wukari. On 2nd January, 1992, a Jukun woman was shot dead by the Tiv on her way to Ibi. Similarly, on 18th January 1992, Yusufu, his wife and children were attacked on their farm at Rafin-Kada by the Tiv. While Yusufu and the grown up children escaped, the wife and their very young child were taken away by the Tiv. The dead bodies of the mother and child were later recovered near Abako (Atoshi 1992, Pp.33 & 35). It is equally contained in Jukun sources that during the 1991/92 crisis, it is on records that kids were collected and thrown into the burning houses with doors securely locked from outside. Infants were picked by their legs and their heads bashed against any hard object (Atoshi 1992, p.30).

Similarly, during the other crises in 2001/2002 and 2012 to 2016, many women and children lost their lives, and many others rendered homeless resulting in the increase of the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Alubo (2008, p.105) notes that the crises triggered the incidence of large-scale refugees both of the Jukun fleeing areas of conflict such as Kente, Akwana and Arufu, and seeking sanctuary in Wukari and other places in Jukun land; and of the Tiv fleeing into Benue State. Alubo (2008, p.106) cited Avav (2002, Pp. 233-4) that there were over 29,000 Tiv refugees documented in various locations in Benue State,

especially on the boarders with Taraba State. More so, during the Ibi and Wukari crises of 2013 to 2016, many women and children were recorded in IDP camps in Wukari, Mutu-Biyu and Jalingo in Taraba State and Lafia in Nasarawa State.

More so, as a result of these crises, many women were raped while many manhandled. Alubo (2008, p.133) notes that there were persistent tale of mass rape of Tiv women during the 2002 conflict. Economically, women were affected consequent of the ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas. For instance, prior to the conflicts, women in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas were involved in trade and commerce. Jukun women were involved in fish selling, salt production and selling; Jukun and Hausa women were involved as middle-men (Baranda) at the markets in Wukari, Ibi and their environs. Jukun and Tiv women were also involved in the yam market business of buying and selling yams. More so, many women had shops for commercial activities.

Agbu (2013, Pp.39-43) notes that, women in Wukari and its environs engaged in trading, clothing business and they owned shops and boutiques. They were involved in buying and selling all sorts of fashion materials and second hand clothes thereby making ends meet and also contributing to their economic well-being. However, due to the conflicts, their businesses were disrupted, and those of them that were supporting their husbands or were bread winners could not do it any more, leading to serious economic hardship. Examples of women affected in Wukari and environs included Akefu Yakubu Atama, Naomi Gambo, Keziah Okey, Mercy Bala, Matan Yashi Musa, Hussaina Abbas, Sadiya Gambo, and many others.

Socially, the conflicts disrupted educational activities of the children, resulting to many of them dropping out of school. The result of the magnitude of this development was rise the number of children who involved in social crimes in Wukari Local Government Area.

Finally, the conflicts in Wukari led to mental stress, psychological torture and disruption of social life amongst women and children. Many women and children became traumatized due to the deaths of their loved ones and the horror they saw during the conflicts. Therefore, in all the conflicts mentioned, the end results were very severe and devastating on the people, particularly women and children.

Women and Conflict Resolution/Peace Process in Wukari LGA

Despite the fact that women have been playing traditional roles in resolving conflicts and building peace within their families, social groups and immediate environments, they are rarely consulted or included in formal peace building process initiated to address myriads

of conflicts, particularly in Wukari, which is a patriarchal society. Even though they are the most vulnerable whenever violence erupts in the society, their contributions to conflict resolutions and peace building have gone largely un-noticed. 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 on the negotiation tables. Therefore, the need to explore the parts played by women in trying to resolve some of the conflicts discussed, particularly the ethno-religious crises of 2013-2015, and how effective they were in the course of peace building.

There are several associations and groups that have women as members and are involved in conflict resolution and peace process in Wukari. There are also women organizations that exclusively champion the progress of women in the society. Examples of women organizations in Wukari include, but, not limited to the following: Amfani Multi-Purpose Association, Women in Da'awa Forum, Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Christian Women Fellowship (Zumuntan Mata), Tsokundi Fadama Association, National Council of Women Society, Ichondi Byepyi Women Association, Hyuku Widows Multi-Purpose Cooperative, and several others.

The aims and objectives of these women associations are, among others, to promote economic development and maintenance of peace and stability, not only among women, but in the society generally. In their resolve to promote peace and stability, women associations, collectively and individually, have been moving round the clock to see that law and order is not broken down. With regards to the Wukari ethno-religious crises between 2013 and 2015, most of the informants agreed that women were seriously affected in the Wukari crises. According to Agbu (2021), "Women were seriously affected during the clashes, because, some of them lost their parents, husbands, children and property worth millions of naira". Useni (2021) confirmed how the crises affected the women when he said: "Women were seriously affected, some were even burnt in the villages, while their farm produce destroyed. Many lost their husbands, children and property".

The views above represents the opinion of majority of the women and men in Wukari and environs when discussing the effects of the crises on women. Women did not just watch their husbands, children, relatives and property being destroyed. They came up with different strategies to resolve the crises and build peace among the warring communities in Wukari.

Dante (2021) notes that:

> At first, the women often cried and prayed unto God at homes, and to some extent, called for general prayers and fasting in Churches for God to have mercy on Wukari land and restore peace.

Louis (2021) confirmed the statement above thus:

> Women in Wukari came up with strategies to restore peace such as: on 3/8/2013, the Jukun women mobilized themselves in large numbers, dressed in sack clothes (blacks), carrying placards and chanting songs of peace in most of the streets of Wukari. Also, on 15/04/2014, the women (both Christians and Muslims) went out in large numbers again, urging the warring parties to drop their weapons and embrace peace.

However, what really caught the attention of the world was the action of the women on 6th and 7th Nov., 2015, when all the women of Wukari matched out, dressed in black clothes, accused the security operatives of fueling the crises, and thus, demanded for their withdrawal. The women organized a peaceful demonstration, moving from the Aku-Uka's Palace, to Wukari Police Station, to Police Area Command and to Army Commander's Guest House. They demanded for the withdrawal of military personnel from Wukari, and even went to the extent of removing the road-blocks mounted by the military within the town, and called for the cancellation of the curfew imposed on the town.

The protest or demonstration above became a turning point in the search for peace in Wukari since 2013. Zhema (2021) notes that "their strategies were very effective as it brought about lasting peace in the community". Aboki (2021) also notes that, "their strategies were very effective and peace was finally restored in Wukari as a result of women's effort." Agbu (2021) equally states that the action of the women was so effective that an emergency security meeting was held at the Aku's Palace to resolve the problem. Danasabe (2021) notes that:

> Their strategies were effective because they got the attention of sympathizers both from within and outside, government and other security agencies, Human Rights Organizations. That led to the relaxation and subsequent cancellation of the long curfew imposed on Wukari, and finally, they had the chance to embark on other peace building process that finally restored peace.

From the foregoing, it is understandable that women in Wukari were really involved in conflict resolution and peace process during periods of conflicts in Wukari and environs from 2013-2020.

The fact that Women in Wukari did and are still doing a lot for peace process in Wukari and environs is not enough. There is the need for their actions to be fully supported by the government, the traditional institutions and even the private organizations, for the consolidation of peace in Wukari. Positive intergroup relations should be encouraged as advised by Hajiya Tala (2021) that:

> Despite all effort put on ground for peace process, we can only consolidate on it, if we do the following: stop the bad-name calling on each other; marry freely without religious barriers; learning and speaking our mother-tongue, especially Jukun, instead of Hausa, and lastly, we must learn to tolerate each other irrespective of our tribal and religious affiliation.

Furthermore, Haruna (2021) believes that:

> The leaders and the people should both work towards rebuilding the spiritual, physical, academic and social lives, and mend broken relationships caused by the crises. Games, dialogue, discussions and peace workshops; sensitization on need for continued peaceful living condition should be embarked on. Leaders should discharge their responsibilities with the fear of God, and people should obey the constituted authority. Lastly, both parties should continue to tolerate each other, as it is scriptural (Hebrew 12:15).

However, Reuben (2021) suggests that:

> The government, in conjunction with security agencies, and the traditional institutions, should constitute a committee for peace, justice and reconciliation, to be saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that the peace being enjoyed lasts.

Usman (2021) also supports the idea that peace seminars between the Christians and Muslims be organized regularly, and religious leaders should continue to preach tolerance and love among worshipers. In addition, Wama (2021) admonishes that:

> Religious leaders should continue to preach peace and tolerance among the people. The government should also create more job opportunities for the youths to be engaged.

The foregoing discussion throws no one in doubt that women have continued to involve themselves in peace building process in Wukari Local Government Area through their organisations and associations. Similarly, through peaceful protest, they have added momentum to the peace building process in the area. This calls for them to be properly incorporated into the entire peace building process in the area.

Conclusion

The paper is centered on the contributions of women in conflict resolution and peace process in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. Though the area has experienced a lot of conflicts, the ethno-religious crises between 2013 and 2015 form the main focus of this paper. The crises were very devastating, because the bed to the killing of thousands of peoples, and property worth millions of naira destroyed; as well as loss of social trust among the inhabitant of the town.

The paper unveils that in the build up to the crises, during the crises and after the crises, women in Wukari were involved in trying to resolve the conflicts and build peace. In their efforts to resolve and build peace, they fasted and prayed to God, organized rallies and protest marches, all to restore peace among the various groups in the community.

Even though through women's efforts and other strategies temporary peace was restored, there is the need to consolidate on it. Through tolerance and organisation of social activities, peace process would continue and peace would be consolidated among the people of Wukari and its environs. It is important to mention categorically that women should not be always relegated to the background in peace building and socio-political issues, for they can add their voice for the development of the society.

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