Communal Conflicts and Iwhuruohna Women in Historical Perspective, 1975-2015.

By

Grace Malachi Brown (PhD)
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Faculty of Humanities
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.
GSM: 0803313526
E-mail: nyetubrown@gmail.com
&
Amadi, Chidi, (PhD)
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Faculty of Humanities
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.
GSM: 08036698110
Email: chidiamadi70@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper entitled Communal conflicts and Iwhuruoha (Ikwerre ethnic group) women is an expository of communal crises that have ravaged many communities in Ikwerre and its adverse effect on women. The paper argues that greed, power, cultism, and economy are the major causes of communal conflicts which has created devastating effects ranging from high crime rate, poverty, reduction in population due to loss of lives, displacement and migration problem, rape, prostitution, disruption of economic activities and other social vices. The paper concludes that Iwhuruoha women have used traditional methods of conflict resolution mechanism to settle some of these conflicts despite the fact that they were the most hit. The study relies heavily on primary and secondary sources of historical data.

Key words: Iwhuruoha Women, Conflicts Resolution, Crises and Economic Activities.

Introduction

In every society, conflicts has always been part of human existence with unsavory consequences on both lives and properties. Accordingly, Iwhuruoha people has witnessed numerous communal clashes since the post Nigeria Civil War years with devastating effects on women who are mostly the victims of the aftermaths of any conflicts. Land

disputes, chieftaincy struggles, cultism, youth restiveness, violence killings, crude oil among others are some of the causes of conflicts in Iwhuruoha (Ikwerre). Taken cognizance of the fact that Iwhuruohna women are mainly farmers and traders, conflict has impacted on them negatively over the years. For instance, in a case of land dispute, the opposing factions always destroyed the crops planted by the women such as cassava, fluited pumpkin, three leafed yam, yam, okro, pepper, native beans and other valuable crops. They also blocked the major roads in order to prevent the traders from going to buy their goods.

Iwhuruohna people comprises four large local government areas that make up the Ikwerre ethnic nationality in Rivers State, Nigeria, namely: Port Harcourt, Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua. The area shares boundary with other ethnic groups. To the North and West is the Ogba-Egbema, Ekpeye and Abua/Odual. The Kalabari and Okrika of the Ijo occupies the Southern boundary. To the South-West and East are the Tai/Eleme, Etche and Oyigbo and to the north east are the Umuapu and the Ohaji of Imo State. Iwhuruohna is blessed with vast land which has dictated the occupational life of the people. Due to the fertility of the soil, Ikwerre people especially the women are experienced farmers and produces a number of food crops which include cassava, yam, pepper, okro, fluited pumpkin etc. It is a known fact that Ikwerre women produces the best garri in Nigeria since it does not spoil even after making it into eba for three days.

However, Iwhuruohna women in most conflict ridden communities such as Ogbakiri, Ogbogoro, Rumuekpe, Omudioga, Rumuolumeni, Rumuosi, Ozuoba, Emohua, Ibaa have continued to count their loses in times of conflict. Albert (2012: 4) affirms that many people from communities experiencing violent conflicts suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome which contributes to poor mental state and reduces quality of life. The devastating effects of conflicts manifest in the condition of women and children living in the conflict ridden communities. Women of such communities were easily raped, killed and deprived of their means of livelihood. Pregnant women in Ogbakiri and other conflict ridden communities were forcefully operated upon by the dissident youths in agitation over the sex of the unborn babies thereby terminating the life's of the mothers and the babies (Mba, 2020). Women and children in the crises areas suffer from malnutrition and slept in the school premises of the neighbouring communities exposing them to serious health hazards. Students and pupils were also forced to stop their education career.

Due to these negative consequences, Bande (2003: 91) cited in Omah (2012: 162) has called for a proper understanding of the appropriate methods of handling conflicts. This is because when conflicts are not properly resolved, they may escalate and lead to violence

which in turn engenders sustainable development. Therefore, conflict needs to be properly resolved as stipulated by the ancestors of Ikwerre in order to maintain stable and peaceful environment which are prerequisite for peaceful coexistence and national development.

Causes of Conflicts in Iwhuruohna

Conflicts emanates from a variety of sources because, conflicts does not just occur as there must be causative factors responsible for any crisis. Adejo (2002: 48) excepts that "conflict does not just happen… they are rooted in some basic dissatisfaction or grievance which await detonation at the slightest opportunity". As a corollary, Dzurgba (2006) cited in Okpaga (2009: 28) admit that the cause of conflicts in the society are numerous and include;

a. Economic Resources

This constitutes a major cause of conflict in human societies due to its scarce nature. The reason is that resources in the society are always in limited supply as a result gains for one individual or group are often associated with loses for other individuals or groups. People disagree over values and resources. Conflict has become inevitable because of the relatively scarce but desirable resources.

Tarkah (2019) posits that the main cause of communal conflicts in Iwhuruohna is economic. The quest to "arrive" and be recognized has led many people into struggling for what does not belong to them. For instance, most people struggle for chieftaincy stool which traditionally does not belong to their families. This is because access to the stool will guarantee the control of the economic possession of whatever God has endowed the community with, such as crude oil, land and other economic resources. These have generated conflict in Rumuekpe, Emohua, Ogbogoro, Ogbakiri, Ibaa among others. Rumuekpe is one of the oil producing communities of Iwhuruohna in Rivers State of Nigeria and is noted for their peaceful co-existence and friendly relationship with their guest and neighbours. In the pre-colonial period, Onowomahuma (2020) admits that there were series of conflicts among the villages in Rumuekpe and between Rumuekpe community and their neighbours such as Elele Alimini, Rundele and Ekpeye community of Idorkein over land disputes. However, these disputes were resolved using indigenous methods of conflict resolution and did not in any way impact negatively on Iwhuruohna women.

The post colonial era saw Rumuekpe as the main source of Shell petroleum Development Company (SPDC) Eastern operations hosting the largest manifold (Chigbo 2011: 2 cited in Ogbara 2015: 2). One of the reasons for the escalation of the 2005 Rumuekpe conflict was the question of denial of access to basic economic opportunities by the leadership of the

community. In order words the Rumuekpe conflict was mainly oil induced. Okachukwu (2019) opines that the leader who hijacked the contracts and supplies issued by the oil companies especially shell have remained the only group enjoying what the community owns for a long time. Chieftaincy and youth leadership tussle polarized the youths into factions between two contenders Mr. Friday Edu, the incumbent youth leader and S. K. Agala. The attacks and reprisal attacks occasioned by the youth leadership struggle over access to oil money led to massive loss of lives and property including women and children (Chuba, 2019). At the height of this contention, problems, hidden annoyance, assassination and killings were hatched and extended to edge off all supposedly beneficiaries from the oil bounties. Rumuekpe women extensively suffered from these disagreements and fled their homes to other communities due to insecurity. The few bold ones that earlier did not vacate their homes have to later do so as they could not visit their farms to get what to eat. Undoubtedly, severe hunger, poor housing, disease and lowlife expectancy became the order of the day.

Similarly, Ogbakiri had same experience. Ogbakiri was one of the developed communities of Iwhuruohna infrastructural wise. The conflict that led to the collapse of the communities on May 2000 resulted to the destruction of buildings, electric poles, schools, churches and loss of lives. It is most saddening to note that these acts were perpetrated by the youths. Elderly women were thrown into wells while the pregnant ladies were operated upon killing the mothers and babies (Israel, 2020). There was famine in the land due to the fear by the few women still living in the community, to visit their farms and harvest their crops for consumption and sales. They finally ran away for their dear lives and became refugees in other communities such as Choba, Ozuoba, Rumuosi, Rumuagholu, Rumuokwuta, Rumuigbo and Mgbuogba (Emesiobi, 2020).

In Ogbogoro, the emergence of oil companies and contest for ownership of waterfront where the multi-nationals facilities were based became an issue. Rumuowhor family who had been the only beneficiary of the royalties from the oil companies such as Spibat Nigeria Limited, America Oil Field Divers and Trevi Nigeria Limited refused to involve the other community members in the management of funds collected from the companies for community development. Thus, the entire community decided that a new agreement be made and that the earlier agreement which required the companies to pay a modest annual rent to the family be replaced to mean, the community. This generated a lot of conflict in Ogbogoro and several law suits were instituted (Njigwum, 2019). During these crises, Ogbogoro women lost their means of livelihood as the land were the oil companies occupied was part of their farmland.

Chieftaincy struggle in Ogbogoro by two sons of Akpalikunga, Chief Sam Dike and Mr. Felix Amadi was also a major cause of conflict in the community. The Ogbogoro chieftaincy struggle is clearly explained in the words of Sunny (2019) thus:

> Akpalikunga was the father of Ogbogoro also known as Akami. He had two wives and seven children namely; Rumukpalikuada, Rumubisio, Rumuayawada also called Rumuodor, Rumuwokenada, Rumuadi, Rumuehiewo, Rumuehiosi and Anaka. Chief Paul Amadi held the leadership stool of Ogbogoro until his death. His only wife had many children for him but lost all except Felix Amadi whom she begot much later with her husband's brother, chief Elendu Wosu of Rumubisio village which is accepted in Iwhuruohna tradition. However, as a result of her husband's death, she sent the insignia of the chieftaincy stool to Chief Sam Dike, his husband brother who was trained and brought up by her husband. It was agreed that if a male child be born by the wife and attain the age of 15, the staff of office should be handed back to the owner by the chiefs of the seven villages of Ogbogoro. At the ripe age of 15, Felix Amadi and his mother Nyejilam Amadi asked Chief Ishmael Dike who was a direct son of Chief Sam Dike to relinquish the staff of authority or leadership to him. The request was initially honoured and Felix Amadi was made the paramount ruler of Ogbogoro community. His leadership style was not cherished by the people and some people decided to cause confusion by laying claims to the throne which polarized the community into factions with vested economic interest.

Remarkably, as it is often said that conflict promotes disputes over value and resource and who controls the power controls the resources. The chieftaincy crisis brought socio-economic hardship to the people especially women and children. Many people lost their lives and property. Also, the cult groups in their desperation to control the economy of Ogbogoro unleashed attacks and wanton destruction on lives and property. The cult boys alleged that the elders while in a meeting were not focusing on community development agenda but on their personal welfare. They thus attacked and killed two of their elders namely; Richard Amadi and Patrick Wali (Amadi, 2010: 84). Due to insecurity, many people fled from the community and became refugees in the neighbouring villages of Rumuolumeni, Mgbuogba, Rumuokwuta, Choba, Ozuoba, Rumuagholu and Rumuosi. Women and children were subjected to sleep in open school premises of these neighbouring communities. Children from Ogbogoro suffered from serious malnutrition

exposing them to various health hazards. School children were forced to stop their education career.

There was also the issue of land dispute in Emohua. Land is very important in the economic life of Emohua in particular and Iwhuruohna in general. The farmland crisis was between the members of Rumungbooh, Rumuche in Emohua between 1985 to 1986. Some members of the communities questioned the method used in sharing the Akpma-Olua farmland which summarily created factions among the members of the community. The aggrieved faction forcefully gained entry into another section of community land situated at *Ngrenge* and *Akwaka* set aside by the paramount ruler for the next farming season. The factional party took this action because they have to undertake their economic venture which was to farm and produce food for survival.

The purchase of the traditional title called *urie* was the brain behind the squabble. Some people who were not yet elders in their respective families had bought the *urie* title which is supposed to be given to the eldest member of the family and is expected to be for the most aged elder. Since the *urie* has been sold and bought by some over ambitious fellows, it now meant that some family will have more than one *urie* title holder. The entire community however decided that only the most senior elders with the legal and recognized *urie* have the authority to share their respective family portion of farmland and asked the other *urie* to drop the title and submit themselves to the eldest recognized *urie* holder in such family. The decision to invalidate all *uries* allegedly bought and to recognize only one *urie* in every family generated several crises in Emohua. Consequently, all persons who became *ele-re-urie* by virtue of a purchased *urie* were stripped off their *urie* title (Obinna, 1989). This exercise affected many important people and they decided to form dissent group to resist the decision of the community leadership.

It is a truism that denial of access to basic economic structures constitutes one of the major causes of communal conflict in Iwhuruohna. Therefore, the deprivation of farmland to a group of people triggered the conflict that resulted to loss of lives and property. Women were deprived of their economic mainstay while some took to their heels into other communities. Uchendu (2019) confirms that the two factions attacked themselves with knives and guns in the bush which resulted to loss of lives and property.

In Rumuosi, there was the Rumuosi and Ozuoba Road Crisis of 1976. Ohortee (2019) posits that in the past Rumuois, Ozuoba and Alakahia had farmlands along the major link road. In 1976, all the communities that had land along the link road farmed on their portion. Due to the massive clearing of their various portions of farmlands, Rumuosi people

created another track road behind the Ozuoba farmland as it presented a shorter route for Rumuosi people going through Ozuoba to Port Harcourt metropolis. If this new pathway was allowed, it will situate Ozuoba behind the access road while the old road projected the community at the front. Ozuoba people vehemently opposed it hence; they demonstrated their annoyance by blocking the road with logs and stones which made it un-motorable. Rumuosi people frowned at the decision of Ozuoba because by their communal efforts, they had cleared and weeded the road in order to make it passable. Nna (2019) posits that Rumuosi was determined to face any circumstance that can arise by that challenge. They removed all the barricades placed across the road and put the road in use again. Ozuoba responded by instituting a civil law suit against Rumuosi, the case lasted for more than five years; huge sums of money was spent by both parties including women and men who contributed to finance the law suit until it was decided in favour of Ozuoba. The disagreements lingered for a long time and Ozuoba and Rumuosi women could not go to their farms due to the fear of the unknown. Weeds took over their farms and famine ensued. The children from these communities suffered from malnutrition and health hazards having had shortage of food intake as a result of the crises.

b. Power/Leadership

Power is also a major cause of conflict in societies. Okpaga (2009: 28) defined power "as the ability to control the behaviour of other people, even against their will". Power also controls economic resources, political process, social institutions, cultural institutions and development. Thus, "power" decides and chooses those who gain and those who lose in any given situation. Power is often associated with reputation, fame, prestige or supremacy in human affairs. The prestige or supremacy of one individual or group is often associated with the loss of prestige or supremacy of another individual. As a result, they must either destroy or weaken such an individual or group. Power has often never been enough for anyone who has it and this is why some leaders go all out to suppress and oppress rivals, opponents and oppositions in order to obtain absolute loyalty. Power is at the same time both value and resource and the contest over power does not play out only in the open spaces but even found in intimate closed spaces. Most crises in Iwhuruohna arise from the attempt to reverse the mode of ascension to the community's throne of which, the first son of the progenitor has always produced the community's paramount ruler.

Therefore, the attempt to reverse the mode of ascension to the throne was always met with stiff resistance. This has in one way fostered conflict in most Iwhuruohna communities such as Ibaa, Ogbakiri, Rumuekpe, Ogbogoro, Emohua and Rumuolumeni. Onigu (1999:

337-338) cited in Boh (2014: 347) agrees with this position when he laments on the social system of Nigeria as thus;

> The Nigeria society is a social system compounded by contested demands on access to scarce resources especially in the political and economical field. It is a society defined by natural cleavages and man-made conflicts. Natural membership of ethnic group…threatened by the expanding interest of other multiple users…provide ground for the emergence of conflicts.

In Ogbakiri, the genesis of Okporowo crises dates back to the period of Echonwere and Echiada when the later claimed seniority to Echonwere. According to the report of Ikwerre Development Association Peace Committee (1995) the Echonwere faction gave a genealogy depicting the paternal lineage of Owo as the son of Ekenta, when Owo the father of Okpara died, Okpara migrated northwards with his father's kinsmen first to Rumuoro and then to a place he named after himself *Okpara-Owo* Okporowo. Being a caring and loving person, he invited sons of his father's brother namely Elenwo, Worukwu and Mgbudu to his new place where they lived together and enjoyed his supremacy and leadership until the death of Okporowo. After his death, his first son Akwu took over the reign. Akwu got married to many wives and had many children of whom Echonwere was the first son. They lived harmoniously till the death of Akwu.

No sooner had they ensued in a dynastic struggle between Echonwere (son of Nwonwere) and Echiada (son of Ada) wives of Akwu over claim and counter-claim on seniority which arose because Ada, the mother of Echiada who first conceived before Nwonwere had a protracted pregnancy. Hence Nwonwere delivered Echonwere before Ada delivered Echiada. Ada was not happy over this because she had wished that she delivered Echiada before the arrival of Echonwere. She therefore nursed bad feeling for him and mis-informed Echiada her son that it was his place to take over the stool since she first conceived before Nwonwere. In cause of this struggle, Ahia Akwu and Chukwu Akwu who represented Akwu children testified that Echonwere was Akwu's first son who always takes first share when their father was alive before *Oha Wezina*. In anger, Echiada ran out naked with a ram tied to *omuu* (young palm frond) and dragged the ram throughout the community invoking curses on the brothers.

Be that as it may, Echonwere accomplished the sacrifices caused by his brother invocation of the gods and became the king. This tele-guided information caused hatred, envy, jealousy between the ruling Echonwere and the Adanwerekna. The Adawerekna youths

resisted the installation of London Echonwere and ignored the chiefs, elders and *owhor* holders and requested that there must be a rotational kingly stool in Okporowo. The actions exhibited by the youths of these families made the Okporowo council of chiefs to inform the head of Adanwerekna house of the impossibilities on the quest for a rotational stool in Okporowo. The plan to install Hamilton Echongbe-Akwu by the Adawerekna as the paramount ruler caused the breakdown of law and order in Okporowo as many houses were destroyed including the building belonging to Ben A. Woke. From then on, insecurity plagued the community. Women were the most affected since they could not go to plant nor harvest their food crops. Traders could not travel to Port Harcourt to buy their wares or even open their shops to sell. The burden of communal crises descended forcefully on the women in form of hardship. Their hand became dried as they could not find monies to spend for their family upkeep. In fact, the women experienced physical hardship until when it became very clear that there might be looming crises in Ogbakiri at any slightest opportunity.

This was the situation until the issue of the display of the *nwanwu* masquerade dance of Oduoha. This was one of the immediate factors that culminated to the sack of Ogbakiri clan. During the display of the masquerade dance troupe, it is against the culture for passers-by and vehicles to move across the masquerades and dancers. While they were displaying, Eric Agbagbue from Oduoha residing in Rumuoro rode his motorcycle across the *mmanwu* dancers (Emesiobi, 2020). Eric Agbagbue's host, Rumuoro, felt insulted and asked Oduoha youths to replace the motorcycle. When this could not happen immediately, reprisal seizure of motorcycles by the youths of Rumuoro lingered unabated.

The confusion on ground created discord between Oduoha and Rumuoro communities in that they always waylaid themselves. Oduoha youths fought Rumuoro youths in front of their town hall and destroyed the Echichinwo statue. They took away the head of *Echichinwo* which represented the founder of Rumuoro. As if this was not enough, Oduoha youths killed a boy from Rumuoro. These events escalated the conflicts that have been stage managed and it now generated into a full-scale war leading to the destruction of all Ogbakiri communities. Rumuokani was attacked by Oduoha, Rumuokani launched a reprisal attack on Oduoha, Oduoha launched an offensive on Rumuoro on 12 April, 2000. Rumuoro equally attacked Okporowo with hired mercenaries from Gokana, Ogoni on 3rd and 6th may, 2000. Okporowo youths destroyed Ahai and Rumuada. From this period onwards according to Emeji (2019) the war took the form of a guerilla warfare by some dissident youths who directed who should return home or not or who should be buried at home or not. These youths looted sacred objects like masquerades and displayed the revered *oboni* cultural dance with impunity. After the total collapse of Ogbakiri, many

women lost their lives and means of livelihood. The ones that are alive took to their heels and became refugees in other communities.

In Ibaa, after the death of the paramount ruler Chief J. J. Ohaka, many people from the *osunu* group became interested on the stool including Chief S. O. Ovua, Chief K. E. Nyenke, Chief P. Nwakana, Chief S. E. Amadi, Late prof. Okala and others. Each of them started soliciting for supports from other villages. The cult groups which had been in existence before now may have used this opportunity to attach themselves to these personalities and used the opportunity to assert their negative relevance in the community. The *degbam, dewell* and *island* cult groups fought for supremacy among themselves and the most powerful who eventually wins would install whoever they are supporting as the *Eze Uvuahu* or *Nye-Nwe-Ali* Ibaa. The Ibaa chieftaincy crisis escalated and each cult group went after the members of the other groups including innocent members of the community. Maiming, killing and destruction of property became wide spread where there is a member from the other group which needs to be killed by a rival cult group and eventually escaped, the family members especially the women were all killed.

In Emohua, the chieftaincy struggle was between Chief E. J. A. Oriji and Chief Sampson Ozuru, both hailed from Rumuche in Emohua community. Chinnah (2019) posits that problem started when E. J. A. Oriji became so autocratic that he used his power to intimidate the people. This led to the factionalization of the entire community as more than half of the people withdrew the support for him. The level of autocracy displayed by him called for his dethronement. Chief Sampson Ozuru became the new *Nye-New-Eli* Emohua. This aggravated the deposed ruler E. J. A. Oriji and his faction and resulted in violent clashes between the two factions. The course of the conflict was so grave and wide tat Chief E. J. A. Oriji and his supporters were chased out of the village. Many people from the community including women lost their dear lives.

c. Cultism

A cult group is a group of people with religious, philosophical or cultural identity viewed as a set within the society. Amaewhule (2019) posits that cultism started as a peer group without evil intentions in Iwhuruohna. As time went on, conflict of interests among the group set in. These interests are mainly on business, politics, women and a breakout from a group which always fostered conflict leading to struggles for supremacy of powers among the groups. As they break out they become oppose to each other while each group struggled for who can be reckoned with in the helm of affairs within the community and

the state. Sometimes, they align themselves with politicians who always patronized the strongest cult groups already fortified with AK47 riffles.

In communities such as Ibaa, Ogbogoro, Ogbakiri, Rumuolumeni, Rumuodogo, Omudioga, Ubima, Omademe and Rumuekpe cultism have in some cases sacked the entire community. The various cult groups such as *dewell, degbam, iceland, greenland* and had held the communities hostage. In Ibaa, they made themselves relevant during the chieftaincy struggle and attached themselves to any of the contending chiefs and used the opportunity to assert negative relevance in the community, Ogbogoro also witnessed the same. The cult groups in the community in their desperation to control the economy unleashed attacks and wanton destruction on lives and properties. In Ogbakiri, the youths invited the seven wonders of Gokana cult group who helped in the destruction of the community. Non-payment of a hired cult group in Rumuolumeni led to the killing of a prominent son at Iwofe Waterside (Isi, 2019). In Rumuodogo the *dewell* cult group hired a mercenary group from Isiokpo to help in the prosecution of the battle of supremacy with other cult groups which resulted to the death of people many including a prominent Chief, Oha Ned (Ndah, 2019). Omudioga also witnessed major cult disturbances over the issue of supremacy among the various cult groups. It is assumed that the strongest cult group will sit over to collect the benefits from oil companies in the community.

In 2003, the clash between the *island, dewell,* and *degbam* in Ubima degenerated into a full scale war which made many people to flee their homes and remained as refugees in the neighbouring communities of Omagwa, Ozuaha, Omademe and Ipo. Omademe also witnessed cultism in the community. The *degbam* leader got information that *island* wanted to stage a recovery battle for their guns earlier seized by the *degbam* and so he instructed all the members not to sleep in the house. The *island* operated with some Isiokpo mercenaries and killed a boy. A reprisal attack by the *degbam* left the community in disarray. In all of these, the burden of loss of lives and destruction has been on the women. Many women have lost their husbands and children due to the insecurity generated by cultism. Their means of livelihood have been shattered, their farms have been taken over by weed while some of their houses have been destroyed.

Effects of Communal Conflicts on Iwhuruohna Women

It is a truism that sustainable social and economic development is hardly possible in an atmosphere of frequent conflicts. It is important to note that these conflicts have caused a lot of harm than good on the Iwhuruohna women in particular and to the entire Iwhuruohna ethnic nationality.

They include;

1. Loss of Lives and Property

To the women, these conflicts have rendered some of them vulnerable, no house again because the one they had was destroyed during conflicts or cult clashes. They now live in shanties and huts in their villages. Women also lost their husbands who are mainly the bread winners of the homes. This is because whatever occupation a woman might take to in the society such as the Iwhuruohna women who indulge in farming and trading as their occupation is to assist their husbands. Many women equally lost their lives during the conflicts. Pregnant women in Ogbakiri were forcefully operated upon by the dissident youths in agitation over the sex of the unborn babies and their bodies littered on the playground. Elderly women were tied and thrown into wells. Most women from such communities were easily raped while their children were maimed. Some of the women also lost their sons and daughters during the various conflicts in their communities.

2. High Rate of Crimes

As a result of communal conflicts, social vices such as rape, prostitution, armed robbery, kidnapping, child abuse, disregard of adults by the youths, breaking and entering, petty theft, alcoholism, drug abuse have gained ascendancy and are detrimental to the women of Iwhuruohna. Married women were easily abused or raped by the young boys of the communities having Ak47 rifles in their possession and with the influence of drugs. Even the younger women were equally raped and thereafter have their private parts shattered with hand or stick (Amadi, 2020). In Rumuekpe, many women were raped and robbery on the major road went on unabated.

3. Increase in Poverty and Inaccessibility to Social Services

Iwuruohna women witnessed increase in poverty and inaccessibility to social services. The communities ridden by conflicts have always been associated with poverty as well as classified as zones with high propensity for rural-urban migration. The high rate of poverty caused by unemployment has been a driving force for these conflicts. If the youths are occupied with jobs, there would not exist the extra time for fermenting trouble. These crises indirectly increased the rate of poverty in the communities. The quality of life of the averge Iwhuruohna woman has diminished because their markets have been destroyed; houses destroyed, farms burnt, dynamite explosions and other war explosives. The fear fostered by the violence deprived women from farming and trading which have been their main economic activities (Ezekwu, 2019).

The adverse effects of these conflicts on the local economy increased the level of poverty in these communities and have helped to further reduce the standard of living. The insecurity created by these conflicts made many businesses including shop owners to

abandon their only source of livelihood thereby reducing the ability of Iwhuruohna women to cater for themselves and their families. The women in these conflicts ridden communities cannot access the social services provided by the government or through community efforts. The dissident youths from these communities destroyed the social amenities that had alleviated the suffering of the people especially the women while fighting for cult supremacy and control of youth leadership. In Ogbakiri, the youths destroyed their schools, health centres, schools, maternity homes, hospitals, boreholes, electric poles and transformers (Emesiobi, 2019).

The story is not different in Rumuekpe where electricity gadgets, telecommunication mask, schools, borehole for water were all destroyed. The schools systems were badly affected. The teachers took to their heels and the children could not go to school for some years. A range of factors affects children's ability to continue their education. The most common are shortage of funds due to loss of their parent's livelihood; insecurity in the schools and death of a sponsor. Some children were used for labour in place of adults who have died in order to support the family (Adesote and Omejeje, 2012: 41). With resumption of school after the war, the teachers refused to go back and were seen demanding for transfer out of the conflict areas. The few that accepted to teach in such places became more like visiting teachers, coming to work once in a while. This situation cannot help the growth of academics and school management in the affected communities. The attendant result is the loss of interest by the children to further their education paving the way for mass illiteracy in such communities.

In the health sector, the Iwhuruohna women are the most vulnerable. Many doctors and nurses declined their posting to the conflict ridden communities of Ikwerre such as Rumuekpe, Ogbakiri, Ibaa, Ogbogoro among others while some doctors posted there frequently requested for transfers to other place as a result of the perceived violence in these communities. Recently, the kidnapping of doctors by some miscreant elements have further diminished their interest to work in rural communities of Ikwerre. Iwhuruohna women who need maternity services and attention are not able to have it. This has often resulted to maternal deaths on both the pregnant women and their babies (Opara, 2021).

4. Migration and Relocation

Migration and relocation of economic activities are socio-economic effects of communal conflicts. This generally have a direct effect on the demography of the people. In order to escape from the danger associated with violence, many people especially the women, children and youths are forced to relocate to relatively more peaceful areas. Most women from the Rumuekpe community became refugees in the neighbouring towns of Elele

Alimini, Ndele, Rumuji, Emohua and Port Harcourt. Few Iwhuruohna women that had cash with them also relocated their businesses in the communities where they had taken refuge.

5. Prostitution

Prostitution is the act of engaging in sexual activity with someone for payment or other gains. Conflicts and wars are among the causative factors of prostitution. In the pre-colonial Ikwerre, prostitution was abhorred as parents usually kept watchful eyes on their daughters and it was an abomination for a married woman to be caught in that act (Okocha, 2021). Any adult member of the community scolded wayward daughters as upbringing of children was regarded as a collective responsibility. The heightened spate of prostitution is mainly an aftermath of conflicts and disputes in the various Iwhuruohna communities. Obile (2021) posits that some young Ibaa ladies who became refugees in other communities with their parents and siblings took to prostitution, due to poverty, hunger and starvation.

This was to enable them provide for the primary needs of their family especially food and clothing. In Ogbakiri, Emohua, Ogbogoro, Omudioga and Rumuolumeni, violent conflicts have necessitated the Iwuruohna young women to resort to prostitution as the only means of survival and livelihood. However, some of these women are educated and if perhaps they are employed they would have been in position to cater for their displaced families without indulging in prostitution.

Iwhuruohna Women and Conflict Resolution

Women occupy important position in village administration as they formed the assembly of all women whether married or unmarried in the village. They are responsible for molding the character of the children and are the bedrock of peace. They settled disputes among themselves and sometimes intervened in serious cases involving the men which have yielded positive results. This is because women are valued in Ikwerre and are regarded as a strong pillar upon which everyone leans.

In a case of assassination, cultism, stealing and sorcery as a way of maintaining peace, they marched through the streets of the community wearing the back of black clothes, imprecating curses against the perpetrators as in the case of Rukpokwu, Port Harcourt in 2008. This period saw the assassinations of well meaning indigenes of the community. These killings scared people away from the community. Businesses were halted and shop owners could not open their normal businesses. People were afraid and lost confidence in the leadership. It was this dilemma that spurred the women especially *rumurinya*

daughters of Rukpokwu to rally enmass in order to maintain peace and harmony in the community.

On the appointed day, they wore the back of black clothes with some traditional items such as *mgbam* made from bamboo stick, mortar and pestles. As they moved they imprecated curses on anyone who would act or in connivance with another person to carry out such a heinous crime. With these rituals, peace returned to the community and members of the community have been living in peace. Businesses are thriving while those who packed out of the community have since returned (Ogwundu, 2020).

In Ibaa, the women called for a meeting of the conflicting parties charging them to change and embrace peace in their own interest. They always warned the people especially the youths on the devastating consequences of allowing disputes transform into violence. *Rumurinya* in Ibaa have resolved allegations of *bishi* homicide through poison amicably through their gentle and expertise methods of handling conflicts. In Ubima, cultism generated violence which made the women carry their mortar and pestles to pound at all junctions every market day for eight market days in company of the community's chief priest. The women while half naked imprecated curses on anyone who would kill anybody whether indigene or non-indigene. After the ritual performances, the situation was controlled and peace returned to the community (Igwe, 2020).

In Omuanwa, *rumurinya* has been a rising force in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. They have used their influence to settle several cases of land disputes, cultism as well as some minor quarrels. They strictly adviced parents to control their children otherwise such person will be ostracized form the community if found wanton (Amadiali, 2020). Omademe also had same experience when they had to contend with cult boys with Ak 47 rifles who carried the guns openly within the community smoking Indian hemp along the streets and major road in Omademe.

This generated violence and insecurity and farmers could not go to their farms anymore. The women converged and decided to use the Iwhuruohna indigenous methods. With some traditional items such as mortar, pestle and palm fronds raining curses on anyone who would steal, kill or kidnap anybody. This brought lasting peace in Omademe (Amaewhule, 2019). However, the measures taken by the women have engendered peace and harmonious living in the communities concerned. The efficacy of the traditional method is not in doubt. Whoever that has not eaten what is pounded by a woman in a mortar with pestle should attempt to violate and feel the grave consequences by the ancestors of Iwhuruohna.

Conclusion

The Iwhuruohna women have negatively felt the effects of conflicts. Conflicts have been very detrimental in their live endeaovours. Many women have lost their husbands, children, properties and their means of livelihood in conflict. Some women have been killed by the dissident youths during conflicts. Pregnant women have been operated upon in agitation over the sex of the unborn babies thereby terminating the life of the mothers and babies. Due to conflict, women sleep in the school premises of neighbouring villages and uncompleted building.

However, Iwhuruohna women through their motherly role have resolved conflicts in their different communities by using the traditional methods of conflict resolution for peaceful co-existence and harmonious living.

References

Primary sources

Oral Interviews

Name	Sex	Age	Social Status	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
Mba Nwobike	M	45	Community member	Business	Ogbakiri	02/02/2020
Tarkah Philip	M	70	Elder	Farming	Rumuekpe	05/04/2019
Onywomahuma Grace	F	57	Woman Leader	Business	Rumuekpe	05/05/2020
Okachukwu Felicia	F	58	Nwereoma Women Meeting	Civil Servant	Ibaa	10/03/2019
Emesiobi Bliss	M	59	CDC Member	Business	Ogbakiri	01/01/2020
Sunny Amadi	M	51	CDC Member	Business	Rumuosi	08/02/2019
Igwe Victor	M	48	Community Memeber	Public Servant	Ubima	15/02/2019
Uchendu Mary	F	45	Provost Women Meeting	Petty Trader	Emohua	10/11/2020

Nna Mercy	F	50	Secretary Ogbotu Women Meeting	Business	Rumuosi	15/02/2019
Emeji John	M	58	Community Member	Business	Ogbakiri	09/01/2019
Chinnah Charity	F	45	Community Member	Public Servant	Emohua	09/01/2019
Amaewhule Kenneth	M	54	CDC Member	Public Servant	Omademe	10/02/2019
Ndah Kemjika	M	50	Community Member	Artisan	Rumuodegu	07/02/2019
Amadi Beatrice	F	62	Woman Leader	Retired Headmistress	Rumuokoro	10/01/2020
Ezekwu Princess	F	55	Secretary Ibaa Women Meeting	Business	Ibaa	05/04/2019
Opara Evelyn	F	58	Community Member	Business	Ogbogoro	08/02/2021
Okocha Chimenem	M	50	Community Member	Business	Rumuokoro	08/02/2021
Obile Kingsley	M	60	Community Member	Business	Ibaa	09/02/2021
Ogwundu Uche	F	53	Woman Leader	Petty Trader	Omuanwa	10/11/2020
Amadiali ThankGod	M	54	CDC Member	Public Servant	Omuanwa	15/11/2020

Books

Adejo, A. M. (2002). "Ethnic and Communal Violence in a Plural Polity: The Nigerian Experience" *Journal of Faculty of Arts*, 3(1) 11-20

Adesote, S. A. and Omejeje, A. (2012). "A Critical Analysis of the Socio-Economic Effects of Inter-Communal Conflicts in Yorubaland" in Albert, I. O. (ed) *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria* John Archers Publishers, 73-83

Albert, I. O. (2012). "Mapping the Discourse: History, Social Conflict and Conflict Management" in Albert, I. O. (ed) *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria.* Ibadan, John Archers Publishers Ltd, 1-7

Amadi, C. (2012). "A History of Ikwerre to 1960" M.A Dissertation submitted to the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Port Harcourt.

Boh, A. (2014). Traditional Mechanisms and Conflict Management in Tivland: The Participatory Theatre Paradigm" in *Journal of the Society of Peace Studies and Practice.* 1 (3) 20-28.

Ikwerre Development Association (1995). Peace Committee

Obinna, E. M. (1989). *Rumuchenya (Emohua) Disputes*. Port Harcourt, Diamond Club

Ogbara, O. (2015). *History of Rumuekpe Community* Port Harcourt.

Okaga, A. (2009). "Peace Building in Conflict and Post Conflict Situation: The Nigerian and African Experience" in *African Journal of Indigenous Development* 5(122) 24-35.

Omah, E. (2012). "Rethinking African Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution" in Albert, I. O., Eselebor, W. A. and Danjibo, N. D. (eds) *Peace, Security and Development in Nigeria.* Abuja, Society for Peace Studies and Practice, 161-184.