

*Full Length Research*

# The Roles and Strategy of Women as Conflict Mediators in Ibibio Land

**Nsikan Abasi U. Wilson, Sunny E. Offiong & Okoro Sunday Asangaung**

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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The study was conducted in Ibibioland, Akwa Ibom State to explore the role of the woman in conflict situations and the strategy she employs in conflict mediation. Guided by the assumptions of Radcliff-Brown's structural functionalism and Talcott Parsons' social system theory, cross-sectional survey research design was adopted in the study. Personal interviews and focus group discussions were employed for data collection. Three hundred and sixty participants were selected from the eighteen (18) Local Government Areas making Ibibio ethnic group. Multi-stage sampling involving purposive and simple random sampling techniques was employed to select participants among women above 25 years of age. Some of the women were visited in their houses and interviewed personally in order to obtain relevant information on their role and strategies in conflict mediation while 18 sessions of focused group discussions were held in the nearby civic centers in these Local Government Areas. The local language was used to obtain information from participants with the aid of a tape recorder and was later transcribed. Data obtained were analyzed thematically. Findings show that marriages create social relationships through which the sanctity of the god of in-law (abasi Ukod) and grandchild (abasi eyeyen) among others became the bond of peace in Ibibioland. Women mediate in conflict situations directly and indirectly and sometimes unconsciously. Their roles in conflict management, though mostly on unofficial capacities, bring peace and stability to the society. The strategies employed include, but are not limited to apologies, women's cultural groups, traditional songs, and marriage. The study recommends that women in Ibibioland should be involved officially in conflict management initiatives and their strategies adapted in conflict situations.

**Keywords:** Woman, Conflict Management, Marriage, Mediation

## INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a social phenomenon which is a common and essential feature of human existence. There is a consensus among scholars in sociology and other related disciplines that conflict is inevitable in every human society (Moore, 1987; Okoh & Ewhariemen, 2001). Offiong (1997) has confirmed that conflict is an inherent and ubiquitous element of human society. Conflict has been with man since creation and it has both positive and negative consequences. It is an inherent and ubiquitous element of human society, from the dyad to the largest human group. There is no human group or society in which life moves along in harmony at all times. Individuals do not always do what society expects them to do, and they frequently behave in ways that disrupts the social order. Every society is aware of the repercussions of unresolved conflicts. Consequently, every human group has developed informal and formal mechanisms to bring about conflict resolution (Offiong, 1997). In recent years, international attention has turned to the promotion of women as peace mediators (Turner, 2019). Obviously, women had played a central role in building and

maintaining harmony within the family and strengthening social cohesion within and outside their various communities, hence the call for the formal involvement of women in conflict management.

According to Douglas (1999), conflicts involve struggles between two or more people over values, or competition for status, power or scarce resources. Also, conflict arises when two or more people or groups endeavor to pursue goals which are mutually inconsistent. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) gives the most widely accepted definition of conflict. It refers to conflict as 'pursuit of incompatible goals by individuals or groups'. Conflict according to the Foundation Coalition (2009) is seen as one quintessential part of human existence which involves a form of struggle between people, groups and communities with differing or opposing opinions, ideas, values, needs, goals and interests which could either be violent or non-violent depending on how the parties involved manage it. While the term according to Mohammed (2010), connotes a form of expressed struggles between two or more

parties who are purportedly and perceived to be pursuing incompatible goals, competing over scarce resource and face some degree of interference from achieving their goals. From the definitions given, one can be apt to say that conflict is part and parcel of human society which involves clash of interests and values by individual members of such society with the aim of achieving their set objectives.

Ibibio communities have experienced series of conflicts for centuries within its ethnically diverse population; many communities have also lived in relative peace with one another. Women played a central role in maintenance of peace and unity across their various communities. For example, as peace advocates, conflict prevention and conflict mediation were the roles reserved for and successfully played by women in pre-colonial Africa. It is on record that only two percent of mediators in formal peace processes from 1990 to 2017 were women, and this significant and persistent underrepresentation was the subject of a wide-ranging discussion at International Peace Institute. Setting out the problem in introductory remarks, International Peace Institute President, Terje Rod-Larsen said, "research has increasingly showed that peace processes that substantively include women tend to result in more durable, sustainable peace. Yet, exclusion continues despite the targeting of women and girls in conflict and the crucial insight of local women as peacebuilders" (International Peace Institute, 2018). Before the westernization of its educational system, African women had developed a conflict resolution method (used in mediation) based on storytelling technique, intermarriages, apologies, among others. As element of socialization, a woman is equipped to see conflict as an opportunity to build a relationship while a man who profess confrontation, considers conflict as an element of and a prospect for competition.

In her 1974 theoretical overview, Rosaldo in Augsburger (1992) exemplified the contrast between men and women by stating that males have a public orientation while women have more of domestic orientation in their lifestyle. The study of Rosemary Ridd in Augsburger (1992) confirmed that in the process of socialization or culture acquisition, women are wired differently when it comes to the use of power in conflict analysis and resolution. The women's powers were more diffused outside of the bureaucratic structure of society. Augsburger (1992) observed that questions related to female adaptability and submission as a product of nature have answers that are blended in the web of life called "culture". This statement indicates that the way men and women act toward a particular social fact as defined by Emile Durkheim in Ritzer (2008) depends on the difference in their process of socialization or the way they are culturally equipped. The difference in conflict styles is therefore dependent upon a mediator culture. A woman's style of conflict resolution is more compassionate while men seem to be more aggressive.

It is our view that even if Ibibio women have been in contact with other cultures, their cultural background and personal experiences remain an influential element in defining their conflict style and mediation process. The reference to cultural background makes our cultural paradigm appears more static and less dynamic. It is this consideration that makes Augsburger (1992:172), concludes that "we always fall short in time of threat or

situations of conflict, in which we have a tendency to fall back upon what we have seen and known in the cultural milieu of our community of origin". This observation by Augsburger (1992) suggests that women have the ability to mediate in most of the conflicts that takes many years to be resolved. Women mediate conflicts or resolve them with regard to their personal life experiences, perceptions and beliefs. Mathey, Dejan, Deballe, Sopio, Koulaninga and Moga (2003) revealed that a fundamental fact of traditional central African societies was the sacred character of the respect given to the elderly in general, and to elderly women in particular. The elderly woman was respected by all and plays a key role in crisis management and conflict resolution. Thus, when a conflict degenerated into armed violence, an appeal would usually be made to a third party of mature years to calm the tension and reconcile the contending parties. Such an appeal for mediation was usually made to a woman who enjoyed the consideration and respect of all who knew her (Mathey, Dejan, Deballe, Sopio, Koulaninga & Moga (2003). Besides, women are not seen in African culture as producers of conflict. Hence, they are always innocent in conflict situation and vulnerable. This innocence accredited to them would allow key players in conflict to grant them listening ears.

It is unfortunate, however, that most of the time "women do not get credit for the work they do. They watch while their male counterparts claim the credit of their work" (Augsburger, 1992:173). In male dominated societies, all glories go to men even when they are themselves object of the conflict. The social consideration that is given to a woman's role in society as mother, educator and even as conflict mediator had been reliable and rewarding as compared to the flexible standards to which men are held. An African proverb says that "to educate a woman is to educate the entire society" (undisclosed author). In North America, female mediators are more facilitative in style and more oriented toward relationships and reconciliation, while males are more likely to focus on the immediate problem that brought about the mediation attempt (Dewhurst and Wall 1994; Weingarten and Douvan 1985).

In our view, a female mediator has a strategic behavior that can quench a problem which could have brought a serious tension in the community or family. We have agreed that gender has a significant influence on conflict resolution and peacemaking behaviour. Women had a strong position in the decision-making process regarding their villages going to war with another village or in the peaceful resolution of internal social conflicts. Mbiti (1988) cited in Kasongo (2010) observed that women are extremely valuable in the sight of society. Not only do they bear life, but they nurse, they cherish, they give warmth, they care for life since all human life passes through their own bodies. Thus, through their role in religion, in African societies, women are more ready and have more abilities to mediate and resolve social conflicts than men whose role is just to create them.

Despite the significant body of research that has emerged in the past two decades to highlight the absence of women in mediation, there is relatively little that looks at women, specifically as mediators. Recent works has sought to address this gap, and to draw distinctions between the roles

of negotiators and mediators that are often conflated in the literature (Aggestam and Svensson, 2018).

It may be submitted that the borrowed cultures into African societies do not take completely away the ultimate role of a woman in the African cultural setting. However, the women's role in Ibibioland has always been considered important both in the socialization process and the resolution of conflicts. The objectives of the study were to evaluate the roles and strategy adopted by Ibibio women in conflict management. Also, to know whether Ibibio women involvement in conflict mediation has actually brought a lasting peace to the society and to proffer useful recommendations that would guide Ibibio women to achieve success in exercising their roles as conflict managers. The role played by Ibibio women in conflict resolution or mediation could either be direct or indirect. It is on the strength of this notion, that this article reviews a number of literatures that reveal these roles and strategies in detail.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The subject of women in conflict mediation has received much attention in research. For example, Agbalajobi (2009) focuses on women's roles in peacebuilding in Africa with Burundi as the case study. The author outlines the common understanding that women are often seen as victims in conflict-areas. Agbalajobi, however, wants to outline the other roles women can play in conflicts they may also be part of, for example as soldiers, supporters, informants and so on, where women rather should be perceived as agents in conflict and peacemaking than as victims.

Moreover, Schirch and Sewak (2005) argue that since women so far have had little participation in peace negotiations and peacebuilding processes, women's interests have been ignored often based on the perception that women's role is that of the victim. The authors also discuss the sociological theory about sex and gender that we are not born into men and women but masculinity and femininity is socially constructed and taught during childhood and throughout life, a theory that will be developed in the section below and used in this research. Schirch and Sewak (2005) also underline the need to adapt to an intersectional perspective where more than just being a woman or a man determines on how you are going to act. They argue that the importance of women in peacebuilding should not consist of women being seen as more naturally peaceful and thus being able to create a sustainable peace, instead women need to be part of the peacebuilding for the simple reason that they are approximately half of the population. Furthermore, they consider the different activities women do in peacebuilding. These include; waging conflict non-violently, building capacity, reducing direct violence and transforming relationships. The authors outline that women especially engage in four kinds of peacebuilding, for example they work as advocates and activists for peace, they pursue democracy and human rights, they are peacekeepers, relief aid workers and work as mediators, counsellors and policymakers and in education.

Jordan (2003) examines the phenomenon that women who are present in peacebuilding seldom get the same

recognition as the men who are present. She says that women are to a large extent present, however, they are not as visible. Jordan argue that the women who work in peacebuilding often use their knowledge and power to help other women and increase their influence. This is further explored by Manchanda (2005) who discuss that since women are the subordinate gender and thus disempowered and is not recognized in the same way as men. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, 2004) cited in Manchanda (2005) says that women are recognized as important in peacebuilding but in the area of reconstruction they are not seen as legitimate, often based on the previous discussed idea that women are seen victims.

Pankhurst (2003) highlights the issue that in recent years' women have been included more in the process to achieve peace, unfortunately this have not led to a better life for women in the aftermath of a conflict. She discusses the widespread assumption of women being advocates for peace and peaceful by nature. She underlines that the assumption of the roles of women and men, where the two are opposite to each other. Based on this, the author concludes that work performed by women is often seen as feminine and empowerment of women in working life is enhancing and extending the pre-existing female work. This in turn makes women who have grown up and live in these societies take on these types of works and keep on performing these types of work. This will lead to, according to Pankhurst, that the effectiveness of the peace process is limited. The authors, mentioned above, all focus on women being perceived as victims after a conflict where they are the ones who suffer from sexual abuse, rape and being displaced due to the conflict. However, they also conclude that this opinion of women in the aftermath of a conflict is highly controversial since women often partake in the conflict in various ways, bringing the conflict forward or working towards peace. This however, they seldom get recognition for and are therefore often stuck in the perception of them as victims.

The Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (2001) also suggests that any peace process that totally neglects the role of women is totally unnatural because in most post-conflict societies, women are not only seen as victims of such conflicts, but they are also seen as actors whose views are crucial in the reconstruction of such conflict torn societies. Again, as a result of the consequences of such conflicts, it is natural for them to assume new responsibilities which were hitherto handled by men thus, the need for them to be incorporated is not only necessary but expedient while neglecting them, is totally against the laws of natural justice.

Alli (2004), noted that the important role played by women in conflict management cannot be overemphasized even though, those who actively participated in the war-front were mostly men, it is sacrosanct for us to include women in the peacebuilding process given the fact that they have a lot to bring into the negotiation table especially their role in keeping the family intact when the men were at the battle ground, therefore, their contribution and insights will also bring a fresh paradigm on issues involving conflict management, peace building and conflict resolution.

Nzomo (2002) noted that as part of the post conflict peace process in Africa, the need to further include women in the agenda of policy formulation and governance process is very

important going by the role they play in the society especially during the conflict process. He was able to look at how the various political parties in Africa have not seen the important role played by women especially during the conflict or liberation struggle as it were.

From the forgoing literature, in tracing the role played by women in traditional African societies, many scholars would argue that women were hitherto seen as major contributors to the development and advancement of such communities given by the important role they play in complimenting their husbands in the management of the home. This position was clearly supported by Sofola (1996) who observed that traditionally, African women were highly revered in the society first of all because of the role they play as “home-makers and managers”, they also serve as custodians of our traditions which they help in passing it from generation to generation and when it comes to giving wise counsels to their husbands, traditional African women were seen to be the best which made it possible for them to be consulted in major decision making in the society.

## THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

This study is guided by the assumptions of Radcliff-Brown's structural functionalism (1952) and Talcott Parsons' social system theory (1975). Structural functionalism is a theoretical understanding of society as built on the assumption that social systems are collective means to fill social needs. In order for social life to survive and develop in society, a number of activities need to be carried out to ensure that certain needs are fulfilled. It is a theory that sees society as built upon order, interrelationships and balance among component units as a means of maintaining the smooth functioning of the whole. He studied society as a structure with interrelated, interdependent and mutually interacting parts. He regarded these interrelated parts of society as “organs” that work towards the proper functioning of the system as a whole. The two theories fall under functionalism.

The functionalist theory explains the role of women in conflict mediation from the stand point of functions perform by women in peace building processes. When structures like women and women groups perform their functions of instilling the right family values of tolerance, respect, mutual understanding, dignity of labour and peaceful coexistence as well as engage in the processes of conflict mediation, there will be order in society and in fact, society will inherently move in the direction of order and stability. If the family structure, which consists of the roles of father, mother and guidance, performs its functions of educating children properly by inculcating the right values and norms, such as tolerance, patience and love, then peace will prevail in society in the long run and institutionalization of this process culminates sustainable peace. However, communities that use all the talents, experience, and wisdom of both men and women are more able to address the needs of their members. If women are excluded from participating in community decisions and leadership, or are so busy with household responsibilities that they do not have time to go to community meetings, then the talents, experiences, and wisdom of half of the population will not contribute to community life.

## METHODOLOGY

### The Study Area

The Ibibio people are located in present-day south-south Nigeria also known as Coastal Southeastern Nigeria. The Ibibio people are predominantly found in Akwa Ibom State. Ibibio is the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Ibibio is both ethnic and linguistic term and all Ibibio people speak and understand the same Ibibio language. The Ibibio people are mainly farmers, fishermen and traders. The people believe that there is a supreme being called *Abasi Enyong* (God of the sky) who created all things including the gods (*ndem*).

Marriage is regarded as a complex of social, political, religious, and economic systems in Ibibio land. It covers diverse aspects of societal life as family and community relationships, sex and sexuality, inheritance, and even political power (as rulership particularly in the past resided in specific and designated families both the secular and the religious). Betrothal before the age of 14 used to be common. Marriage payments were made to the prospective bride's parents. The marriage payment was shared among the bride's kin, with the father keeping the largest share. The marriage payment traditionally had to be completed before the marriage could be consummated; it was supplemented by services rendered by the husband to the bride's father. Given the fact that marriage is a fulcrum in Ibibio society, there are elaborate ceremonies on it before, during, and after the formal handing over of a girl or woman to her groom's family.

The Ibibio society is made up of villages, each belonging to a bigger unit known as clan. The clan is named after the founder of the first villages and they are all equal in status. Each village is made up of families consisting of father, mother, children and grand-parents. As a patriarchal society, an average Ibibio man does anything to have a male child, who will carry on the father's name or lineage. When this fails to produce the desired results, men will resort to polygamy in the hope that the other women will give them the son they need. This desire for a male child has resulted in husbands pressuring their wives to have more children, in some cases putting the health of the women in danger. In this regard, women assumed subordinated status in Ibibio society. When women cry-out along with their unsaved children in conflict situation, they are usually given listening ears as vulnerable groups.

The study was conducted in the eighteen (18) Local Government Areas in Ibibio. The Local Government Areas in Ibibio are Etinan, Mkpato Enin, Ikot Abasi, Onna, Eket, Esit Eket, Uyo, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Ubium, Eastern Obolo, Itu, Ibesikpo Asutan, Ikono, Uruan, Ibeno, Ini, Nsit Atai and Ibiono Ibom. Cross-sectional survey research design was adopted in the study. Personal interviews and focus group discussions were employed for data collection. Three hundred and sixty participants were selected from the eighteen (18) Local Government Areas making Ibibio ethnic group.

Multi-stage sampling involving purposive and simple random sampling techniques was employed to select participants among women above 25 years of age. Some of the women were visited in their houses and interviewed personally in order to obtain relevant information on their role and strategies in conflict

mediation while 18 sessions of focused group discussions were held in the nearby civic centers in these Local Government Areas. The local language was used to obtain information from participants with the aid of a tape recorder and was later transcribed. Data obtained were analyzed thematically.

## DATA, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected and analyzed reveal that women play a great role in conflict management. The strategies employed include:

### Women Groups

The participation of women in conflict resolution is not optional but rather an essential ingredient of peace-building. The organized participation of women's groups in conflict mediation processes has often times yielded positive result to the conflicting parties thereby bringing understanding and agreements to bear. In the pre-colonial era, women in Ibibio land have organized themselves into associations and unions to champion the course of women as well as ensuring peace in the family, community and the society. Women leaders, particularly those from civil society groups, can appeal to their communities and generate greater buy-in for the mediation process among the broader public. This is especially true in societies where women's interactions with male leaders tend to be limited. The chief mediator whether male or female can play a role in engaging directly women leaders from early on in the process, thus investing in the long-term acceptance and consent for the peace process in the communities these women represent. This is not only a result of the chief mediator behaving more inclusively toward those affected by the process; it reflects the mediator's willingness to demonstrate and implement inclusivity in terms of who is at the peace table and permitted to participate fully. Therefore, women involvement in conflict is voluntary, they are volunteers. Women are volunteers for conflict resolution. It is suggested that women mediators will bring different ('soft') skills to mediation, that they will be more focused on inclusivity, and that they will be catalysts to women's empowerment in mediation (Potter, 2005; De Langis, 2015).

The importance of civil society groups cannot be overstated. Including women in formal peace processes is a necessary goal, but women who are at the peace table to represent a particular party or rebel group tend to primarily voice the interests of their faction; they may differ very little from their male counterparts' priorities and demands. Conversely, women from civil society often represent groups of women and voice their collective priorities and concerns.

In Ibibio land, men and women had their cultural groups that provided for social interaction and recreation. They came in various forms and arrangements and were expressed during festivals, seasonal displays and in the moonlight. Scholars have identified two main women's organizations commonly found in Ibibio communities. These include, *Nka Iban Isong* and *Ebre* clubs. In fact, all married women were expected to join *Ebre* club.

### *Nka Iban Isong:*

Iban Isong (women of the land or community women) was a strong women's pressure group in Ibibio society. According to Abasiattai (1991), *Iban Isong* is an exclusively women's society, which is mid-way between freemasonry and a trade union. Its objective was to safeguard women against the tyranny of the men folk. Iban Isong were a group of bold Ibibio women who used indigenous methods in the fight for justice, liberation and restoration of the Ibibio women folk's dignity in a male dominated world. Every adult female of the village was regarded as a member of *Iban Isong Idung* and when they met as a judicial body, they had the right to impose any form of sanction on offending members and such sanctions would be acceded to by the village head. In fact, most crimes committed by women were referred to this body for trial. Therefore, one could rightly say that *Iban Isong* in Ibibio were groups of women who stood up to fight for peace and justice for the weak and oppressed and as such they were seen as agents of social transformation in the Ibibio traditional society in their own way.

Narrating how *Iban Isong* fight for the rights of the women folk, Udo (1983:153) says:

Any man who abused a woman by talking about her sexual autonomy was deemed to have committed a grave crime against *Iban Isong* Esit. The aggrieved woman usually took the case to the *Iban Isong*, who will fix a day on which it will try the culprit. At about 5 a.m, the women arrived the man's compound, ordered people in the compound to leave, and prevented others from entering the compound. They made the culprit to sit in a central and conspicuous place. While all of them stripped and stood nude before him, forcing the man to look at them. Their faces and bodies painted black and they held objects made in the shape of a woman's uterus...The woman remain in the state of mourning throughout the day, while at the same time they rained curses upon the man. They called upon the supreme God of the sky (Abasi enyong) who made women and endowed them with the sexuality which enabled both men and women to pass into this word, but which the culprit had disgraced, to kill the man and not to give him any issue; they called upon the gods and goddesses (ndem) to kill the man whenever he attempted sexual intercourse with any woman...such a man would die soon after the visit by *Iban Isong*, if their demands were not met. It was in this way that the Ibibio women earned respect from their husbands as well as from other persons.

In a focused group discussion, a discussant, Gloria Inyang (female), 52 years old woman at Ikot Ambang Village Council Hall states:

Women are symbol of peace. In the past, our mothers were members of *Ebre* (women cult) to make sure sanity and peace prevail among women in our communities. We also have women groups and unions like *Iban Isong*, *Uyio Iban*, *Nka Uforo Iban* and other women groups who played a leading role in conflict resolution. If a woman has a problem in her marital family or being abused by somebody, she can approach the women groups to intervene for her. The women group will invite the offender to appear before them in order to answer some questions and if

found guilty will be asked to pay some fines. If the offender refuses their invitation they may move in a group to the person's compound for display just to show their annoyance. These women groups were strong forces against any form of intimidation and abuse of women's rights and that of their children. The society knows our value because members of these women groups were regarded as matured and decent members of the public. We still have some of these women groups in our villages, especially, within Ibibio extraction and they still perform a greater role in conflict management (Focused group discussion on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2019).

Yet, another discussant Lucy Ekanem (female) a 49 year old woman at Ikot Akpaobong Civic Center in Mkpato Enin Local Government Area, narrated as follows;

No society can survive without a woman. We are the ones that usher in peace wherever there is conflict. Women groups and associations have been in the forefront of conflict management before we were born. Today, we have Federation of Women Lawyers that provides free legal services for women, women society organizations, women fellowship in different churches, market women associations, etc. all in the name of defending women and mediating in conflict situations. In most occasions, community women do come together with one mind in the form of peaceful protest to tell community elders the urgent need to end conflict in their communities including communal conflicts, mostly when the lives of their children and husbands are in danger. No woman wants to lose any member of her family to death no matter how serious that conflict might be. To be frank, women groups such as Iban Isong in our different communities are peaceful and responsible women, who have the capacity to mediate in conflict, no matter the gravity of offence, especially when it threatened common existence.

### **Ndok Ufok Ebe (Humiliations of Marital Home)**

Though almost non-existence in the present-day Ibibio society, this consisted of a group of dissatisfied housewives who from time to time banded themselves to protest and publicly express their annoyance at being maltreated by their husbands. They usually went topless, tied rattles around their ankles and took their musical instruments to sing their sorrowful songs of ill-treatment in the market place. A husband who did not want his dirty linen washed in the public would therefore mend his ways.

Ekaette Gorge (female), 55 years old woman from Ikot Udobia in Etinan Local Government Area during a personal interview said:

Let me tell you, women use different songs to express their feelings. Most of these songs are messages that are being passed to usher peace in our communities. Wherever community women are gathered, they do entertain themselves and the public with songs. It is not all the songs that portray Ndok Ufok Ebe. Nowadays we sing songs that speak well about us and our leaders. That does not mean that if a wife or husband behaves wrongly or harm our children, we will sing songs that will send strong messages to them. We women do not joke with traditional sons. I can sing for you even now.

### **Inter-marriage**

Inter-marriage is a marriage between two people of different backgrounds. It is a form of exogamy or marrying outside of one's social group. Imaobong Udofia said that:

Inter-marriage encourages growth and social interaction and reduces a tribal and ethnic conflict which is one of the problems facing the society. In Ibibio, there is a very high regard to in-laws (ukod) and grandchildren (eyeyen) from their married daughters. In-laws and grandchildren are sacred to Ibibio people and they could not be harmed nor killed for whatever reason no matter that level of offence. The safety of in-laws and grandchildren is always guaranteed and they fear neither being charmed, poisoned nor violently attacked by their in-laws or mother's village. With this in mind, in-laws and grandchildren were always safe in their wife's or mother's village in times of trouble or conflict and in most cases when a grandchild intervenes in any conflict situation that involves his or her mother's family or community, elders from such family or community always respect whatever that will come out from the mouth of such a grandchild in order to sustain the bond of peace. Married daughters do approach elders in the family/community where conflict persists and chart a way forward on the need to end such conflict.

### **Apologies**

Ibibio women are good in apologizing. This shows respect, deference and accommodation. Using sorry as an occasional heartfelt response to disappointment can be very effective at home and outside. At its best, it demonstrates humility and asks for atonement. An apology is about taking responsibility and making a commitment to do differently next time. It is true that the word 'sorry' unconsciously diffuses conflict. Smith (2008) assumed that females are more likely than males to offer an apology. Also, Holmes (1989) found that compared to males, females were more likely to offer an apology, with females offering 75% of apologies. For women, apologizing is a way of reconnecting with someone whose feelings you have hurt, however inadvertently. When a woman gets feedback that something she has done or failed to do have left another feeling offended or injured, she is usually quick to apologize. A breach in the relationship is avoided and the relationship continues undisturbed. Neither the woman offering nor the man receiving the apology regard it as unusual but rather see it as a routine aspect of relationship. An Ibibio woman will always tender an apology to her husband mostly when there is a misunderstanding between the husband and the daughter or son. For instance, in the case of unwanted pregnancy and other unwholesome behaviours that could provoke the father who may take a strong decision against such a child and it is expected of the wife to perform a mediating role between the husband and the offended son or daughter. In the extended family circle, the husband might have a conflict with his kinsmen or community people may be because of inheritance or land dispute or whatever, it is the wife's duty to talk to the husband in a respectful manner for him to accept peace to prevail and this might be when both of them are on the bed at night or by cooking delicious food to the husband thereby getting his attention.

**Mrs. Idorenyin Akpan said in an interview;**

We women are so compassionate and we like to tender apologies for wrong doings. We do not want anything negative to happen to the children we brought to this world. We bear the pains of motherhood. The aim of an apology is to re-establish a relationship broken by a harmful act. It is to restore trust and to give back the offended person the dignity that they feel has been lost. It is meant to put right what went wrong and this may involve taking extra measures. Apologies express accountability, regret, remorse and reassure that the harmful act will not be repeated. An Ibibio woman will always approach the husband and apologize on behalf of the son or daughter that offends the father. They also apologize to elders of the family or community when there is conflict involving their children. I could recall when my first daughter became pregnant out of wedlock; my husband sent my daughter away and warned her never to return to his house. As a mother with a soft heart, I went into the matter and God willing, my husband gave me a listening ear and she was accepted back to the family.

**Another respondent, Ekaette Ekanem said;**

Apology is helpful in the resolution of disputes. Women are very good at tendering apologies. I am a mother of six children. I have five (5) boys and a girl. When I have issues with my husband, my only daughter always apologizes on my behalf. I see her as a mediator even when other of her siblings fights in the house. A woman's approach to conflict resolution is always very calm and successful. It is easy to for a woman to calm a hot tempered person than a man.

**CONCLUSION**

The study has examined the roles and strategy adopted by Ibibio women in conflict management. Findings show that marriages create social relationships through which the sanctity of the god of in-law (*abasi Uko*) and grandchild (*abasi eyeyen*) among others became the bond of peace in Ibibioland. Women mediate in conflict situations directly and indirectly and sometimes unconsciously. Their roles in conflict management, though mostly on unofficial capacities, bring peace and stability to the society. The strategies employed include, but are not limited to apologies, women's cultural groups, traditional songs, and marriage. Conflict is indeed a social process which is a common and essential feature of human existence. Conflicts often force women to organize themselves to safeguard necessities that will create a new status quo. Women maintain harmony in the family and community and everyone is affected when they are excluded from peace building efforts or processes. Women are also the central caretakers of families and everyone is affected when they are excluded from peace building. Women are also advocates for peace, as peacekeepers, relief workers and mediators. Women are symbols of peace wherever in the world. We can conclude by saying that society exist because women are part of the society, their contributions to societal stability no matter how negligible

accounted for peace coexistence in the world where women are active participants no matter cultural limitations.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The study recommends that;

- (a) Women in Ibibioland should be involved officially in conflict management initiatives and their strategies adapted in conflict situations.
- (b) Women participation in conflict management has brought lasting peace to the society. These significant roles and strategies associated with Ibibio women should be encouraged.
- (c) Community leaders should see their women as an asset far beyond the traditional belief that women have their place in the kitchen. They should involve women in peacebuilding processes, because they have the capacity to quell conflict and reconcile conflicting parties.
- (d) For conflict to be resolved there must be a concerted effort and willingness by the actors involved to ensure that the various conflict resolution mechanisms they will adopt will be able to see the light of day.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW/FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSIONS GUIDE

- Q1: How old are you?  
 Q2: Are you married?  
 Q3: How long have you stayed in this community?  
 Q4: Do you belong to any women group in your community?  
 Q5: Have you ever witnessed any conflict in your community?  
 Q6: How did the community settle the conflict?  
 Q7: Do you think women have a role in conflict management?  
 Q8: If you think women have a role in conflict management, what are the roles?  
 Q9: How do women play the role?  
 Q10: Do women have strategies in managing conflict?  
 Q11: What have been the strategies that women use in managing conflict in your community?  
 Q12: How effective are these strategies?  
 Q13: What is your advice towards the official involvement of women in conflict management in Nigeria?