Chapter 15

Empowering Women for Conflict Resolution and Management

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Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in both developed and developing nations as well as at homes, places of worship and communities. It is therefore, important for women to be empowered for effective participation in conflict resolution in order to bring about enduring and sustainable peace. According to Tearfund (2014), an organisation that is committed to peace building in situations of conflicts by equipping movements and people, is of the opinion that people including women should work together to prevent and respond to conflicts. This can be achieved by examining the root causes of conflicts in order to restore broken relationships and respond promptly to crisis. This implies that efforts at resolving and managing conflict must not be exclusive but inclusive involving cooperation, collaboration and understanding of the conflicting situation. Women must, therefore, be empowered to develop objective and constructive views to political and social relationships across ethnic, religion, class, home, national and racial boundaries; the purpose of which is to resolve injustice across board, in possibly non-violent ways and transform and address the conflicting situations. When women are involved in conflict resolutions, there is not only peace in communities, but also endurable peace and self-sustaining development.

Traditionally, women are regarded as weaker vessels in comparison to men. They are seen as people not to be educated as their education will likely end up in the kitchen. However, women have good traits that could bring to bear on conflict resolution. They are the pillar of families and communities. Their nurture of the homes which can be termed as inreach factors through providing care and support naturally transcend to their outreach roles of building communities and taking leading roles in various community organisations hence woman need to be empowered more for conflict resolution and management. Paige and LMSW (2024) are of the opinion that gender is often impressed before birth. What it means to be a woman can vary depending on culture, gender identity and expression. What it means to be woman as stated above varies from person to person.

Gender being a social construct is influenced by many factors such as individual experiences, hopes and emotions. A woman must be made and empowered to make use of her experiences and sense of self to bear on whatever she does. The

self-identity of especially confidence would empower a woman to speak and boldly address any conflicting situation without fear or favour. However, the issue of gender discrimination manifests all over the world; at home, work places, communities and relationships, hence women tend to be silenced by the masculine gender in issues where women are to voice out their opinions. Systemic gender disparities contribute to a culture where women's leadership is diminished, leading to a lack of self-perception as leaders.

Empowering women to take their rightful place in society, particularly in conflict resolution, requires a focus on building their self-esteem and confidence. This empowerment hinges on providing access to information, as information is power, and fostering positive social engagement. Without timely and useful information, women's participation in conflict resolution remains a distant goal (Adedokun, 2018).In essence, empowering women means cultivating their self-worth, securing their autonomy, and enabling them to drive positive change and advocate for their rights and the rights of others.Women's ability to contribute meaningfully to conflict resolution is significantly enhanced by education and access to information. When provided with opportunities, resources, and a sense of self-worth, women can confidently participate in conflict resolution and management

Conflict Management

Conflict management is the process of limiting negative aspects of conflicts while increasing the positive aspects whenever conflicts arise. The aim is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness to make peace ensue. Conflicts happen in communities, families and places of work between trade unions and workers, conflict is thus, a common issue in any organization, family or communities where different interest groups exist. Conflicts occur where an action of one party is perceived as preventing or interfering with the goals, needs or actions of another party. Conflicts occur from the interaction between members (organizations, families and communities including the world at large) and across various organizations as members make efforts to achieve the goals and objectives laid for such organizations, families or communities (Amoda, Awe, Ogunade, & Yakubu, 2021).

Conflicts tend to be associated with negative features and situations that lead to dysfunctional situations and may at the same time lead to creative problem solving which brings development (Ojo and Abolade, 2014). Their study revealed that effective conflict management enhances good performance in organizations and peace is built. Training and re- training was recommended for people, women inclusive, for effective conflict management.

The study of Amoda et. al (2021) revealed various strategies like arbitration, dialogue, effective communication strategies are some strategies that could be

used to manage conflicts. This underscores the importance of effective interaction among conflicting parties. Women should, thus be trained for empowerment in various conflict management strategies. In addition to the above stated strategies, making use of culture if civility, win- lose strategy, lose- lose strategy, win – win strategy, diplomacy, negotiation, communication, accommodation and collective bargaining among others (Basiru, 2022). Conflict management brings about efficiency in job performances, peace and understanding at home, communities and the world at large. It is, therefore, important for women to be empowered through training and re-training programmes in order to be able to participate effectively in issues of conflict management.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution and conflict management, though sometimes used interchangeably, have distinct meanings. Conflict management involves the prevention and control of conflict, ensuring that disagreements do not escalate into destructive disputes. On the other hand, conflict resolution focuses on the process of addressing and resolving conflicts to achieve a lasting solution. Conflict resolution refers to the tools, methods, or approaches used to handle conflicts effectively. However, the most effective strategy for managing conflict is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. Like conflict management, conflict resolution involves various methods, including joint consultations among conflicting parties, mediation, and collective bargaining (Ojo & Abolade, 2014).
Effective conflict resolution strategies have the potential to bring people together in the search for solutions to disputes. This process fosters teamwork and cultivates a culture of mutual respect. Conflict resolution is grounded in effective communication and trust, both of which facilitate quicker and more amicable resolutions. Essential life skills, such as negotiation, empathy, and problem-solving, play a crucial role in resolving conflicts constructively. By employing these skills, individuals can reach cordial and sustainable solutions to disputes (MailChimp.com, 2024).Furthermore, for women to effectively handle conflicts in a professional manner, they must undergo continuous training and re-training programs. These programs will equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to mediate conflicts efficiently and promote peaceful resolutions in various settings.

The Essence of Women Empowerment for Conflict Resolution and Management

Empowerment is the vital process of equipping individuals with the authority and resources needed to make informed decisions that benefit themselves and their communities. It cultivates autonomy, enabling people to take control of their actions and shape their own paths. This autonomy, in turn, fosters strength, confidence, and improved self-esteem, leading to a positive self-perception, a concept intrinsically linked to effective management. Empowerment, as defined

by Adams (2008), is the ability of individuals, groups, or communities to control their circumstances and exercise power to achieve their goals. It's a means of maximizing quality of life, both individually and collectively, a concept echoed by Zimmerman (2000) and Rappaport (1984), who emphasize that empowerment enables individuals to gain mastery over their lives and overcome challenges.

Empowerment carries significant sociological implications, particularly in addressing the exclusion of marginalized groups from decision-making processes. This is especially relevant for women, who are often excluded from vital decisions and subjected to the choices made by men. Therefore, empowering women to access basic opportunities and participate fully in all aspects of life is crucial. This involves fostering self-confidence and developing skills for self-sufficiency, ensuring women are not marginalized in their communities, homes, or workplaces. The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (2017) reinforces this, advocating for equal empowerment for all genders through improved conditions, standards, and a global perspective.

Empowerment equips individuals with the skills and knowledge to overcome obstacles in life, work, and conflict situations. It unlocks the inherent decision-making power derived from personal experience, as noted by Blanchard, John, and Alan (1996). Furthermore, empowerment is central to human rights and development. The United Nations (2017) prioritizes gender equality and women's empowerment in its global development agenda. Cheryl (1999) views empowerment as a means of fostering power in individuals to address issues relevant to their lives, communities, and society.

In practical terms, empowering people, especially women, involves teaching skills and knowledge that motivate them to improve their living conditions. Empowerment is both a process and a transformative outlook for individuals, organizations, and communities. It's a collective endeavour that encourages active participation, critical reflection, and awareness. It enables individuals to understand the relationship between their actions and outcomes, linking personal control with efficacy. Specifically, for women, it means exercising personal control, demonstrating efficacy in conflict resolution, and believing in their capacity to resolve conflicts. Ultimately, everyone possesses the potential to be empowered and to use that empowerment to build strong relationships at home, work, and in society, as articulated by Lisa, Tammy, and Torey (2023).

Empowering Women in Conflict Resolution: Strategies for Peacebuilding

The empowerment of women in conflict resolution is not merely a matter of social justice; it is a strategic imperative for building lasting peace. Women, often deeply affected by conflict, possess unique perspectives and skills that are vital to resolving disputes and fostering reconciliation. To fully realize this potential, women must be equipped with a range of conflict resolution strategies.

At the foundation of these strategies lies negotiation. This is not about adversarial "winning," but about collaborative problem-solving. It requires women to engage in open dialogue, actively listen to opposing viewpoints, and communicate effectively to find common ground. Crucial to this process are emotional intelligence, patience, and analytical thinking (Adedokun, 2012).

Mediation and dialogue offer complementary approaches. Mediation introduces a neutral third party to facilitate communication and guide conflicting parties toward mutually acceptable solutions.This necessitates trust in the mediator's impartiality, a role that civil women's organizations can often fulfil. The UN Women (2024) on the issue of conflict prevention and resolution opined that women's participation in mediation is important as women are crucial partners in economic recovery, and social cohesion. This will ensure more members of the community to become involved in peace making. This is suggestive of having an inclusive mediation. The document suggests that an inclusive mediation would lead to full understanding of causes of conflict and all would bring their experiences to seek solution to such through holistic approach.

Dialogue, on the other hand, provides a platform for direct communication, allowing parties to address the root causes of conflict and seek nonviolent resolutions. Forclough (2001) highlights dialogue as a means to prevent crises through nonviolent resolution while Barcovites et al. (2002) suggest it can be used to terminate violence. Principally, cconflicting parties discuss and resolve differences.

When negotiation and mediation prove insufficient, arbitration provides a more formal legal avenue (Falusi, Owoeye, and Olabanji ,2023). Here, an arbitrator makes a legally binding decision after reviewing evidence and arguments. This strategy requires women to understand legal procedures and recognize when court involvement is necessary. Importantly, traditional forms of arbitration, often rooted in community customs, offer flexible and culturally sensitive alternatives to formal legal processes (Falusi et al., 2023).

Value of Education in Women Empowerment for Peacebuilding

Underlying all the strategies highlighted is the necessity of education and training. Education is a way by which worthwhile and valuable cultures of the society are transmitted from one generation to another. The main function of education is to expand the knowledge base of people and it enables people to understand and undertake socio-economic, cultural and political transformations necessary to understand political and conflicting situations. Through education, people acquire knowledge and this is why knowledge is power. The role education is expected to play is to use power with piety to bring people up with good sense of judgement that will empower them in making good decisions. Education is expected to play a

role of motivating people in the task of mentoring a generation that will carry out roles of leadership themselves (Adedokun, 2012).

Education both traditional and formal will bring empowerment to women. Traditionally, experiences have been built up through parents and the culture of the people while through formal education, the arts of reading, writing and numeracy are cultivated. The sustainable development goals among others include fighting injustice, inequality and bringing about peace and justice (Adedokun, 2018); the achievements of these goals may become a mirage due to lack of information literacy. This calls for women to be empowered through education because educated people are more likely to understand, support and create solutions that ensure and sustain development. There must be the provision of learning and education experiences for women as these are necessary ingredients for seeking solutions to impending and imminent societal problems (Adedokun, 2019).

Women are to be empowered to become good managers of conflicts through various strategies that strengthen them and embolden them to put their innate potentials to good use. It should be noted that education for women is important in the process of empowering them for conflict resolutions. Adedokun (2019) submits that learning is a lifelong process through which one uses acquired experiences to deal with new situations, develop new relationship and solve new problems. This implies that acquired learning in school must not be seen as being enough for solving everyday problem. There is need for women to acquire various skills that will help them solve emerging problems. Women must be empowered with life skills that will enable them to meet with daily challenges. Life skill in Adedokun (2019) is described as skills that will make individuals function well in their environment, make them active and productive members of their societies. Functionality requires an interplay of skills, coupling various skills to give a person confidence and a sense of control over situations around them. Threatening situations like conflicts borne out of anger, stress and environmental challenges abound in all societies of the world, this is why acquisition of life skills which will enable individuals to cope with these threatening situations on an everyday basis.

The World Health Organisation as quoted by Adedokun (2019) highlights the cross-cultural areas of life skills which are important to living quality of life and bring peace to communities and people. Such include:
- Decision making and problem-solving skills. Every person inclusive of women must be given the prerogative to participate in decision making that will bring resolutions to conflicting issues. Everybody must be empowered in the area of problem solving and not give others the opportunity to decide or solve their problems for them.

- Creative and critical thinking. These skills are germane for self-reliance which is borne out of self-esteem and confidence. This implies being independent in thought and action.
- Communication and interpersonal skill. Ensuring successful resolution and management of conflict is dependent on effective communication and interdependence. With good communication ability, active listening is enhanced which produces good and objective judgement.
- Self-awareness will enable each person to identify his/her areas of weaknesses and embark on the strong areas in bringing about resolution to any conflict
- Assertiveness: Women should be empowered to be assertive and not blown about by winds of doubt. Opinions should be expressed with confidence when expressing the truth. Even in the face of threats and intimidations, truth must be expressed calmly in order to make for interpersonal relationships.
- Resilience is another great life skill needed in the process of conflict resolutions. Doubts may be thrown at women in the process of resolving conflicts, there is the need to be resilient and cope with emotions in the process of managing conflicts.
- Focus and self-control: Women in conflict situations and management must be focused; not being carried away by the point of view of a person. They must exercise self-control in the process of pronouncing judgement. To be self-controlled and focused means to be attentive and reflective.
- Perspective taking will help each person to understand the other and thereby respecting each other's opinion leading to resolution.
- Each woman must be ready to take on challenges instead of avoiding them. This will enhance their self-directedness, through which potentials are brought out and made good use of and thereby leading to self-growth.

In this regard, equipping women with the knowledge and skills to navigate complex conflicts is paramount. This includes developing their ability to manage emotions, communicate effectively, and understand legal frameworks. By investing in women's capacity for conflict resolution, societies can unlock a powerful resource for building peace and fostering social cohesion. Each woman must be empowered to become literate as improved literacy limits injustice and inequality among people and it promotes democracy. Through democratic principles, women would not be jettisoned in the process of conflict resolution. Women must have full rights to education as this will arm them with vital information needed for good judgement. Along line traditional education, information literacy must be encouraged so that women can access vital information through e-library or social media, these could enhance their overall view of the world and empower them to enable good decisions in cases of conflicts (IFLA, 2018). With proper education, the gap between tacit knowledge

and explicit knowledge will be bridged. The above implies that education and acquisition of life skills are important for empowering women for conflict resolution and management. In especially, acquired education will provide them with the following skills (United Nations, 2024):

- Decision making and problem-solving skills. Every person inclusive of women must be given the prerogative to participate in decision making that will bring resolutions to conflicting issues. Everybody must be empowered in the area of problem solving and not give others the opportunity to decide or solve their problems for them.

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- Each woman must be ready to take on challenges instead of avoiding them. This will enhance their self-directedness, through which potentials are brought out and made good use of and thereby leading to self-growth.

Conclusion

The paper dealt with the fact that conflict is inevitable. Conflict can be negative leading to destruction or it can be positive leading to development. Efforts at resolving conflicts must be inclusive, women should be given opportunities in resolving and managing conflicts. Women should be educated and empowered to

use their life experiences and life skills to wade into conflict arising and be given proper advocacy that would encourage them to be organised into civil organisations to make them more powerful. Some strategies of conflict resolutions were also discussed and that women should be empowered through training to make good use of the strategies in conflict resolution and management. Some of the importance of empowering women for conflict resolution were also discussed.

Recommendations

Based on the exposition in this paper, the following are recommended:
- Women should be empowered to face the challenges of their lives by being bold to free themselves from the chains of men bondage.
- Efforts should be made at given proper education to women to enhance their potentialities
- Women must be versed in communication, be good listeners and objective in their judgement.
- Women must be willing to be part of civil organisations in societies in order for them to be strong to fight their course.
- Empowerment of any kind is a form of willingness. All women should be willing to be empowered and educated. When educated, they will be able to network with the world on issues of violence and how to relegate it to the background. In issues of conflict resolution, they would not be found wanting as they would have prepared themselves as being up to the task.
- With women empowerment, gender discrimination would be at its lowest.
- Every woman must rise up to the issue of empowering other women in order to resolve and manage erupted conflicts so that the world will be a better place to live in.

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