

**Umuada and Peace Building in Emerging Youth Restiveness
in Igboland, 2010-2020.**

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Abstract

The study examines the role of Umuada in peace building amid rising youth restiveness in Igbo land. The Umuada institution represents a traditional female social structure in Igbo society where married and unmarried daughters maintain significant cultural, spiritual and political authority within their natal communities. The paper examines the historical foundations of Umuada authority, their traditional roles in dispute settlement and their unique positioning as both insiders and outsiders within their natal communities a status that grant them moral authority and impartiality in mediating conflicts. The paper adopted historical qualitative research methodology which relied on primary and secondary sources. The finding reveals that Umuada groups employs various strategies like dialogue facilitation between aggrieved youth and traditional authorities, economic empowerment initiatives, cultural reorientation programs and their ritual power to enforce peace agreement. identifies both the strengths of this indigenous peace building approach inclining cultural legitimacy, gender sensitive perspectives and deep community knowledge and its limitations in addressing structural issues driving youth restiveness. Again, this discourse on indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, gender and peace building in African contexts, and the relevance of traditional institutions in contemporary governance will minimize youth restiveness. The paper concludes that the integrating Umuada structures into formal peace building frameworks in addressing the need for institutional strengthening and intergenerational knowledge transfer to ensure sustainability.

Keywords: *Umuada, Peace Building, Youth Restiveness, Conflict Resolution, Cultural Values, Social Change*

Introduction

For the effective functioning of every society, whether traditional or modern, peace building remains a focal principle of peaceful co-existence. Peace is a priceless commodity every society seeks to acquire and implement as a core value in the society. Peace is always said to be a harbinger of progress and development in the society. Peace building acts as a bridge against hostile attitudes that are bad to the progress of the society.

The Umuada Igbo, epitomize these values of initiating peace in various Igbo society, because the Umuada generally were seen as peace makers and they were always invited by their families or Umunna (kinsmen) in some important issues for their inputs and promotion of peace. Peace building is a cardinal role of the Umuada in conflict prevention and resolution mechanism. Their roles are sacrosanct in peace building because when men fail for example Umunna (Kinsmen) in their decision to create a tranquil and peaceful atmosphere, the Umuada steps in to fill the vacuum to create peace, for example, if a quarrel happens in the family or even between villages, they were invited because they are not biased, there is a believe that they will always tell the truth. Sometimes if any case was not judged well by the men, Umuada revisits the case for better judgment. They initiated a thorough mechanism through questioning, information gathering (Igba Nju) and reconciliation meeting with the conflicting patterns. In other to deescalate conflict and hostilities among members. The Umuada wields a big stick in a hostile situation to bring peace between the warring parties in other to reconcile the aggrieved parties as friends and brothers.

According to Agbasiere, Umuada Igbo are daughters of the lineage, clans and family who were married outside the community. The author argued further that Umuada weighs the power of finality in issues concerning the peace of their paternal family and community at large, in matters of conflict resolutions and peace building. The Umuada achieve this feat to forestall peaceful co-existence and order within the society and their individual families.¹

The Umuada Igbo had always been on the vanguard for peace building in pre-colonial and post-colonial Igbo society. This could be seen in their charismatic approaches in peace building and conflict resolution in pre and post independent South Eastern Nigeria. The Umuada over the years had high reputations in peace building.² No matter how big a problem may be, the Umuada, are determined to resolve it and bring peace within the society. The Umuada exhibit reconciliatory and advisory roles to bring peace in the society. These approaches were activated to avoid violent conflicts in the society which may be regarded as dysfunctional in nature.

In recent times, the role of Umuada as a conflict management institution has reduced due to the fact that most cases are now handled by the police and judiciary, that does not imply that they are no more in practice or forgotten. The big question now arise what could have been the causes of the abandonment of these noble roles which over the years had been an integral value system of the Umuada in peace building, could the cause be attributed to modernity, forgetfulness of the basic dynamics of peace building mechanism which had been practiced and internalise in the time past. These questions are what this study wants to unravel and brings to the fore in other to showcase the contributing factors behind these derailments. The contemporary nature of Igbo society in recent times where the police and the judiciary set in to take over the role of Umuada becomes a problem in the sense that it does not allow Umuada to perform their traditional roles in facilitating peace. It is worthy of note that in this 21st century certain factors like urbanization and urban migration, western education and modernization, globalization and cultural changes and erosion among others have contributed drastically to the derailment of the roles played by the Umuada in this 21st century.

The Concept of Peace Building

Peace invariably could be described as the stoppage of violent conflicts, a state of quiet or tranquil situation. Peace building could rather be referred to as the absence of hostilities between two belligerents or combatants. Peace could transcend to mutual relationship between people by respecting justice and equity and fair play in dealing with each other or individuals at large. Peace invariably could be described in a lay man perspective as the absence of war, a state of calmness, serenity, among others. It could be seen that when peace is described as absence of war, when it is stretched further to mean absence of direct violence among others.

¹ J. T. Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and thought* (London: Routledge, 2000), 96.

² Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and thought*, 96.

According to Karrame, peace building prevents the outbreak of reoccurrence or continuations of violent conflicts from reoccurring. Peace building could be seen with the aim of resolving injustice and violent conflicts with the sole aim of transforming structural and cultural conditions that generate destructive conflicts into a more peaceful atmosphere for peaceful co-existence.³

Lihamamba, makes distinction in his analysis between formal and informal activities in peace process. The author further highlighted that in formal peace building which is exclusive at the preview of governmental organization with the exclusion of women folk but rather the women had contributed to the peace deals in conflict resolutions vis-à-vis peace building in Mongoro region of Tanzania.⁴ Although, the author did not base his study in Igbo society but uses Tanzania as a case study.

The Umuada traditionally serves as neutral mediators in family and community disputes, drawing authority from their unique positions as both insiders by birth and outsiders by marriage. Their interventions are particularly valued in resolving conflicts between their natal family and other groups, as they can advocate impartially while commanding respect through their spiritual connection to their lineage's ancestral homeland.

The Role of Umuada Igbo and Peace Building in Igbo Land

According to Agbasiere, the Umuada; meaning; "Daughters of The Land" in Igbo. The Umuada plays a significant and multifaceted role in peace building within the Igbo communities. They were well respected in Igboland.⁵ The author went further to explain that the Umuada are daughters of the lineage, family and clans who were married or unmarried outside or within the community. The author argues that Umuada weighs the power of finality in issues of conflict resolutions and peace building in the family and the society at large. It is worthy of note that where men were unable to settle disputes, the Umuada steps in to settle it and create a condition for peaceful atmosphere.

Uchem, in collaboration with the views of Agbasiere observed that every Igbo woman belongs to these village-based groups irrespective of creed or social status.⁶ For Eme, the author posits that the relevance of Umuada Igbo in Igboland cannot be over emphasized.⁷ The author described Umuada as native daughters of the soil who were indispensable in the Igbo social political arrangements. The author finally concludes that based on the audacious roles of the Umuada in peace building they step in to resolve issues and create an enabling atmosphere for peace where the Umunna (Kinsmen) fails to agree on any matter or matters.

Nwoye observe that the Umuada in all Igbo cultures were recognized as judges, peace brokers and enforcers. They were always decent and dynamic in their decisions and actions to midwife peace in the land of their birth.⁸ The author stresses further that the Umuada are great arbiters in Igboland. He argues further that the Umuada resolves disputes in their individual families. They also offer useful suggestions and pieces of advices for peaceful resolutions of conflicts and peace building within the family and community at large.⁹ According to Uchem, for example Umuada adapt different approaches to peace building.

A. Openness and Effective Communication:

The Umuada facilitates dialogues between conflicting parties in order to reach a compromise to settle disputes and perceived grievances in other to avoid escalating tempers that may be dysfunctional to the progress of the society. This involves active listening, Identifying the root cause of the problem and assist to initiate peace among conflicting parties.¹⁰ The author argues further that conciliatory approaches of the Umuada makes the conflicting parties to reach an agreement towards exploring modalities to resolve the conflict and build the atmosphere of peace. The Umuada could also exert force to bring peace to steer the tide of conflict, where it has created deep-rooted feelings of hatred and acrimony. Their decision was final because they were regarded as not

³ Kari Karime, *Gender and Peace Building in Africa* (Norway: Works Pub. 2004), 6.

⁴ A. Lihamanba, *Women's Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Skills Mongoro Region* (Tanzania: UNESCO Report 2003), 23-25.

⁵ Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and thought* (London: Routledge, 2000), 92.

⁶ R. N. Uchem, *Over Coming Women's Subordination in Igbo African Culture and in the Catholic Church* (Owerri: Okey Publishers, 2001), 68.

⁷ M. Eme, *The Women in Igbo Culture* (New Jersey: Dortan Books, 2007), 6.

⁸ A. Nwoye, *Role of Women in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Societies* (Nairobi: Kenyatta University Press, 2008) p.31.

⁹ Nwoye, *Role of Women in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Societies*.

¹⁰ Uchem, R.N. *Over Coming Women's Subordination in Igbo African Culture and in The Catholic Church*. (Owerri Okey Pub, 2001)

biased and always stand for truth in order to bring peace within the society. Also, the Umuada were obligated to appear in a Court of Law to present their verdicts or decision if the parties decide to go to court.

B. Education Aim at Promoting Harmonious Co-existence:

According to Nwoye, who opined that in the pre-colonial Igbo society, women played effective role in educating the young ones to learn the moral values and internalize the norms and cultural values of the community for harmonious coexistence with other people as early as when they were young.¹¹ Fukuyama, in agreement with the views of Nwoye who observed that this type of education was informal which internalized values and norms shared among members of a group that permits shared cooperation among them.¹² The author finally concludes that this type of education was geared towards socialization of the young one which was effectively supervised by Umuada. In addition to that Abigail, observed that women sustain the social fabrics of the society or peace building¹³. She pointed out that women trained girls as responsible future mothers, as well as boys as responsible fathers by maintaining the social fabrics of the society for peace building.¹⁴

C. Mediation and Arbitration:

The Umuada acts as informal court applying cultural norms with adequate knowledge to mediate and arbitrate on disputes between their families and their immediate communities at large. It is worthy of note that their decisions carry heavy penalties because of their neutrality and unbiased positions on issues of conflict resolution and peace building and also the penalties awarded serves as deterrents to defaulters.

Eme, observed that the Umuada occupies a centre piece in peace building, mediation, and conflict resolutions in pre-colonial and post-colonial Igbo society because of the enormous roles they play in instituting peace in the society.¹⁵ The author further stressed that the Umuada were responsible for the reconciliation and mediations of litigants in conflicts to create peace among themselves, family, and the community at large for harmonious co-existence devoid of rancour. The author concluded that the Umuada were a voice to reckon within the Igbo socio-political arrangements. That is why in certain cases where the Umunna (kins men) fails to agree on any matter, the Umuada steps in to resolve the issue. As a result of their charismatic roles they play in peace building, in extreme cases the Umunna takes the back seat and abide by the rulings of the Umuada in peace building and conflict resolutions. The Umuada in their characteristic's idiosyncrasies were strict but fair in their intervention and adjudication in peace building mechanism; that is why generally, the Umuada were recognized as judges, peace builders and enforcers.¹⁶

Jeane argued that the Umuada offered peaceful suggestions for peace building and conflict resolutions in their various communities and in their various families at large. They were always a voice to be heard in any family matters of great importance.¹⁷ The author argues further that the Umuada was always given the floor in their various families and communities at large to contribute their views when matters of great concern were raised and needs urgent and critical solutions. They were well respected and given special privileges and honour each time they visited their paternal homeland. Their views in any matter were respected seriously by the elders and kinsmen.

Youth Restiveness

Youth restiveness could be regarded as impatient organizations on the side of the youths especially when they are not satisfied with things around them. Elegbeleye observed that youth restiveness could be described as a suitable protest embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youth. As a collective action of desires driven by dissatisfaction, the youths are seeking changes from established power structures.¹⁸ Newunwa postulated that youth restiveness is a collection of an embodiment of

¹¹ A. Nwoye, *Role of Women in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Societies*, 16.

¹² F. Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstruction of Social Order*. (London: Profit Publishers, 2010), 10.

¹³ Uchem, R.N. *Over Coming Women's Subordination in Igbo African Culture and in The Catholic Church*.

¹⁴ Abigail. D. Denis, "Combating Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: Proffering Workable Solutions" *American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 1, No. 80. 2009, 15.

¹⁵ Ene, *The Women in Igbo Culture*, 4.

¹⁶ Ene, *The Women in Igbo Culture*.

¹⁷ Jeane F. D., *Women and War* (London: Zeed Books Publishers, 1993), 20.

¹⁸ O. B. Elegbeleye, *Combating Youth Restiveness in Nigeria at Proffering Workable Solutions* (Ilorin: University of Ilorin Press, 2005), 10.

all forms of youth activities that pose or have it potential of posing threat to orderliness, life and property.¹⁹ It is however a point to note that this exposure broadens the scope to encompass both violent and non-violent activities of youth that trends to distrust the existing order.

Youth Restiveness in Igbo Land

It is however a disturbing trend in this 21st century that the entire South Eastern states of Nigeria is engulfed by violence and youth restiveness. It is unfortunate that to reckon that the entire Igboland had known no peace since the beginning of this social upheavals in Igboland. It is worthy of note that the Southern Eastern states of Nigeria have been witnessing untold hardship ranging from wanton destruction of lives and properties, kidnapping and ransom payments, loss of business and livelihood as a result of incessant sit at home orders since the beginning of these Litany of violence in Igboland which had been the ripple effects of this youth restiveness. It is worrisome and mind boggling that this new normal is beginning to defying all solutions to mitigate this ravaging enigma in the bud.

In retrospect, the youths were regarded as the nerve center of every society. That is why every society both primitive and civilize societies works assiduously to preserve her youths.

The youths were said to be the future of tomorrow. In collaboration to this view Urua opined that the youth could be referred to as young men and women who are no longer children but who are not yet adults.²⁰

UNESCO reports agrees with the views of Urua and posit that the youths could be said to be the period of transition from childhood dependence to childhood independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of the community.²¹ The report finally concludes that a youth could be regarded as person between the ages of 18-35 years. Arising out of these arguments the National Policy of Education opined that the youth could be seen as those persons belonging to the age bracket of 16-30 years.²²

Causes of Youth Restiveness in Igboland

According to Chukwuezi, youth restiveness in Igboland is a new normal in recent times that is trying to ravage the entire South East.²³ He stressed that the causes of youth restiveness in Igboland could be traced to some salient factors such as youth exclusion from the main stream of political participations, high rate of unemployment, bad governance by not allowing the dividends of democracy to trickle down to the people that elected their representatives to power, inequitable distribution of goods and services among the youth. However, Elegbelaye argued differently by observing that what contributed to youth restiveness could be traced to peer motivated excitement of being a student, jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation parenting style.²⁴ In collaboration with this view, Anazodo postulated that what amount to youth restiveness could be link to family failure.²⁵ This view by Anazodo collaborates with the theme of this paper under interrogation about the duties of the Umuada in peace building. It was geared towards bringing up of younger ones to become better adults tomorrow. The negations of this values amount to youth restiveness.

Factors That Inhibit the Roles of Umuada Igbo in Combating Youth Restiveness

Umuada Igbo are all daughters of the lineage who were married or unmarried within and outside of their community. Umuada were versed with potential attributes in traditional peace building and conflict resolutions mechanism that cannot be overemphasied. This is because of their versed professional and charismatic approaches in issues of traditional peace building and other matters that concerns the betterment of the community and their family at large. The Umuada apply best traditional best practices based on acceptable

¹⁹ G.C. Newunwa, *Academic Background, Social-Economic Status and Gender Implications for Youths Restiveness and Educational Development in River State*. (Scientific and Academic Publishing, Port Harcourt: Jeans Publishers, 2007), 30.

²⁰ O. A. Urua, "Academic Background, Social-economic Status and Gender: Implications for Youth Restiveness and Educational Development in River's State." *International Journal of Applied Sociology*. Vol. 5, No. 17, (2015), 16.

²¹ UNESCO Report 2017 on Youth Restiveness in Nigeria. <http://www.Unescoreport2024.com>

²² National Policy of Education (2014) Edition on Youth Restiveness, 85.

²³ C. O. Chukwuezi, "Poverty and Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: Implication for National Development." *Ozean Journal of Social Sciences*. Vol.2, No.2, (2009), 40.

²⁴ Elegbelaye, *Combating Youth Restiveness in Nigeria at Proffering Workable Solutions*, 13.

²⁵ J. P. Anazodo et al "Social Control in the South - South Nigeria: Implications for Foreign Investment", *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*. Vol. 5, No.17, (2011), 10.

traditional norms and values of the society. It is interesting to note that in time past, the Umuada were at the top of their game in conflict resolutions and peace building. It is obviously quite glaring that during the pre and post-colonial Igbo society youth restiveness or violence was drastically reduced to the barest minimum than what is obtainable today. It is extremely quite disgusting and unwarranted that youth restiveness had become the order of the day in this contemporary Igbo society that is trying to skip any salient remedy or solutions to help nip it in the bud. The ravaging menace of this anomaly were characterized by wanton destruction of lives and properties, human hostages, Kidnapping and ransom taking among others. This youth restiveness in Igbo land had violently turned the South East into a state of lawlessness, monumental arson, destructions of houses and properties, ransom taking, kidnapping, armed robbery and other social vices among others which has wantonly become the order of the day. This ugly scenario by non-state actors *visa-vis* these hoodlums had brought about severe economic down turn to the sub-region. For example, using the activities of the indigenous people of Biafra as a case study of their untold activities in the South Eastern State, starting from mass mobilization and protest across the region, persistent sit at home orders on Mondays that has virtually paralyzed economic, social activities to a standstill and the formation of Eastern security network to protect the Igbo communities from attacks by Fulani Herdsmen among others and election boycotts. The (IPOB) constantly have been clashing with security forces which has resulted in loss of life and properties and humanitarian crisis in Igbo Land.

It is pertinent to know that in spite of the enormous efforts being put in place to ameliorate this vices which had yielded little or no results because of the activities of these non-state actors had taken a new dimension and strategy like a guerilla warfare which however requires high level of government intervention to nip this in the bud. The point to note is that, curbing the menace of youth restiveness cannot be left in the hand of the government alone. This where the roles of the Umuada Igbo comes in as peace builders and harbingers of good values in the community. Certain factors contributed to the non-performance of the role of Umuada, which as follows:

Erosion of Traditional Authority Structures.

Modernization, western education and urbanization have weakened the traditional reverence for indigenous institution like the Umuada, making young people less receptive to their counsel and interventions in contemporary conflicts

Economic Constraints and Resource Limitation

Many Umuada groups lack the financial resource needed to implement meaningful youth empowerment programmes or provide the economic incentives that might address the material deprivations driving youth restiveness.

Gender Marginalization in Formal Governance

Despite their traditional authority, Umuada are often excluded from modern political and administrative decision-making processes limiting their ability to influence policies affecting youth or to access governmental platforms for conflict resolution.

Complexity of Contemporary Youth Grievance

Modern youth restiveness is often rooted in systemic issues like unemployment, political disenfranchisement and national governance failures that exceed the scope of traditional community-based interventions that Umuada are equipped to handle.

The Changing Nature of Conflicts in This Contemporary Period in Igbo Land

Conflicts in Igboland in contemporary times have changed from traditional disputes and community wars to conflicts involving land, money, and politics. Young people in Igboland are becoming increasingly restive due to unemployment and poor economic conditions, which lead to increased crime and desperation. Many educated youths who are unemployed join unlawful groups such as cult groups and some engage in armed robbery. New technology and media also make these conflicts spread quickly, as young people use social media to promote their views and incite others against the government. Evidence such as the End SARS protest of 2020 showed how Igbo youth united to challenge authorities about public brutality and lack of economic opportunities.

Changing Nature of Conflict in Contemporary Igbo land

1. Land and Boundary Dispute

Conflict over land have become a major problem in Igbo land due to rising land prices and urban development. Different families and communities are in contention about land ownership and sometimes these disputes lead to violence and killings in some communities.

2. Political And Governance Conflicts

Politics in Igbo land has become a major source of conflict where politicians use money and force to obtain positions. This leads to violence before and after elections, sometimes using youths as weapon.

3. Economic Conflicts and Unemployment

Young people in Igbo land face serious challenges due to unemployment and difficult economic conditions. This makes them join various unlawful groups, engage in desperate activities and become restive against the government for lack of business and employment opportunities.

4. Conflicts Through Media and Technology

Social media and new technology make conflicts spread quickly in Igbo land. Young people use facebook, whatsapp, and twitter to spread false informations, or fake news, incite anger, and mobilize people for protest like End SARS, which creates problems between them and the police.

The Way Forward

It is important for Igbo communities to restore the power and respect of Umuada in tradition, so they can participate in resolving youth conflicts. Umuada are women who holds a special position in Igbo land tradition because they are daughters born in a community but married within or to another community. They can speak the truth without fear, federal and state government should incorporate Umuada into conflict resolution process to help resolve youth problems before they escalate. The Umuada should initiate training and education programs for youths through Umuada, these training programs such as tailoring, weaving, computer training work and business for youths and young people in their communities. Through these programmes it will deescalate youth restiveness Umuada should endeavour to publicize the good works they are doing on radio, television, and other Social Medias. This action will bring the youth closer to them for monitoring and mentorship towards peaceful behavior as peace ambassadors who will help them spread peace messages in communities. Umuada should promote traditional festivals like new yam festivals, "Iwa Akwa" and other celebrations that bring youths and elders together. These festivals will give young people the opportunity to learn their culture and feel a sense of belonging in their community which will reduce their interest in wrong doing. Finally, the Umuada should advocate for justice for young people suffering at the hands of police or lawless government officials. They should work towards supporting reforms in the security system so that youth can trust the government. Umuada can also establish community watch groups to help police secure communities.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the Umuada which is a female traditional Societal institution in Igboland played vital role in maintaining peace emanating from youth restiveness in Igboland. As daughters of the society, their interest in peace settlement, peace building and ensuring a conducive and habitable society was paramount. Umuada intervention in crises situation, conflict resolution and management enhanced sustainable co-existence among the Igbo people. The Umuada are indispensable in Igbo socio-political system for their overall transformation. Through Umuada, Igbo society have several crises and conflicts resolved effectively. They constituted one vital unit of administration in Igbo society.

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