

**Gender Issues in Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria: A
sociologicalInsight**

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Abstract

Gender issues in conflict and conflict management explains gender perspective in relation to conflict and conflict management, noting the effects, most at risk population, main perpetrators and how to address the problem. While the vast majority of studies on conflict and conflict management are found in the Western world, there is less literature available that specifically link the subject to gender in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper sets out to gain sociological insights into gender issues in conflict and conflict management in Nigeria. The analysis was guided by two specific objectives and assumptions of feminist perspectives. The research is basically theoretical, depends essentially on policy reports and scholarly reviews of relevant literature to obtain necessary information and secondary data. The findings revealed that the culture of patriarchy is entrenched in Nigeria, subjecting women to suffer systemic inequalities, alienation and social exclusion. Despite these barriers and other negative pulls, women have been able to participate actively in conflict management/resolution, with successful outcomes. Gender-mainstreaming is advocated for effective conflict management. Our cultural practices and national policies should be reviewed to accommodate female inclusion both in formal and informal conflict management and peace initiatives for better outcomes. The mainstreaming of gender perspectives into conflict prevention and control interventions is an essential component of conflict studies aimed at redirecting policy and action for sustainable reconciliation, security and peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, Gender, Gender Issues, sociological insight

Introduction

Asociological insight into the core of the problem calls for first, a clear distinction between sex and gender, and later, contextualization of conflict and conflict management in relation to gender. Social scientists generally, and sociologists in particular, believe that the term 'gender' is not biological, but rather socially determined, which differentiates it from sex as another human identity. According to Giddens (2006, p. 458), "gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity. It is not necessarily a direct product of an individual's biological sex". Similarly, Enyoghasimet *al.* (2018, p. 23) explained that "gender is the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females while sex refers to the anatomical and physiological differences that define male and female bodies".

Conflict, on the other hand, simply means serious misunderstanding between and/or amongst persons, groups, organizations and nations arising from clash of interest or ideology. Thus, "understanding the nature and source of conflict and its progression and stages, resolution, and outcome is a vital aspect of leadership. When the difference is understood and the resultant behaviour properly addressed, most conflicts can be settled in a way that provides needed change in an organization and interrelationships (Harolds & Wood, 2006, p. 200). This goes to suggest that effective conflict management results in minimizing disruptions arising from the existence of a conflict and proffers a solution that is satisfactory and acceptable for an organization's progress" (Nnam, 2013, p. 63).

Gender-based approach to the study of conflict and conflict management was brought to international attention by the Beijing conference, the fourth world

Conference on Women, Action for Equality, Development and Peace, which took place in Beijing China in 1995. Prior to this, the United Nations (UN) has played a leading role in promoting the subject of gender equality in relation to conflict situations by organizing the UN World Women Conferences. The first of these conferences took place in Mexico in 1975, followed by that of Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. At the end of the Beijing Conference, the participants formulated an agenda identifying twelve critical areas of concern for a follow-up. One of the focal areas of interest is on women and armed conflict. At a session entitled ‘Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century’, the General Assembly adopted a political Declaration and Platform for Action. The outcome of that document, among other things, is that there is a wider recognition of the fact that the destructive impact of armed conflict is different for women and men and hence the need to integrate a gender perspective in the planning, design and implementation of development aid and humanitarian assistance (Bouta&Frerks 2002).

In addition to the United Nations’ reports, recent studies acknowledge that gender plays a vital role in conflicts, though the emphasis is on correlation, while very little is known about causation. For instance, from Herbert’s (2014a, 2014b) extensive reviews of both theoretical and empirical evidence on the associations between gender inequality and causes of violent conflict, “it is not known whether conflict leads to greater gender inequality, whether gender inequality leads to conflict, whether gender equality is a proxy for something else that might cause conflict, or whether countries that are prone to one type of violence are also prone to others” (p. 4; see also Birchall, 2019, p. 3). Rather, from the same sources, clear correlations between levels of gender inequality and conflict, and emerging evidence to illustrate links between gender-based violence and conflict were found. There is a strong evidence base on the ways that beliefs and values behind unequal gendered roles and power relations are instrumental in building support for and perpetuating conflict (Wright, 2014; Birchall, 2019).

Most of the studies that investigate specifically the link between gender and conflicts are mostly found in the Western literature (see Hudson *et al.*, 2009; Cohn, 2012; Herbert, 2014a, 2014b; Wright, 2014; Birchal, 2019), while the subject has received very little attention in Nigeria, a gap in knowledge this research intends to fill. Therefore, this paper sets out to gain sociological insights into gender issues in conflict and conflict management in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine gender issues in conflict and conflict management, while the specific objectives are:

1. To examine gender issues in relation to harmful socio-cultural practices that prevent men and women from contributing and participating actively in conflict management/resolution; and
2. To determine the roles of women in conflict management/resolution.

Conceptual Clarifications

Gender

Gender as a concept has been hotly debated in various circles. While some think it is synonymous with biology (Murdock, 1980 as cited in Haralambos & Heald, 1980), others see it as socially constructed thus different from biological characteristics (Oakley 1972). On whatever divide a person leans, what matters is the interpretation given to the outcome. If gender is seen as biologically determined, one has to provide convincing and universal evidence to support that. Where that is not done, there is no need to further argue on that. So also is true for the culturally determined advocates. In conceptualizing gender, it is important to draw a distinction between the concept “gender” and “sex”. Oftentimes, sex and gender have been erroneously used to mean one and the same thing. However, it was from the 1940s to the 1960s, that is, the decades commonly considered to be a period when feminism was ‘latent’ through the works of Komarovsky (1950), Myrdal and Klein, (1956), and Michel (1959, 1960) that the idea of ‘sex roles’ was critically developed (Delphy, 1993).

The concept of sex roles emerged within the framework of a feminist critique (even when the term feminist was not explicitly used), these authors all stressed that the position of women was variable since it was socially determined. Michel (1960), for instance, strongly criticized the containment of women within traditional roles, and also Parson's idea that this was good for women and for society. So, the term 'sex roles' remained in use for a long time, until the concept of gender, that derived directly from it, came into existence in the early 1970s (Delphy, 1993). The word 'gender' was borrowed from the social psychologist, Robert Stoller, who worked on "individuals with ambiguous genital sex" (Jackson, 1998, p. 33). Stoller (1968) defined sex in terms of physical differences between males and females: sex organs, secondary sex characteristics and hormones. These differences mean that women can bear and suckle children whereas men cannot. He further defines gender in terms of the psychological and cultural differences between what is defined as masculine and feminine in particular societies. This implies that differences between men and women in terms of behaviour and social roles are at least partly social and cultural rather than biological. One of the early works on Gender by Oakley (1972) titled 'Sex, Gender and Society' tried to make a distinction between sex and gender as shown in the following indentation:

Sex is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. Gender however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Oakley's use of the concept of gender covers not only *all the established differences between men and women*, whether they are individual differences (studied by psychologists), or social roles or cultural representations (studied by sociologists and anthropologists) but also everything that is variable and socially determined – variability being the proof that it is social in origin...the constancy of sex must be admitted, but so too must the variability of gender (Oakley, 1985, p. 16)

Anifowose and Enemu (1999) revealed that gender is widely used to denote the different and unequal perceptions, views, roles, relevance and rewards which society assigns to men and women through its culture. Miller (2001) defined gender as 'sexual division of power' and goes further to differentiate between sex and gender, viewing sex as biologically determined and gender as socially constructed. Sharing similar views, Dex (1985) and Reddock (1994) described gender as the sexual division of power departs from the community accepted definition of gender as the sexual division of labour, and women's work being restricted to the private sphere of the household while men's work extended to the public sphere. Others conceptualised gender as a socially constructed identity through which roles are assigned at different levels. These can differ according to culture and can be changed by circumstances such as conflict. Other definitions of gender include: A status achieved through psychological, cultural, and social means (Skjelsbæk, (1997). It is a socially constructed definition of women and men determined by conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life (Council of Europe, 1998). For Ottuh (n. d., p. 1) gender is "a socially defined set of roles, rights, responsibilities, entitlements, and obligations of females and males in societies". In spite of these established differences between sex and gender, the concepts have continued to be used interchangeably by many scholars, seeing gender in terms of sex or as Delphy puts it: "to see it as a social dichotomy determined by a natural dichotomy...gender as the content with sex as the container. The content may vary, and some consider it must vary, but the container is considered to be invariable because it is part of nature, and nature, 'does not change'" (1993, p. 3). Since Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, responsibilities and identities for women and men, it goes without saying that gender is not synonymous with women but refers to both sexes. This implies that they are historically and socially specific. In other words, what is expected of our grandparents as women and men may not be the same for our grandchildren.

Similarly, the appropriate roles and identities for women and men in one cultural setting may be different from those in another cultural setting. The study of 224 societies by Murdock in 1949, shows that some roles performed by men in some societies are performed by women in others though it was not stressed by Murdock in his work (Haralambos & Heald, 1980). It was Oakley (1981), revisiting his work that established that there are gender role differentiations in the various societies studied by Murdock. In the midst of these arguments UN Gender Theme Group, Nigeria (2013) has described gender as ‘a set of qualities and behaviours expected from men and women by their societies’. A person’s social identity is formed by these expectations. These expectations stem from the idea that certain qualities, behaviour, characteristics, needs and roles are ‘natural’ for men, while certain other qualities and roles are ‘natural’ for women’ (p. 1). Thus it is the term used to denote the social characteristics assigned to men and women. These social characteristics are constructed based on different factors, such as age, religion, nationality, ethnic and social origin. They differ both within and between cultures and define identities, statuses, roles, responsibilities and power relations among the members of any society or culture. Gender is neither static nor innate, but evolves to respond to changes in the social, political, and cultural environment. Gender is learnt through socialization.

Gender is seen as a system of roles and relationships between women and men which are not determined by biology but by social, political and economic contexts (INSTRAW, 1996). Some scholars have also seen it as a process by which individuals who are born as male or female become women and men through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity. To adopt a gender perspective is to distinguish between the naturally and socially constructed and in the process to renegotiate the boundaries between the natural (relatively inflexible) and the social (relatively transformable) (Kabeer, 1990). Accordingly, gender and sex are different in the sense that sex is natural, universal and unchanging, while gender is learned and varies in time and space.

That is, we are born as female and male, but as we grow up as girls and boys, we are taught to be women and men with appropriate behaviour, attitudes, roles and activities pertaining to each sex. Moreover, since gender roles, responsibilities and identities are learned, they can also be changed. Having conceptualized gender, the next is to define conflict and conflict management as the next two sections will focus.

Conflict

The word “conflict” originated from the Latin word *confligere*, which means to “strike together.” Conflict also means contradiction arising from differences in interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations, beliefs, perceptions and tendencies (National Open University of Nigeria [NOUN], 2015, p. 128). Different definitions of conflict have been advanced by various scholars. Wright (1990, p. 19) as cited in NOUN (2015, p. 128), for instance, defined conflict as opposition among social entities directed against one another and it is distinguished from competition which he defines as opposition among social entities independently striving for something of which the resources are inadequate to satisfy all. The competitors, while they are parties to a conflict, may not be aware of one another. Madalina (2016, p. 807) acknowledged that “conflicts are endemic to society as a whole. They are directly related to the scarcity of resources, division of functions and tasks, power of relations, differentiation and organization roles in society. Any organization, regardless of its type, face daily conflicts that are based on different causes of internal and external organization”

Conflict is “the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by groups and individuals” (Ojo, 2006 as cited in Akujobi, 2011). Two things could be taken from these simple definitions. The first is that conflict emanates from (social) relationships. Secondly the conflicting groups must reside in close proximity whether physically or psychologically. What can be deduced from these definitions directly related to conflict analysis and management is that contrary to the old perspective which regards conflict as natural, it is not inevitable, only

competition can be so regarded. Secondly, conflict and competition are two points of a continuum on which conflict represents aggravated competition. In other words conflict arises when disagreement emerging from competition cannot be resolved. It follows therefore, that conflict management has to begin with and includes management of supposedly simple competition. The other point that can be inferred from Wright's definition is that conflicts are processes that can degenerate from non-violent to violent and from crisis to full-scale war.

Conflict Management

Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of [conflict](#) while increasing the positive aspects of conflict". The aim of conflict management is to enhance [learning](#) and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organizational setting (Rahim (2002). It the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in the conflict" (Burton, 1990;Laung& Wudi, 1990). Properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes (Alpert *et al.*, 2000; Bodtker& Jameson, 2001; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Kuhn & Poole, 2000; DeChurch & Marks, 2001). Business Dictionary defines conflict management as "the practice of recognizing and dealing with disputes in a rational, balanced and effective way" Other definitions, though similar in content, include "the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly, and efficiently as well as recognizing the potential value of conflict for driving change and innovation". This means knowing when to confront, and when to avoid a conflict and understanding the issues around which conflict revolves (American Management Association, 2008). From the definitions, gender issues could be conceptualized to mean identifying problems that might lead to conflict of interests between men and women and trying to resolve them in a rational, balanced, fair, effective and acceptable manner to both parties. Some theoretical issues are discussed in the next section

Brief theoretical Issues

Obviously, women are confronted with peculiar challenges in conflict and war situations which are scarcely met. Examples are issues bordering on gender inequality and such other debilitating conditions associated with patriarchy. Traditional planning, policymaking and implementation in conflict situations, conflict resolutions and peace-building have generally been informed by the functionalist view of women as homemakers whose roles are reproductive and expressive in the gender division of labour in the family. This often makes them to be sidelined or neglected in issues of conflict management, especially in society where patriarchy is entrenched. Similar results were found in Herbert's (2014a, p. 3) study: "There is substantial evidence that traditional patriarchal gender identities lead to militaristic and violent conflict approaches. The more years a country has had female suffrage, the more likely it is to resolve disputes without military violence. Better gender equality can indirectly increase a country's stability through its impact on wealth/income".

Further explanations have been provided by some feminists as to why this is the case. The radical feminists see the underlying causes of women's inequality, gender bias and inequity as deeply rooted in society which could be traced to the patriarchal system of power relationships. This system is characterized by male dominance, hierarchy and competition (Tong 1992). Yet, conflict management does not only concern men who participate directly in armed conflicts but also women who are also directly or indirectly affected by conflict and war situations as evidence from many peace building efforts in and outside Africa has shown. The next section presents gender and conflict management in Nigeria.

Gender and Conflict Management: The Nigerian Perspective

The role of women in conflict resolution has gained prominence in the last few years as a result of concerted efforts by NGOs and international agencies to address the issues of gender and conflict resolution. The greatest impetus has been the Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council on Women,

Peace and Security and the Beijing declaration on affirmative action among others. In spite of this however, women in Nigeria, like their counterparts in different parts of the world, are yet to be in the mainstream in the political, social, economic as well as peace and conflict related issues (Oluyemi-Kusa 2009; Anthony,2005).

Traditional Approaches

The Strategic Conflict Association of Nigeria (SCAN) reveals that women have been very active in traditional methods of conflict resolution from the earliest times (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2003). In pre-colonial Yoruba land, for instance, *Iyalode* (Female Political Leader), the *Erelu* (the female spiritual leader), the *Iyaloja* (Mother of the Market), *Obirin Ile*, (Compound wives) etc. settled disputes amicably with the men (Tumbo-Masabo 1994) while the same goes for women in Igbo and Hausa groups. Among the Igbo, the association of the married daughters of the land known as *Otu Umuada* is a very powerful organ to reckon with in conflict management and peace building. Uchendu (1993) noted that these women often intervened whenever the village constitution was violated and most times imposed sanctions on offenders. Not only are they arbiters in quarrels which the male authorities are unable to settle, they also play an important part in preserving the peace of the market. The *Umuada* exerted strong influence in the affairs of the communities and even in their various compounds they intervened in resolving conflicts among their brothers and also imposed sanctions on some of the stubborn wives if need be, as a weapon of peace building in their various communities. There are also records of women who held titles and important positions in pre-colonial northern Nigeria. The *Iya*, *Magajiya* and *Mardanni*, held outstanding positions and wielded power in the administration of their towns alongside their male counterparts (Uchendu 1993).

Recent Times

One of the fundamental issues in conflict management in Nigeria in recent times is the exclusion of women from the process. The involvement of women in decision making, conflict management and post conflict process is limited in Nigeria. This could be explained from the standpoint of the socio-cultural impediments placed on the women folk that facilitate their relegation to the background as a result of the highly patriarchal nature of the society. The contributions of women are mere suggestions and most often jettisoned at critical decision times. The relegation of women to the background even in matters that affect them directly like peace and security emanate from the home or the private domain into the general society (Sheila 1999, Shertima, 2001). However, women have been able to force their way through protests and dialogues though, to a very little extent, in tackling issues and matters that affect them (Ogege, 2009).

It is a well-known fact that women suffer most, alongside their children, in conflict and war situations, even though they are neither consulted nor are they usually party to the disagreements that snowball into conflicts. Yet, they are forced to bear the loss of spouses, children and care for the wounded, displaced, as well as the raped and live with the psychological trauma for life. However, when it is time for conflict resolution and peace building, only the men are involved as members of delegations to negotiate peace. (Oppong & Oppong, 1987; Scott, 1996). Irrespective of their relegation, women have, in various ways and times, tried in averting, checking and halting otherwise threatening situations to peace and security in the history of Nigeria. Writers such as Bastian (1985), Afigbo (1991), and Uchendu (1993) have reported that, in pre-colonial era, Nigerian women were active in public life. The political power of women according to them rested mainly in their associations where they participated in making important decisions affecting their lives and that of their community. Leaders of women's associations represented the interest of women in public affairs and commanded respect and acceptability in the community. Women like

Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Queen Amina of Zaria, Margaret Ekpo of Calabar and Funnilayo Kuti of Abeokuta, to mention a few held sway, amidst exercising political powers and employing diplomacy in achieving peace.

A notable case was the ‘riots’ or the war, led by women in the provinces of Calabar and Owerri in southeastern Nigeria in November and December of 1929, which became known as the ‘Aba Women’s Riots of 1929’ in British colonial history, or as the ‘Women’s War’ in Igbo history. During the period, thousands of Igbo women organized a massive revolt against the obnoxious policies imposed by British colonial administrators in southeastern Nigeria, touching off the most serious challenge to British rule in the history of the colony (Mba, 1982). Similarly, in an attempt to register their displeasures, women in the Niger Delta and indeed all over the country have used a variety of resistance forms such as dancing and singing, demonstrations and strikes, testimonies and silence, cultural specific responses like stripping naked, refusing to change work routine, participating in women's meetings and struggling to maintain their daily routines amidst the chaos and violence that surround them (WARDC, 2006 as cited in Ogege, 2009). In most cases, when things are getting out of hand, women carry out peaceful actions to provoke a reaction on the responsible parties to correct the perceived anomalies. In several occasions, the enormity of the circumstances forces the women to march around town naked to protest one injustice or the other, against actions that may result in a major conflict (Ogege, 2009). A strong case is therefore made for gender equity and mainstreaming especially in conflict management. Men and women need to work together to resolve conflicts which have become a feature of our socio-political landscape.

Discussion

Gender approach to issues implies the analysis of social relations between men and women, boys and girls in any given context that may be culturally or historically determined. Overtime, experience has shown that there is a gender factor and its role in disputing, negotiating and resolving human differences with

the sole aim of promoting peace. There are patterns of differences between men and women and how they experience conflict and go about its prevention, management and resolution. Research has shown that men and women's different realities lead them to interpret, understand, express and handle conflict differently. (Ottuh&Onimhawo, 2010) opine that women tend to discuss issues in greater depth, express feelings and concerns more openly, and use more conciliatory or problem-solving strategies to resolve conflicts. While men on the other hand use more rational linear language to talk about their conflicts and are less likely to express their feelings. Men are also likely to talk more about issues of justice and fairness and adopt a more competitive approach to managing conflicts.

So far, most concepts and approaches to conflict resolution and peace-building have either ignored or marginalized issues of gender. Contrary to common belief, women are both victims of and participants in armed conflict. They are also players in the post-conflict phase, acting as agents of change. As a result, it is essential to understand the gender dimension of conflict if peacekeeping and peace-building are to succeed in the long-term (UNDPKO, 2005). Taking up a gender approach therefore, challenges the notion of "gender-neutral" policies, programmes and institutions of crisis prevention and conflict management. It also sheds a light on how women's activities and new experiences in the course of a conflict may have social, political and economic consequences for the post-conflict settlement and peace-building processes. In the year 2000, [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#) further validated gender mainstreaming by supporting it as a means to encourage greater consideration of women in conflict prevention, resolution and the peace-building process (Gibbings, 2011).

Armed conflict exacerbates inequalities in gender relations that existed in the pre-conflict period. It highlights the gender-specific disadvantages experienced by women and men that are denied by conventional interpretations of armed

conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes. Women experience significant disadvantage in the course of armed conflict, but it does not necessarily follow that men are always the perpetrators and therefore the winners, and women the losers. The inequality that women experience during and after armed conflict in all societies derives from dominant understandings of gender roles. In the context of armed conflict, the perception persists of women as wives, mothers and nurturers, whereas men are cast as aggressors and soldiers. Although women and men do often assume these traditional parts, there is a tendency in the mainstream literature to exaggerate the extent to which they play stereotypical gender roles in armed conflict. The reality is that women are also active as soldiers and aggressors, as could be seen in the armed forces of many countries of the world today, while men may be both victims and combatants.

Conflicts take on a wide variety of forms and have been classified based on the intensity or scale of violence, structure and character of parties in conflict (such as class, ethnic, groups, religious group, racial group, and so on) and manifesting a distinct spatial character (such as national, regional, inter-state or international). However, non-violent conflict has the potential to become violent if the regulatory mechanism is ineffective. For instance, “if disadvantaged groups and individuals refuse to consider open conflict, they deny themselves what sometimes is their most effective means for bringing about needed change” (Ross, 1993, as cited in NOUN, 2015, p. 128). From the same source, therefore, saw nothing wrong in conflict; it as a natural and inevitable human experience and as a critical mechanism by which goals and aspirations of individuals and groups are articulated. It is a channel for the definition of creative solutions to human problems and a means to the development of a collective identity. What Ross is trying to infer is that without conflict we cannot have change.

Similarly, Laue (1990, pp. 256-7) as cited in NOUN (2015, p.129) tries to disabuse our minds about the dysfunctional perception of conflict: “Conflict is not deviant, pathological, or sick behaviour per se. It is not the opposite of

order...there is orderliness in conflict, although conflict can become disorderly. And it can be a very helpful and useful part of society". Nnam (2013, p. 71) argued that "proactive and ideal-based conflict is feasible and commendable. Conflict with its proper management is inevitable, normal and a catalyst for social changes. Thus, in any system where functional conflict is encouraged, staff rights are often guaranteed and the organization's mission and vision achieved without reservation". What should be dreaded is destructive conflict (i.e. conflict that has started producing negative results) rather than conflict itself. Wright (1990) also opines that war is a type of conflict, thus, by understanding conflict we may learn about the probable characteristics of war under different conditions and methods most suitable for regulating, preventing, and winning wars. The author further proceeded to give two senses in which war could be understood, that is, in the legal sense, war is considered a situation during which two or more political groups are equally entitled to settle conflict by armed force. Whereas in the sociological sense, which is of ordinary usage, war refers to conflicts among political groups carried on by armed forces of considerable magnitude

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Gender-mainstreaming is advocated for effective conflict management; this refers to a strategy which strengthens gender equality through policy and resource allocation that reflect the interests of both men and women. It is an organizational strategy to bring a gender perspective to all aspects of an institution's policy and activities, through building gender capacity and accountability. According to the Beijing Platform for Action, governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all their policies and programmes (Reeves & Baden 2000). Contextually, mainstreaming gender implies that both women and men be involved in conflict and conflict management. Since women are often excluded from the mainstream of peace process, our cultural practices and national policies should be reviewed to accommodate female inclusion both in formal and

informal conflict management and peace initiative for better outcomes. The mainstreaming of gender perspectives into conflict prevention and control interventions is an essential component of conflict studies aimed at redirecting policy and action for sustainable reconciliation, security and peaceful coexistence. The idea entails incorporating gender-sensitive indicators into early warning signals and the strengthening of preventive strategies relating to violence against women.

Since the main issue in conflict is to avoid and/or minimize its violent expression, we allude to the recommendation/suggestion of Sikoska and Solomon (1999), who suggested that the integrating of the traditional conflict prevention actors like governments with the new ones such as civil society groups would provide comprehensive and multi-layered frameworks for handling conflicts in their early stages. Within this new approach to the origins of conflict and conflict prevention is the importance of integrating women and gender in conflict and peace themes especially after the Fourth World Conference on Women of Beijing in 1985, which called for increased access of women to conflict prevention and resolution. It also raised the consciousness of both the international academic and policy making communities of the importance of women's role in peace activism and in creating conditions of trust and confidence among conflicting communities (Sikoska & Solomon, 1999)

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