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CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES OF IKPORO ONITSHA INDIGENOUS WOMEN-LED PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS IN ONITSHA, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The indigenous women of Onitsha known as "Ikporo Onitsha" have traditionally played critical roles in mediating conflicts, fostering dialogue, and preserving communal harmony through their cultural and social networks. This study investigates the challenges and successes of ikporo onitsha indigenous women-led peacebuilding efforts in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through interviews and focus group discussions with 600 respondents, including key stakeholders and members of indigenous women's groups. Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages. These were presented in charts for clarity. Qualitative data from the interviews was analysed thematically. Key themes related to challenges, successes, and the roles of women in peacebuilding were identified and interpreted. The findings reveal that socio-economic constraints such as lack of educational opportunities, cultural norms, economic challenges, and political exclusion hinder the effective participation of women in peacebuilding. However, Ikporo Onitsha women have employed strategies such as mediation, group discussions, and the involvement of respected elders to successfully resolve conflicts. The women have also achieved notable success in promoting reconciliation, reducing violence, and fostering social unity within the community. The study concludes that while Ikporo Onitsha women face significant barriers, their peacebuilding efforts have made a positive impact on maintaining social harmony. The findings suggest the need for policy reforms to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding and greater recognition of their contributions. Additionally, the study provides insights for future research on indigenous women's roles in peacebuilding across different regions.

KEYWORDS: *Indigenous women, Ikporo Onitsha, peacebuilding, efforts, socio-cultural challenges, Onitsha, conflict resolution, community harmony*

INTRODUCTION

The challenges and successes of Ikporo Onitsha indigenous women in peacebuilding efforts represent a vital aspect of community resilience in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. Despite being pivotal in conflict resolution, these women face socio-cultural, economic, and political obstacles that limit their participation in peacebuilding initiatives (Nwachukwu, 2017; Eze & Umeh, 2017). Cultural norms often dictate women's roles as primarily domestic, thereby restricting their public engagement (Ogo, 2024). Additionally, economic constraints such as high unemployment hinder their active involvement in community decision-making. However, the women have employed effective strategies such as mediation and collaboration with community elders, leading to significant successes in fostering dialogue and reconciliation. This study aims to explore the complexities of their contributions, highlighting both the barriers they face and the impactful roles they play in enhancing social harmony within their communities, thus calling for greater recognition and support for their efforts in peacebuilding.

The history of Onitsha, like many African communities, highlights the significant roles played by women, especially in peacebuilding efforts. Indigenous women, including the Ikporo Onitsha (Onitsha Women), have historically been at the forefront of addressing social, cultural, and political conflicts (Chuku, 2013; Amadiume, 2000). Their approach to peacebuilding is deeply rooted in the traditions and values of the Onitsha community, embodying the principles of consensus-building, communal living, and conflict resolution. However, their efforts are not without challenges, though they have also recorded remarkable successes.

A significant challenge faced by Ikporo Onitsha women in peacebuilding is the deeply ingrained patriarchal structures of the society (Ekanem & Etim, 2022; Nnaemeka, 2004). Traditional leadership roles, such as those of the Obi (King) and the Ndichie (Council of Elders), are predominantly male-dominated, leaving women with limited official roles in decision-making processes (Amadiume, 2000). Despite their invaluable contributions to peacebuilding, Ikporo Onitsha women often find their efforts side-lined by male authority figures (Chuku, 2013). The cultural expectations placed on women in Onitsha society, which often restrict them to domestic roles, serve as another barrier. Although they are seen as moral custodians of the family, their participation in formal

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peace processes can be constrained by societal perceptions that women should remain in supportive rather than leadership roles. This tends to limit their ability to engage fully in formal negotiations or political resolutions.

Indigenous women-led groups, including Ikporo Onitsha, often face challenges in accessing the resources needed to sustain peacebuilding efforts (Oyewumi, 1997). Whether it is financial support, education, or platforms for wider advocacy, these women sometimes struggle to make their voices heard in larger national or international peacebuilding forums, where access to resources can be critical. Another significant challenge is the pervasive issue of gender-based violence, which is both a consequence of and a contributor to conflict in the region (Mba, 2019). The threat of violence and insecurity often deters women from participating openly in peacebuilding initiatives, making it difficult for them to lead such efforts safely and effectively. Economic hardship, exacerbated by national issues such as inflation and unemployment, presents a significant challenge (Nnaemeka, 2004). Many women in Onitsha, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, are preoccupied with meeting the basic needs of their families. This economic pressure can limit their participation in peacebuilding activities as they prioritize survival over community involvement.

Ikporo Onitsha women bring unique cultural insights to the peacebuilding process. Their deep knowledge of Onitsha's customs, traditions, and the local history allows them to mediate effectively in conflicts that require an understanding of the community's social fabric (Mba, 2019). For instance, these women play crucial roles in resolving disputes related to land, family, and domestic issues—areas where male leaders might struggle due to the sensitive nature of such conflicts (Okolo & Kalu, 2021; Uwakwe, 2020). The success of Ikporo Onitsha women's peacebuilding efforts lies in their ability to foster community-based approaches. By engaging with families, youth groups, and religious leaders, these women have created networks that promote dialogue and reconciliation (Adeyemi & Adekola, 2017). Their focus on grassroots mobilization ensures that peacebuilding is not just a top-down process but one that involves all members of society. Ikporo Onitsha women have also been advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, particularly women and children. Their involvement in addressing gender inequalities and social justice issues within their community seems to have contributed to more inclusive peace processes (Ekanem & Etim, 2022). This advocacy may have has led to better protection for vulnerable groups, ensuring that their voices are considered in community decisions.

In recent years, Ikporo Onitsha women have broadened their peacebuilding efforts to include environmental and economic concerns. For instance, their advocacy for environmental sustainability has led to initiatives that protect the local ecosystem from exploitation, while their efforts to promote economic empowerment through small-scale businesses have helped improve the livelihoods of women and families in the region (Mba, 2019; Ogo, 2024). Through their roles as caregivers and moral educators, Ikporo Onitsha women works on strengthening the social fabric of their community. By emphasizing family values, respect for elders, and the importance of communal living, these women foster a sense of unity that is essential for sustainable peace.

In addition, indigenous women's groups like Ikporo Onitsha have played an important role in advocating for the rights of their communities and raising awareness about the issues their communities face (Kamal, 2021). These women have demanded access to basic services and resources for their communities, working to ensure their inclusion in decision-making processes. Such actions have fostered a sense of inclusion and contributed to a more peaceful and equitable society. Studies such as Adeyemi and Adekola (2017), Adenyi (2015), Madu (2015), and Ibok and Ogar (2018) all emphasize the indispensable roles women play in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. Walker (2015) argued that women often serve as a stabilizing force in post-conflict settings, playing key roles in reconstruction, rehabilitation, and the reintegration of former combatants, as well as the revival of basic economic activities. Sall and Yongo (2017) echoed this sentiment, stating that while conflict impacts all aspects of society, women remain an invaluable resource for maintaining peace.

Onitsha, a major commercial hub in Nigeria, is renowned for its economic significance and cultural heritage (Nwachukwu, 2019). Situated on the eastern bank of the Niger River in Anambra State, the city hosts the prominent New Yam Festival, a cultural event deeply rooted in Igbo traditions. The rich cultural practices, however, coexist with modern commercial activities, contributing to the complexity of societal interactions. This blend of traditional customs and modernity often results in conflicts, especially in matters related to chieftaincy, land ownership, and traditional leadership roles. Notable disputes include those over the diokpa and onyisi ofor titles, which traditional leadership positions are held in high regard in Onitsha's hierarchical structure (Eze & Umeh, 2017; Ogo, 2024). These conflicts typically arise from challenges in balancing ancient customs with the evolving socio-political landscape in the region. The presence of these challenges highlights the importance of conflict resolution mechanisms in Onitsha, which often involve community elders and customary authorities. Despite the tensions, the cultural richness of Onitsha continues to thrive, anchored by strong communal values and practices that ensure social cohesion even in the face of disagreements.

In response to such conflicts, indigenous women's groups like Umuada, Ndi Inyom (Ikporo), and Otu Odu society have taken up peacebuilding roles. These groups rely on dialogue, mediation, and traditional customs to foster understanding and resolve disputes (Ogo, 2024). Nwosu (2017) study highlighted how these women have been instrumental in mediation, advocacy, and education on conflict resolution, contributing to sustainable peace in Onitsha. However, their efforts face challenges, including lack of resources, limited peacebuilding knowledge, and insufficient support from the government or other organizations (Egbuonu, 2018). Patriarchy and traditional norms also restrict women's participation in decision-making, thereby limiting the effectiveness of their peacebuilding initiatives (Adiele, 2018).

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While substantial research seems to have examined the roles of women in peacebuilding across Africa, there is a noticeable gap regarding the specific contributions of indigenous women groups, particularly in Onitsha, Anambra State. The exclusion of Ikporo Onitsha women from peacebuilding studies suggests a broader oversight in recognizing grassroots, female-led initiatives. This lack of scholarly attention diminishes the understanding of how these indigenous women contribute to conflict resolution within their communities, often using traditional mediation, dialogue, and arbitration methods. By focusing on the challenges and successes of Ikporo Onitsha women in peacebuilding, this study addresses this gap and aims to provide insights into their unique strategies, including their role in resolving disputes over communal disagreements. The study also seeks to enhance the recognition of their efforts in fostering dialogue, promoting reconciliation, and maintaining social harmony in Onitsha. Consequently, this research contributed to the broader body of literature on peacebuilding by highlighting the critical but understudied role of indigenous women in conflict resolution.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the historical significance and active involvement of Ikporo Onitsha women in peacebuilding efforts in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria, and their contributions are often overshadowed by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures and societal norms. These indigenous women have traditionally played critical roles in mediating conflicts, fostering dialogue, and preserving communal harmony through their cultural and social networks. However, the challenges they face, such as exclusion from formal decision-making processes, limited access to resources, and cultural expectations that confine them to domestic roles, hinder their ability to fully participate in or lead peacebuilding initiatives. Additionally, issues such as gender-based violence, economic hardship, and societal perceptions further limit the effectiveness of their peacebuilding efforts.

While the successes of Ikporo Onitsha women in conflict resolution and grassroots mobilization have been acknowledged, these achievements are often localized and remain insufficiently recognized at broader levels. Their ability to engage in formal political resolutions or influence larger policy frameworks is constrained, despite their proven capacity to mediate and resolve conflicts in areas like land disputes, family conflicts, and domestic issues. Furthermore, research on their peacebuilding efforts remains sparse, particularly regarding how these women navigate the complex socio-political and economic landscape of Onitsha to sustain peace.
This gap in understanding highlights the need to examine the specific challenges and successes of Ikporo Onitsha indigenous women-led peacebuilding initiatives. A better understanding of these dynamics is essential for developing more inclusive and effective peacebuilding strategies that harness the full potential of indigenous women as agents of peace. Without addressing the barriers they face and building on their successes, efforts to promote sustainable peace in Onitsha may remain incomplete. This study seeks to bridge the gap, explore these issues to examine the challenges and successes of Ikporo Onitsha indigenous women-led peacebuilding efforts in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and successes of Ikporo Onitsha indigenous women-led peacebuilding efforts in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Identify and analyze the socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges that hinder the effective participation of Ikporo Onitsha women in peacebuilding initiatives.
2. Explore the peacebuilding strategies employed by these women in resolving conflicts related to land disputes, chieftaincy issues, and community disagreements.
3. Examine the successes of these indigenous women in fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and maintaining social harmony within the community.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges that hinder the effective participation of Ikporo Onitsha women in peacebuilding initiatives?
2. What are the peacebuilding strategies employed by these women in resolving conflicts related to land disputes, chieftaincy issues, and community disagreements?
3. What are the successes of these indigenous women in fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and maintaining social harmony within the community?

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design, area of the study, population of the study, sample size and sampling techniques, instruments for data collection, procedures for data collection, and the methods of data analysis used in the study on the Challenges and Successes of Ikporo Onitsha Indigenous Women-Led Peacebuilding Efforts in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate for gathering data from a broad range of respondents in their natural settings to examine the challenges and successes of Ikporo Onitsha women in peacebuilding. The study involves both qualitative and quantitative approaches, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the perspectives, experiences, and contributions of indigenous women in peacebuilding efforts.

The study was conducted in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria, a commercial hub located on the eastern bank of the Niger River. Onitsha, composed of two local government areas (North and South), is renowned for its business, industry, and education, housing the largest market in Africa. The native population, Ndi Onicha, is primarily Igbo. Onitsha faces socio-economic challenges such as youth unemployment and weak security, leading to conflicts. Traditional institutions like the Igwe-in-Council, Ndi Iche, and women's groups, including Ikporo Onitsha, mediate disputes through dialogue and

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arbitration, with women playing vital roles in peacebuilding efforts.

SAMPLING DESIGN

The population for this study consists of 186,000 the indigenous women of Onitsha, particularly the members of Ikporo Onitsha groups such as Umuada, and Otu Odu Society, as well as other stakeholders involved in peacebuilding like community leaders. The total population comprises 186,000 individuals. A sample size of 600 respondents selected for the study. This sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, which provides a reliable sample size for a population of this size. The sampling techniques used include: Purposive sampling to select key informants and community leaders directly involved in peacebuilding efforts. Simple random sampling to select women from the Ikporo Onitsha groups, ensuring each participant has an equal chance of being included in the study.

INSTRUMENTATION

The study employed semi-structured interviews and focused group discussion as the primary instruments for data collection.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions aimed at eliciting responses on the challenges and successes of the women-led peacebuilding efforts. It covered aspects such as the roles of women, the obstacles they face, and their successes in fostering peace within the community.

Interview guide: The semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct in-depth interviews with key informants, including leaders of Ikporo Onitsha groups, traditional ruler, and local chieftaincy officials, to gain more insight into the peacebuilding efforts. The instrument was validated by experts in peace and conflict studies to ensure they measure what they are intended to measure. A pilot study was also be conducted with a small group of respondents to refine the questions for clarity and appropriateness.

STATISTICAL DESIGN

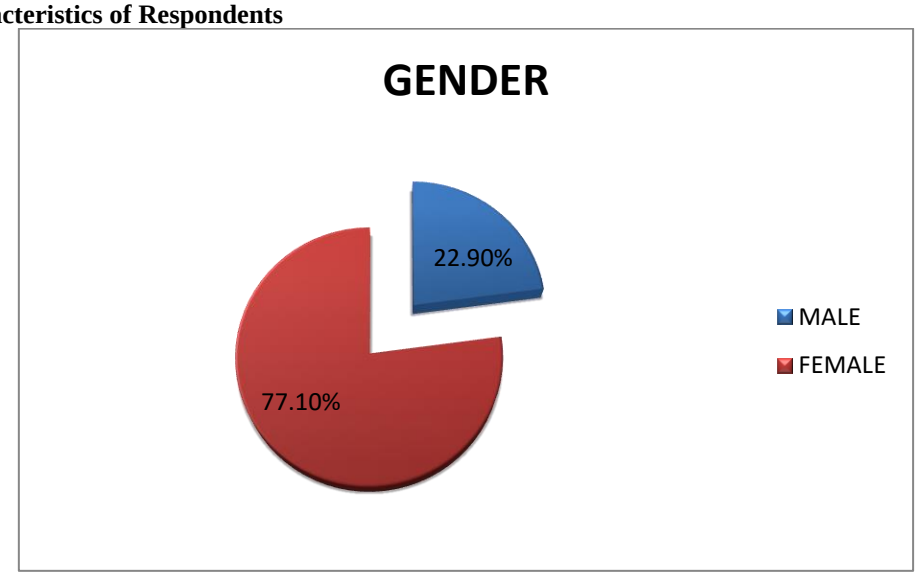
Data collection was carried out in two phases:
Phase 1: Distribution of questionnaires to selected respondents. Trained research assistants assisted in the distribution and collection of questionnaires.

Phase 2: In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants. These interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants for accuracy and thorough analysis. The survey was intended to collect data from 600 respondents, but only 576 successfully participated in the study and ultimately responding through questionnaires out of which 6 participants participated in the in-depth interview.

The data obtained were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques: Quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages. These were presented in charts for clarity. Qualitative data from the interviews was analysed thematically. Key themes related to challenges, successes, and the roles of women in peacebuilding were identified and interpreted.

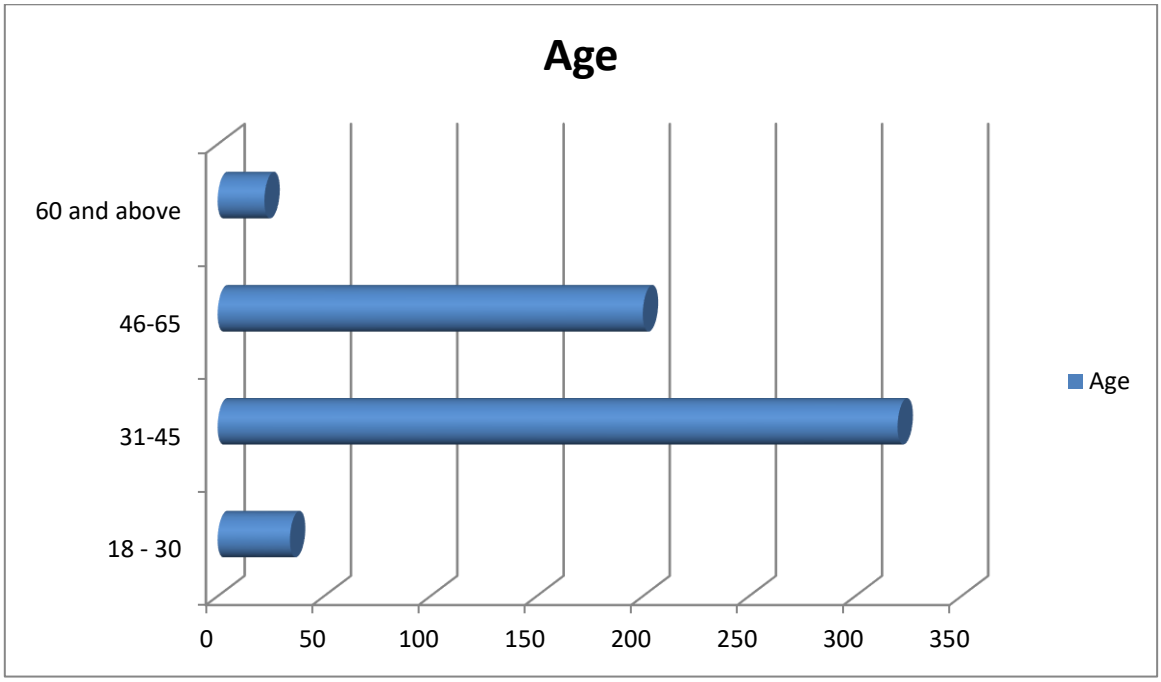
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents



The chart above illustrate the gender distribution of respondents. Specifically, 444 (77.1%) respondents were identified as female, constituting the majority, while 132 (22.9%) were identified as male, indicating a minority among the respondents.

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In the chart above, the age distribution among the 576 respondents reveals significant insights into the demographic composition of the respondents. The largest group is comprised of persons aged 31-45 years, with 320 respondents accounting for 55.56% of the total. Following this, 200 respondents (34.72%) fall within the age range of 46-65 years, marking them as the majority group. Additionally, there are 34 respondents (5.90%) in the 18-30 years category and 22 respondents (3.82%) aged 66 and above. This data indicates a predominantly middle-aged demographic among the respondents, particularly concentrated in the 31-45 and 46-65 age ranges.

Research Question 1: What are the socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges that hinder the effective participation of Ikporo Onitsha women in peacebuilding initiatives?
Findings of the study based on the interview and focused group discussion conducted revealed that the socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges that hinder the effective participation of Ikporo Onitsha women in peacebuilding initiatives include:

a. Many women report a lack of educational opportunities that restrict their ability to engage in peacebuilding effectively.
b. Cultural norms often dictate that women should primarily focus on household duties, limiting their public participation. Certain beliefs may devalue women's contributions to community decision-making processes.
c. Some respondents highlight that male community members do not support women's involvement in peacebuilding efforts.
d. Most participants rate economic challenges as significant, indicating high unemployment rates and lack of financial resources that impede their active participation.
e. Many women feel that their voices are not represented in local governance structures.
f. Participants express distrust in local authorities, believing that decisions are influenced more by corruption than community needs.
g. Women report that there is minimal backing for their initiatives from local government officials.

The findings of the study highlight significant socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges that hinder Ikporo Onitsha women from fully engaging in peacebuilding initiatives. One major obstacle identified is the lack of educational opportunities for women, which limits their ability to effectively participate in conflict resolution processes. This finding aligns with broader research such as Fountain (2016) that shows education plays a key role in empowering women in peacebuilding efforts. Without access to education, women often lack the necessary skills, such as negotiation, leadership, and public speaking, which are vital in peace processes.

Cultural norms present another critical barrier. In many traditional African societies, including Onitsha, women are expected to focus primarily on domestic responsibilities, a practice that restricts their public engagement. The belief that women's contributions to decision-making are secondary to men's further entrenches their marginalization in peacebuilding. This is consistent with studies such as Kameri-Mbote (2018), which demonstrate that patriarchal norms often exclude women from public and political spheres, thus limiting their involvement in peace efforts.

The study also points to economic challenges, such as high unemployment and limited financial resources, as significant impediments. Economic instability prevents women from mobilizing resources for peace initiatives, and they often struggle to secure the necessary funding or material support to sustain their efforts. This finding reflects a global pattern, where economic barriers limit women's participation in peacebuilding, especially in resource-scarce regions.

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Political exclusion further hinders women's roles in peacebuilding. The lack of representation in local governance structures and distrust in local authorities highlight the political marginalization that Ikporo Onitsha women face. Corruption within governance systems worsens this issue, as decision-making often favours elites over the community's genuine needs. This exclusion from political processes aligns with studies suggesting that women's political marginalization is a significant obstacle to their effective participation in peacebuilding globally.

Lastly, the minimal support from local government officials for women-led peace initiatives suggests an institutional failure to recognize the importance of grassroots contributions to conflict resolution. Local governments often prioritize elite-driven solutions, overlooking community-based efforts led by women. This highlights the need for institutional reforms that integrate women's voices into formal peacebuilding frameworks, as advocated by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (UNSCR 1325, 2000).

Research Question 2: What are the peacebuilding strategies employed by these women in resolving conflicts related to land disputes, chieftaincy issues, and community disagreements?

a. A significant number of respondents interviewed on peacebuilding strategies employed by these women in resolving conflicts related to land disputes, chieftaincy issues, and community disagreements emphasize the importance of open communication among community members to resolve conflicts.
b. Many women report that they organize mediation sessions, leveraging the influence of established women's groups to facilitate discussions. There is a common practice of involving respected elders to arbitrate disputes and lend credibility to the peacebuilding process.
c. Respondents revealed that they often gather community members for discussions to collectively address and resolve disagreements, especially concerning land and chieftaincy issues. Women frequently initiate conversations about land rights and ownership and many women turn to traditional leaders for assistance in resolving land disputes.
d. Also, the interview and focused group participants note that proper documentation is essential in addressing land issues and preventing conflicts.

The findings of the study on peacebuilding strategies employed by Ikporo Onitsha women demonstrate the importance of community-based and inclusive approaches to conflict resolution. These strategies, which emphasize open communication, mediation, and the involvement of respected elders, align with broader research on effective peacebuilding in traditional African communities. Open communication was highlighted as a key factor in resolving conflicts related to land disputes, chieftaincy issues, and community disagreements. This approach is consistent with conflict resolution theories that emphasize dialogue as a primary tool for addressing differences and building consensus. By encouraging transparent discussions, women in Onitsha are able to facilitate understanding and cooperation among disputing parties, which is crucial in mitigating long-standing grievances. This emphasis on communication supports the theory that involving all stakeholders in the peacebuilding process promotes a more inclusive and lasting resolution to conflicts.

The organization of mediation sessions by women's groups, often leveraging their social influence, shows the power of grassroots actors in resolving disputes. Women's mediation roles are significant, as they often act as neutral parties with the moral authority to guide conflicting groups toward reconciliation. Studies such as O'Reilly (2015)show that grassroots women's groups are effective mediators because they are deeply embedded in their communities and have a unique understanding of the social dynamics at play. Their reliance on the influence of respected elders to arbitrate further strengthens the legitimacy of the peace process, reflecting African traditions where elders hold significant moral and social authority. Lastly, the emphasis on proper documentation in addressing issues highlights the need for transparency and accountability in managing resources. Proper documentation helps prevent future disputes by clearly delineating ownership and rights, a practice that is becoming increasingly important as communities grow and resources become more contested. This finding aligns with Deininger and Feder (2009) research that suggests the formalization of land rights through documentation reduces the likelihood of conflicts by providing legal clarity and protection.

Research Question 3: What are the successes of these indigenous women in fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and maintaining social harmony within the community?

a. In responding to the successes of these indigenous women in fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and maintaining social harmony within the community, many respondents confirm that they have successfully facilitated dialogue within their communities, with specific instances of resolving conflicts through group discussions.
b. The women describe successful peace negotiations that led to the resolution of longstanding disputes, such as agreements over issues related to widows.
c. A significant number of participants view the involvement of indigenous women in peacebuilding as having a very positive impact on social harmony, citing examples of improved relationships among community members.
d. Finally, respondents report that the efforts of women have contributed to a greater sense of community unity and reduced instances of violence and discord.

The findings of the study highlight the notable successes of Ikporo Onitsha women in fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and maintaining social harmony within their communities. These successes can be justified by various socio-cultural factors and the unique role of women in community peacebuilding.

a. Facilitating dialogue: Many respondents confirm that women have successfully mediated community dialogues, often resolving conflicts through group discussions. This success is in line with existing research that shows women's ability to act

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as mediators in community disputes due to their deep-rooted social networks and relational roles within the community (O'Reilly, 2015). Women often possess the interpersonal skills necessary for dialogue, as their roles within families and the community center on communication and problem-solving. By initiating group discussions, they leverage their social influence to foster peaceful exchanges, particularly in situations where formal conflict resolution mechanisms may be inaccessible or ineffective.

b. Peace negotiations: The resolution of longstanding disputes, particularly those concerning widows, reflects the effective negotiation skills employed by these women. Historically, women in African communities have been at the forefront of advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups, including widows, whose rights to inheritance and land are often contested (Tripp, 2015). Through these negotiations, women act as both advocates and mediators, ensuring that fair outcomes are achieved for marginalized groups, such as widows. This aligns with the concept of "inclusive peacebuilding," where all stakeholders, particularly women and marginalized groups, are involved in the conflict resolution process.

c. Positive impact on social harmony: Many participants emphasize the positive influence of women's involvement in peacebuilding on social relationships within the community. This impact can be attributed to women's traditional role as custodians of social cohesion, often being viewed as neutral or non-threatening parties in conflicts. The inclusion of women in peace processes fosters a more balanced and harmonious social environment, as they often prioritize the well-being of the entire community over individual or factional interests. Their unique position allows them to rebuild trust among community members, which is crucial in post-conflict reconciliation efforts.

d. Community unity and reduction of violence: The women's contributions to enhancing community unity and reducing violence underscore the importance of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. Studies show that community-based approaches to conflict resolution, especially those led by women, tend to result in more sustainable peace outcomes, as they address the root causes of conflict at the local level (Aning & Atuobi, 2009). The ability of women to build alliances across different factions and promote dialogue reduces the likelihood of violent confrontations, fostering a culture of non-violence and mutual respect.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the critical role of Ikporo Onitsha indigenous women in peacebuilding efforts within Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. It underscores the significant socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges that these women face, which include limited educational opportunities, cultural norms that restrict their public roles, and a lack of support from male community members and local authorities. These barriers hinder the full potential of women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives. Despite these challenges, the women have developed effective peacebuilding strategies that involve open communication, mediation, and the involvement of respected elders to resolve conflicts related to land disputes, chieftaincy matters, and other community disagreements. These strategies, deeply rooted in the social fabric of the community, leverage the collective influence of women's groups to facilitate peaceful resolutions. The study also reveals that the successes of these indigenous women are evident in their ability to foster dialogue, reconciliation, and social harmony within their communities. Through their efforts, longstanding disputes have been resolved, social relationships have improved, and a greater sense of community unity has been achieved. The positive impact of their work extends beyond conflict resolution, as their initiatives have contributed to the reduction of violence and increased community cohesion.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study on the Ikporo Onitsha indigenous women-led peacebuilding efforts have several significant implications:

1. The study highlights the need for policies that actively promote women's inclusion in decision-making and peacebuilding processes. Local governance structures should be reformed to give women a greater voice, particularly in conflict resolution and community leadership roles. The exclusion of women due to cultural and socio-economic factors weakens the overall effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts.
2. There is a need for a cultural shift that challenges traditional norms limiting women to household roles. Community education and awareness programs should focus on changing attitudes towards women's roles, recognizing their contributions to resolving conflicts and fostering social harmony.
3. The success of Ikporo Onitsha women in using mediation and dialogue as peacebuilding strategies demonstrates the value of these traditional methods. Policymakers and community leaders can learn from these grassroots approaches, incorporating them into broader conflict resolution frameworks to maintain peace in other communities.
4. The role of indigenous women's groups in fostering dialogue and unity suggests that empowering these structures can strengthen social cohesion. Communities should invest in supporting and formalizing these groups' roles to make their peacebuilding efforts sustainable. The peacebuilding strategies employed by Ikporo Onitsha women offer a model for conflict-affected areas worldwide, particularly in Africa, where women often play vital roles in informal peace processes.
5. This study fills a gap in the literature and encourages further research into indigenous women-led peacebuilding efforts. Future studies should explore how similar groups in other regions of Nigeria and beyond contribute to conflict resolution, and how they can be supported to maximize their impact on peacebuilding.

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