

# The Role of Umuada Igbo in Conflict Management and Development in Nigeria

**Cletus O. Obasi, Rebecca Ginikanwa Nnamani**

School of General Studies, Social Science Unit, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, Enugu, Nigeria  
Email: [cletusobasi@yahoo.com](mailto:cletusobasi@yahoo.com), [beckynnamani@yahoo.com](mailto:beckynnamani@yahoo.com)

Received 10 January 2015; accepted 14 June 2015; published 17 June 2015

Copyright © 2015 by authors and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

The Umuada Igbo in Igbo cultural group is one of the most organized, peaceful and endowed women groups in Nigeria. As individuals and as a group, their contributions as farmers, civil workers and managers of human welfare are central to the ability of households, communities and nation to tackle the challenges of poverty and conflicts. It is to be noted, however, that the Umuada Igbo like other women groups from other nations suffer from decreased access to resources and paternalistic domination. However, their traditional and modern contributions make them to be no “pushovers” in the political, economic, religious and social life of the nation. Their roles in these areas are acknowledged. Their developmental efforts are remarkable in the families, communities and the Church. In families and communities, their reconciliatory roles are unsurpassed in support of their husbands, and the empowerment of rural women since they appreciate that empowerment is essential for a new world order and essential to find solutions to many conflicts. To achieve this, an environment for peace has to be created. As an organized group, they have established goals and strategies to pursue peace. This paper aims at studying their roles as agents of reconciliation and vanguards of development in pre-colonial and post-colonial modern Igbo land of Africa. John Burton’s Human Needs model (theory) was adopted as a theoretical tool of analysis. Suggestions were proffered on how to use the Umuada as an agency of development to improve the status of women in the society.

## Keywords

Umuada Igbo, Feminism, Patriarchy, Matriarchy, Conflict Management, Development, Biafran War and Nigeria

---

## 1. Introduction

The Igbo, in their pre-colonial world, like any other traditional society in the world, is patriarchal in nature.

Gender roles are not the same. Nature in some instances has assigned roles to men and women. While women are mothers, bringing forth new life to the world, men are the voice of the family. They care and protect mothers and the life they bring to the world. While women are traditionally the heart of the home, procurators and caretakers of the house, men control the economy and support the family (Obioma, 2001: p. 19). Nature on the other hand has given each gender gifts according to the roles of each sex. Men cannot bear the pains of pregnancy, women have the gift. Women are strongest on this, men are weaker. It is on the basis of the different roles of sexes that tradition assigns functions to each. Igbo tradition respects the individual person without discrimination. "A person is thought of first of all as a member of a particular family, kindred, clan or tribe. Today in Igbo village, one rarely asked: 'who are you?' but rather, 'whose son (daughter) are you?' and what lineage or clan do you belong to?" (Obioma, 2001: p. 18) Each individual Igbo man or woman belongs to a family and this is learnt from infancy. It is the family that makes the individual in a community. The individual, the family and community are bonded bio-sociologically and spiritually. It is so organized that each Igbo individual is respected in his/her family and in his/her maternal home. The feeling of belonging to a family is the spurring spirit to contribute to the well-being of the family you belong, from the smallest to the biggest. It is the quest of every one: Umuada, Ndinyom, umuokpara, nwoke, and nwanyi. Our concern in this paper is the role of Umuada in the peace efforts and development of Nigeria, and in particular, the Igbo communities.

Their contributions as farmers, civil workers, professionals and managers of human welfare are central to the ability of households, communities and nation to tackle the resulting crisis. Umuada Igbo like other women of other nations suffer from decreased access to resources and paternalistic domination. They are not disturbed as they are not subjugated and they don't feel so. They are no push-over in the political, economic, religious and social life of the nation. Their roles in these areas are acknowledged. Their development efforts are remarkable in the families, communities and the Church. In families and communities, their reconciliatory roles are unsurpassed. The Igbo women are united in support of their husbands, and are concerned in the empowerment of rural women. Empowerment is essential for a new world order and essential to find solutions to so many conflicts. To achieve this, an environment for peace has to be created. As an organized group, they have established goals and strategies to pursue peace. This paper aims at studying the roles of Umuada as agents of peace, moral guardians and vanguards of development in Igbo land and Diaspora. Before we continue, we shall briefly look at the role of the Nigerian women in conflict management.

### 1.1. Conceptual Clarifications of Igbo Womanhood in Conflict Resolution

In Igbo society, a woman is a daughter, a sister and a wife. Agbasiere (2000: p. 6), states brilliantly that every adult Igbo woman represents a comprehensive nature of Igbo womanhood as viewed by tradition. To maintain their status, Igbo women organize themselves from the early stage for the work of motherhood. From the young age of ten to puberty, girls form *Ikpa ohu* or *Enwe-oru* groups to assist in the farm. They take turn to farm for the family of a member till it goes round. They can be hired occasionally but the main purpose of the group is to contribute to the economic well being of member families. This group of girls is part of the Umuada. The Umuada or Umuokpu (as it is called in some places) are the daughters of the lineage. Umuada is a compound noun and is formed from two Igbo words "Umu" and "ada". Umu is a generic plural word that conveys the sense of many. Ada is a name and means daughter. In general usage, every Igbo woman is "ada" and is recognized as such even in her matrimonial home. In a particular usage, Ada refers to the first female of a family, often called "Adaobi". Umuada connotes therefore, many daughters in a social group in same lineage. Agbasiere defines lineage as "a social unit consisting of a group of people who can trace actual descent from one ancestor." She went further to affirm that the ties of kinship may be a basis for claims to land and other kinds of property, to mutual assistance in the pursuit of common interests, to authority over others; they also incur obligations which compliment these claims" (Agbasiere, 2000: p. 90). Umuada is different from "Ndinyom" or the married wives. Igbo women are generally grouped into these two groups in their political, economic and social life power sharing. Umuada weighs the power of finality in issues concerning women in the family, community and in conflicts where men are unable to settle them.

Other associations of women within and outside the community are also very important: the association of market women, modern day professionals, Christian Mothers, titled women, etc. Each is associated with one function or the other in addition to keeping watch to public morality. The Umuada in Igbo cultural group is one of the most organized, peaceful and endowed women groups in Nigeria. As individuals and groups, they stand at

the most vital position of human lives and businesses. They engage in economic and cultural life of the people. They take care of village squares and places of religious worships. Umuada as a social cultural group has assumed another dimension. It has assumed a cultural identity embracing all daughters of Igbo land. It has been certified and registered by the Corporate Affairs Commission, Abuja under the Companies and Allied Matters Act of 1990. It has its national headquarters at Enugu, Nigeria. As non-political, non-governmental cultural and corporate organization, Umuada derives its members from the seven Igbo speaking states of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia, Delta and Rivers. Igbo daughters in Diaspora are members of the organization. The organization's interest is the peace and progress of Igbo families and homes.

## 1.2. Conflict Management in the Context of Umuada

The minimization of conflict and enthronement of peace in the family and community is the function of Umuada. Where men fail in conflict management, the Umuada weighs a big stick and their decision is final. Conflict is a clash of interests. Conflict is inevitable and can bring disaster to the family and community. Umuada help to control and manage it. Conflict derives from the Latin word, *Confligere* meaning to strike together. Lederach (2000: p. 70), argues that this meaning leaves with it the image of "flint" and "stone", "heat" and "fire". "Heat" is one of the most common metaphors of conflict. We often listen to "heated arguments", which if not controlled, can backfire. Once a person described a quarrel, two neighbours had in their compound as "very heated" and like an "earthquake". It is the reason why people talk about their conflicts metaphorically. "Metaphors are a tremendous source for perceiving how people understand and experience a particular event or relationship. The power of metaphors is their innate ability to tap into our experiences and the feelings about a situation" (Lederach, 2000: p. 70). Describing a quarrel as earthquake evokes emotion and images as well as insights that at times we are unable to provide in literal analysis. The quarrel was hard and beyond naming, thus the uses of such descriptions evoke on the other hand, possible interventional efforts to talk about the problems and to be aware of possible control methods.

Lederach (2000: p. 71) sees conflict as composed of three elements: people, process and problems. Any of these and combination may cause conflict and will always be present in the development and outcome of a dispute. Let us develop this further. People are very often at the centre of disputes. In conflict, people's relation and psychology are affected. Umuada are aware of the problems inherent in family or communal conflicts where people are at the centre. The process and method of settling a problem differs from one group to another but the umuada give people the chance to expressing their own ideas and opinions to the case. No matter how big a problem may be, the umuada take care to resolve it with their republican approach.

Conflict management involves efforts and the interventions to minimize, limit, contain, control or regulate conflict. It is a process of minimizing and controlling the negative effects of conflict through working with the disputing parties. Some authors use conflict prevention synonymously with conflict management. It seeks to reduce the negative and destructive capacity of conflict based on the realization that conflict is inevitable and that not all conflicts are resolved always. Irresolvable conflicts are controlled and managed.

Suffice it to say that the Umuada Igbo take two approaches to conflict management. Through conciliatory approach, they make the conflict parties to reach an agreement and to interpret the issues at stake and explore ways towards finding an amicable resolution to their conflict. It could also approach conflict management through force and threat to stem the negative effects of the conflict. Where the conflict has created a deep rooted feeling of hatred and acrimony, the parties are forced with a threat not to cross the boundaries of hatred. In this case, boundaries are drawn against the wishes of the conflicting parties or at least one of them. Their decision on that case is final. Force and threat approach is not intended to suppress the conflict on the basis of power imbalance but on the parlance of obedience to the group. But to arrive at this point and the use of force, every consultation, opportunities and chances have been given to the parties to arrive at peace.

Umuada are not just called in every conflict situation. The Igbo world has many other indigenous mediatory bodies to conflict management and resolution. The family is the first in the process of conflict resolution in cases concerning the family. If the crisis is between neighbours, the families involved are required to come for a dialogue. Where the family or families are unable to resolve their problem, umunna comes in to help. The Umunna (brothers) is called upon where families cannot resolve their problem. The Umu Ogbo (Age grade or peer group) takes care of the conflicts within them and functions too as executors of the decision of elders. The Masquerade Mmuo cult along with the age grade enforces the laws and policies of the town and sees that they are imple-

mented. The Dibia (diviner) is the chief priest of any given town in Igbo land and his interventions in any matter of the land are respected, lest the gods will be angry with the land. While he is involved in the day to day running of the town he is consulted on regular basis. The Elders are responsible for the day to day running of the town. The council of elders are the highest policy making body in the town. Agbasiere (2000: p. 90) notes that the Umuada and Umanna are the two categories of kin that have both mutual claims on and obligations to the conservation of the group's identity, which is the *raison d'être* of any kinship system.

### 1.3. The Nigerian Woman

The Nigerian woman is bold and industrious. She is a mother and leader in the family and community. Before the advent of colonial rule and the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, many women have made history in the political and socio-economic levels of their environment at a time not known. According to Nnamani & Okpara (2010: p. 95), the gallantry efforts of Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Yorubaland, Queen Kambasa of Ijawland and Queen Owari of Ilesha were recorded in history. In Igboland, many priestesses intervened to avert family and communal conflicts. The advent and influence of colonialism eroded the traditional autonomy of Nigerian women. It affected and reduced their peace efforts in the early days to their charging. It was against this background that the Aba women riot of 1929 took place. It was staged against the British high-handedness, policies against women and taxations. Nnamani & Okpara (2010: p. 95) affirmed that the *Egbasu* women group from Yoruba nationality staged another protest in 1941 and 1947 against injustice meted against women and the exploitations by the colonial administration. The Nigerian women have come of age since independence. They are now more organized than ever. They fight against abuse of women, trafficking of girls, marginalization, exploitation and disempowerment. In the mid 1970s, the women of Umueleke staged a protest against sexual child abuse and for some days left their homes for their men who did not do so much to punish the culprit. The women took refuge at the St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Umuezeala, Ehime Mbano, Imo State. Their action attracted attention and the men were forced to act immediately.

## 2. Theoretical Framework of Analysis

In analyzing the role of Umuada in conflict management, we shall adopt as our tool the John Burton's Human Needs model (theory). Burton argues that when an individual or group is denied its need for identity, security, recognition or equal participation within the society, protracted conflict is inevitable. To prevent the conflict, he proffers a solution. According him, it is essential that needs that are threatened be identified and subsequently restructuring of relationships or the social system take place in a way that needs of all individuals and groups are accommodated. By implication, the umuada in their role, bridge the gap and/or mediate between disputing parties to forestall peace and ensure that the various individuals and group needs are accommodated. This model helps us to understand and appreciate the role of umuada in the society. One of the vital roles they play is to identify the essential needs that are threatened and consequently restructure the relationships in the society.

### 2.1. Umuada and the Matrilineal Culture—The Power to Make Peace

The Igbo culture is both patriarchal and matriarchic. In some parts of Igbo land, women are in control as far as inheritance rights of landed and other immovable properties are concerned. The matriarchal practice exists in Ohafia and Afikpo areas of today. Why does Ohafia practice matrilineal custom? There are two versions to this. According to Chief Jonathan Agbara Kalu, an indigene of the area, the story goes like this. A very popular warrior of the town unknowingly committed an abominable crime, which needed his head or the head of a relation for atonement of his crime. The community loved him and felt that he was too important to die. He was requested to offer one of his sons. It was said that none of his wives agreed to offer her son to the gods. The man's sister married outside came to the rescue. She had successfully convinced her husband and offered one of her sons for the atonement of her brother's abominable crime. The brother was so pleased and grateful that while he was still alive, he gave his sister power to dominate in his affairs and to enjoy his belongings. He also willed that after his death, his sister and her children should continue to be the heirs of his property. Another version of the origin of matrilineal practice in Ohafia is based on the rationale that since the woman gives birth to children, her claims over her children can never be doubted while the same can never be said for the man. Whatever the version of the story, it is a fact as seen in the practice of a section of Igbo women to have control on issues con-

cerning landed properties. In general, women in Igbo land have their property rights in contradistinction to inheritance rights. Women have rights over such commercial and fruit trees as palm tree, mango, African pears and avocado trees. Through these trees, women are economically empowered. Lands are given to women when they come in new as married wives. Wealthy women can as well buy plots of land for farming and purposes of building. When they die, the lands are inherited by their sons.

## 2.2. Umuada Igbo and Social Justice

The Igbo women participation in the socio-cultural and socio-political life of the Igbo nation pre-dates the advent of European civilization. The village squares were places and centers of cultural and economic life of the communities. The women group themselves accordingly for meetings and dialogue. In their groups as market women, titled women association, dancers, etc., their concern is the welfare of their members and the good of everyone. Their meetings were focused on the establishment and operation of just institutions and the protection of the dignity of women and men. For the Igbo woman, social justice raises powerful images of making things, creating equal opportunity, rectifying the wrong, and restitution. Pre-colonial scene for Igbo women was based on equality and social and non-discriminatory society. The respect for gender was very high. Uchem (2001: p. 113) affirms that Igbo women at this period “were not marginalized in the traditional Igbo society ... because of their relatively high socio-economic status. Although they were culturally and ritually subordinated, they were not inferiorized, nor powerless; neither were they marginalized in the traditional setting. This was because of the Igbo dual-sex socio-political system, which provided gender power checks and balances”. Any discrimination, especially against fellow women is frowned at and where it is pronounced, the women come into it whether invited or uninvited. Most of the traditional social rights of women were usurped by men with the advent of colonization. Uchem (2001: p. 133), notes further that “Igbo women became divested of their traditional institutional power by the colonial policies, which marginalized women, were perpetuated by the Igbo male elite and reinforced by the inherited Christianity.” Uchem (Ibid), went further to affirm that “since those traditional structures which formerly protected women have been undermined by colonialism and Western Christianity... Igbo women no longer have a collective political bargaining power for defending themselves.” While it could be said that colonialism affected the role of women in Africa in general, and Igbo in particular, western education enhanced the life of women and empowered them to know, and affirm their dignity and rights. Education helped to galvanize Igbo women to effectively register their anger at the colonial administration in the Aba riot of 1929.

## 2.3. Umuada and Feminism

The idea of Umuada pre-dates modern day Feminist movement. Igbo culture like many other indigenous cultures is male-dominated. That in itself does not indicate subjugation of women. Nwokafor (2012: p. 17), notes on the contrary, and affirms that women in traditional Igbo society are a force in political, legal, religious and social issues. Women had and still have many fora designed to present and protect their well-being. Umuada is one such forum. The forum is the vanguard in the struggle for equal opportunities for women and children in the society. Feminism according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2009) is “the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes”. The *Encarta Encyclopedia* (2009) defines it as “a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women’s rights and women’s position in culture and society”. Although the term “feminism” is rooted in the mobilization for women suffrage in Europe and America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, efforts to obtain justice for women did not begin or end within this period of activism. Umuada’s struggle for justice pre-dates this period. Their actions are not occurring on “waves” but on consistent struggle for empowerment and equal opportunities for women.

Empowerment can be defined as a person’s capacity to make effective choices and to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes. The extent to which a person is empowered is influenced by personal agency (the capacity to make a purposive choice) and opportunity structure (the institutional context in which choice is made). This is the definition of empowerment used in this paper. To determine degrees of empowerment, various indicators are suggested: for agency, asset endowments—psychological, informational, organisational, material, social, financial or human; for opportunity structure, the presence and operation of formal and informal institutions, including the laws, regulatory frameworks, and norms governing behavior (see *Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005*).

Umuada is not an ideological movement. As a socio-cultural group, they respect the rights and power of men



and want the same to be reciprocated to them. Amadi (1982: p. 76) notes that the Umuada understands their strength and weaknesses. Their great responsibilities in child birth and child rearing are very demanding. In Igbo land as in else-where in Africa, the love for children is the basis for marriages and procreation. The status of a woman is enhanced by her marriage and her children. The quest for children in Igboland is not to guarantee decent burial as Uchem (2001: pp. 126-127) would think. Children guarantee continuity and maintenance of the ancestral lineage. It is the reason children are the pride of their mother. By guaranteeing continuity through child bearing in Igboland women's participation in socio-economic and political affairs is affected. These were the possible earlier reason to discourage women from taking up careers outside the home. Feminists would not agree with this point. For them, men's desire to dominate women is the only reason. Gender equality is not their major task, rather they gather out of love, shared responsibilities, equal opportunities and concern for their people. They gather to campaign for development support, and equal participation in enthroning peace through their mediatory roles.

### 3. The Roles of Umuada in Igbo Socio-Political Settings

The roles of umuada are many. They are the highest group uniting all other women in the community. They take the center stage in conflict resolution and management at every level, concerning women in the community. The various groups like the market women associations, social clubs, dance groups, etc, serve as watch dogs of public morality and conviviality. Umuada transverses all these various women Igbo groups, old and new. There is no hard fact that men dominate in socio-political matters in Igbo land, but women in complex conflicts of conjugal character intervene. The men take the back seat in such matters.

Generally in Igbo land, the power of Umuada is felt heavily in conflict management and reconciliation in virtually everything except in land issues. They can offer their opinions on this issue but the final decision lie with the male. However, in Ohafia and some parts of Afikpo are exceptions to this as a result of their matrilineal life. In chieftaincy matters, they have limited role to play. It must be observed however that some communities are thinking changing this cultural policy in order to appoint women into the cabinet of the *Igwe* or *Eze*. In conflicts concerning marital infidelity, mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law, Umuada come in whether invited or not. Their role is to bring lasting peace, eliminate subjugation and infuse in them, the spirit of *metanio*, forgiveness and justice. In any of these cases, the Umuada takes a neutral stand as the conflicting parties are called to resolve the issues. The Umuada will extract the facts, analyze them and decide appropriate measures of penalty to be apportioned on the guilty party. Their decision is final on the matter. The Umuada can act as a "court of arbitration" (though not with legal force) and as a mediator in conflicts. They can ask the guilty party to pay fine, or cook a certain portion of meal, or to bring a cock, or ram, in addition to kola nuts for reconciliation. Before this is done, guilt and pardon have been obtained and forgiveness accepted by the parties in the case. The person offended is expected to grant forgiveness to the offender and where there is recalcitrance from any of the parties, the Umuada will weigh the big stick on the latest offender.

The Umuada and Ndinyom collectively wade in matters concerning issues of the market, cleanliness of village squares and shrines. Members hold regular meetings and those living in the urban areas make their contributions through mothers-in-law or a neighbor's wife. They keep watch at dress codes of their daughters and direct their conducts. Pre-marital sex is abhorred in Igbo land. Young girls who got pregnant are fined or ostracized; their mothers in some places are punished at the same time. This cultural law was very strong before the advent of Christianity. Unmarried pregnant girls were then given out to widowers in marriage after they performed purification rites. Today, pre-marital sex and pregnancy are still frowned at though rampant. Some parents give out their pregnant girls into marriage, forcefully at times, to avoid the "shame" brought about by their girl. Some girls who would not like to face the 'music' run away into "pregnant homes" to deliver and give out the child into adoption. One of the duties of women is to educate and advice their girls against unwanted pregnancies and anti social behaviours in the society. Agbasiere (2000: p. 39) affirms that "apart from their general role as advisers, women have their council of female elders, parallel to the council of male elders. In critical situations both councils could meet together for deliberation and consultation... Igbo women in general are expected to perform the role of "watch dogs" of public morality... Women may demonstrate their political pressure through their meetings, which may be inter- or intra-lineage in structure and usually operative under the aegis of the most senior married women". "The powers of umuada are as extensive as they are ambivalent. They include the right of arbitration (we have pointed out earlier) within their natal lineage, settling of quarrels con-

cerning political, economic and ritual matters which are beyond their male relative's power to settle. The task of disciplining obstreperous or disobedient relatives' wives also falls within their domain... the umuada have (also) the power to ostracize any proven incorrigible (male) lineage relative. In consequence, the funeral of such a person would be boycotted, which would initiate a ritual crisis, since the services of the umuada in the funeral of a relative are regarded as indispensable (Agbasiere, 2000: pp. 41-42)". Umuada exercise a lot of influence within any Igbo community.

Every Igbo woman belongs to these village based groups irrespective of creed or social status. In many Igbo areas, the Umuada make contributions for the development of their lineage through building of town halls, maternity or school. Through these efforts, they impact on the lives of the people of their village and towns. Umuada at times convulses the *Ndinyom*, especially at the funeral of one of their brothers. If it happens that the widow of the dead man had maltreated the husband when he was still alive, it will not be easy for the widow. This is what Uchem (2001: p. 67), regarded as internalized oppression manifested in women who do sometimes not trust fellow women, or sometimes oppress fellow women who are in weaker positions. This oppressive action of umuada on the *ndinyom* has to be re-examined indeed.

Today Christianity has affected the life and role of women in Igbo land. In certain issues like marriage and pre-marital pregnancy, the traditional strictness is no longer there, although it is still being frowned at. In the past fifty years, women have so much distinguished two major groups: the home and abroad women groups. All other women groups, as professionals, market and cultural groups square into these two groups. They meet once a year in what is known today in Igbo land as the "August Return". Others call it August general meeting or "Home and Abroad Meeting". Whatever name it is called, one of the aims of the August meeting is to resolve some issues of conflict in the group. The initial purpose of beginning the meeting was the welfare of women and community development (Nwokafor, 2012: p. 33). Women raise lots of money in their August meeting to uplift the status and empower some low members of the group. They have offered scholarships to indigent girls, built houses for widows and clothed the poor of their members. They have undertaken the construction of Churches, Clinics, Schools, Town halls, markets and provision of water and electricity in towns and villages. Through these efforts, they empower fellow women. Their empowerment program is on course as many women have benefitted from them. They enhance their lives and create social cohesion in the community (Carolyn, 2000: p. 158).

### Umuada and the Civil War in Nigeria

The Nigerian/Biafran war was fought between 1967 through 1970. The outbreak of the war in the words of Nmezi (2010: p. 129), "opened up unintended new public spaces for women by sudden shifts in gender roles". Women stepped out of their traditional roles of child bearing and other traditional roles to meet up with social and economic demands of the war. As the men and young males went into war or in hiding, the women became the lifeblood of the family and by extension, the communities. Many bore the trauma of the harsh conditions of life caused by the civil war and its consequent health problems and ventured into caring their children and the soldiers. Many got involved in the *Ahia Attack*. Women and very young boys who were engaged in this *Ahia Attack* passed sometimes through the war front or through a town near the war front to buy their goods. They made their journey mostly at night when the war fighting slowed down. Obiezuofu-Ezeigbo (2007: pp. 137-136) pointed out that most of the goods bought from the *Ahia Attack* were salt, rice, cigarette, beans and yam. Many women coordinated the relieve food brought by Caritas and other Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to support the suffering Biafra. On the home front, the women took care of the children and try to hide the young girls from the soldiers on both sides who were always looking for "comfort girls".

One great care-work taken by the Umuada at this period was to pick up the children of their brothers who went to war and of those who did not come back from the war. They provided for their needs and became 'fathers' to these children. Many accommodated the wives of their brothers and their kids and even sold their wrappers to feed them. In many communities, the institution of umuada became stronger to checkmate public morality especially where the dominating men were at war or in hiding. In that era of scarcity and poverty, anyone caught stealing was severely punished by the women.

### 4. Conclusion

As argued in this article, Umuada as a gender related group in Igbo land of Africa falls under the feminist histo-

ry of women empowerment globally. This adds up to our knowledge that the Umuada, as women gender group has fought for equality of rights and opportunity with men in Igbo society. The women, as a socio-political group has made efforts towards a sustainable conflict resolution and management. As such, the Umuada, as a conflict resolution agency in both pre- and post-modern Igbo society in Nigeria, are the pride and honor of the Igbo ethnic stock that make up the three major tribes in Nigeria. Their organization is strong, active and supportive of the global and regional struggle for women's empowerment and gender equality. Umuada weigh much power and they use this power positively in the Churches, towns and villages to empower the less privileged in the society. They use their power to touch the lives of men and women as bridge builders in development programming to calm tensions, bring down walls of hatred and foster peace in the homes, community and nation. Operating within the structures of modernity, the Umuada respects tradition, but does not, as a feminine power group, seek to compete with the men as heads of the family. While every other women group in other tribes seeks to push the boundaries of femininity by attacking distributed family roles under the guise of modernity, the Umuada remains unaffected by modern developments that seek to misinterpret women's basic functions as bridge builders, mediators and conflict managers in family and communal issues. This has proven that women in Africa, with its cultural patriarchy and inherited gender ceilings, have much to contribute to impacting positively family life, peace of the indigenous community, and the sustainable development of Africa's troubled and conflict ridden nations. Women's traditional conflict resolution roles in the Igbo traditional community in Nigeria should be expanded as the key to both a sustained equal opportunities struggle in our social systems and a modern window that will expand their roles in the modern African state.

## References

- Agbasiere, J. T. (2000). *Woman in Igbo Life and Thought*. London: Routledge.
- Alsop, R., & Heinsohn, N. (2005). Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3510. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/41307\\_wps3510.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/41307_wps3510.pdf)
- Amadi, E. (1982). *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books
- Carolyn, S.-S. (Ed.) (2000). Transformative Mediation. In S.-S. Carolyn (Ed.), *Mediation and Facilitation Training Manual: Foundation and Skills for Constructive Conflict Transformation*. Akron, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Conciliation Service.
- Encyclopedia Britannica (2009). *Student and Home Edition*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Lederach, J. P. (2000). Understanding Conflict: Experience, Structure and Dynamics. In *Mediation and Facilitation Training Manual*. Akron, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Conciliation Service.
- Nmezi, S. (2010). Igbo Women's Experience of Violence During the Biafra-Nigerian War. In C. J. Korie, & I. Ezeonu (Eds.), *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, History, and Memory of the Nigeria-Biafra War*. Glassboro, NJ: Goldline & Jacobs Publishers.
- Nwokafor, P. (2012). *The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution: Igbo Experience*. Unpublished Thesis.
- Obiezuofu-Ezeigbo, E. C. (2007). *The Biafran War and the Igbo in Contemporary Nigerian Politics*. Genius Press.
- Obioma, D. O. (2001). *Human Suffering: A Challenge to Christian Faith in Igbo/African Christian Families*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Uchem, R. N. (2001). *Overcoming Women's Subordination in Igbo African Culture and in the Catholic Church: Envisioning an Inclusive Theology with Reference to Women*. Dissertation, Parkland.