

GENDER DYNAMICS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IN GHANA'S OTI AND VOLTA REGIONS

Aikins K¹, Enuameh-Agboloso AD^{2*} and Agbesinyale P¹

¹*Department of Integrated Development Studies, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana*

²*Department of Integrated Development Studies, School of Social Sciences, Evangelical Presbyterian University College, Ho-Volta Region, Ghana*

Abstract: A number of conflict hotspots, as old as the age of the communities, can be associated with the communities of the Oti and Volta Regions of Ghana, respectively. These conflicts must be managed sustainably so they do not degenerate into violent situations time after time. The study analysed the gender dynamics of conflict management policies and programmes and their influence on development. A case study design was adopted. Data was collected through interviews, focused group discussions, and observation. Narrative thematic analysis was used in bringing out key issues related to the study. Institutional gender perspectives on policies and practices of gender equality, mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and the involvement of women in peace and security issues revealed that even though there was an education on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, the involvement of women was generally low in all spheres. The findings also indicated there was name-calling by other women, resulting in women shying away from taking various positions in public. Some institutions also maintained the status quo that women were below men and so should therefore work under the authority of men. Gender equality and mainstreaming were to be applied only when women qualified for the positions they were applying for. Concluding, the consideration of gender balance in the creation of committees that helped to manage conflicts was overwhelmingly affirmed across the board, emphasizing the inclusion of women just like men on the conflict management committees. However, female empowerment seems to be a concept yet to be practicalized in some settings.

Keywords: gender mainstreaming, gender equality, gender dynamics, conflict management, women's empowerment, development.

Introduction

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2020, gender dynamics are informed by socio-cultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Depending on how they are reinforced, gender dynamics can reinforce or challenge existing norms. The essence of conflict management under such a circumstance is to help build on and sustain gender role changes that result from conflict (OSCE 2001; Kumar 2005; ILO 2001 as cited in Bouta, Frerks & Bannon, 2004). It was observed from the literature that conflict management policies and programmes even though were well spelled out by conflict management institutions lag in practice. Also, the gender dynamics of most of the conflict management policies and programmes were skewed towards males with some institutions with policies and programmes which were gender biased.

Conflict management refers to various processes of resolving conflict, peacemaking, conflict transformation, and other measures or overtures that ensure individuals, families, and social groups of a given environment coexist peacefully. This has the added benefit of facilitating development. In settings where a gendered approach was used, an amicable settlement of conflicts was arrived at. Anecdotal evidence points to the absence of gendered perspectives in the conflict management approach being implemented within diverse conflict hotspots in Ghana. The Dual Concern theory,

Thomas Kilmann's Model, and Feminist theories are all theories that propose equal opportunities for women and men and would guide the assessment of the gender dynamics of conflict management systems within the study communities - facilitating the investigation of conflict management from a gender perspective and its influence on the overall development of communities in the Oti and Volta Regions of Ghana.

The study analyzed the institutional gender perspectives on policies and practices of gender equality, mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and the involvement of women in peace and security issues; assessed the gender balance in the creation of conflict management committees; and assessed formal or informal requirements of institutions mandating "equal gender representation" in the process of managing conflict and building peace. Gender mainstreaming is a public policy concept of assessing the different implications for people of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes in all areas and levels. Empowerment is a process, which can be long and complex. For women and men to be empowered, conditions have to be created to enable them to acquire the necessary resources, knowledge, political voice, and organizational capacity (Prabhu, 2020).

The paper discussed findings that emerged from the qualitative interviews on gender dynamics of conflict management policies and programmes. The gender dynamics focused on institutional gender perspectives on policies and practices of gender equality, mainstreaming, women's empowerment and the involvement of women in peace and security issues, consideration for gender balance in the creation of conflict management committees, formal or informal requirements of institutions mandating "equal gender representation" or otherwise of committee members in the process of conflict management and empowerment of women and their ability to participate in managing conflicts and building peace. Opportunities for implementing gender-sensitive provisions or demands for gender equality should begin with creating permanent structures at the national and regional levels (Reimann, 2014). Bouta and Frerks (2002) confirm the promotion of gender-sensitive structures in conflict management through the essentialization of the role of women.

General Objective

To investigate conflict management from a gender perspective and its influence on the overall development of communities in the Oti and Volta Regions of Ghana.

Specific Objectives

1. Explore institutional gender perspectives on policies and practices of gender equality, mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and the involvement of women in peace and security issues.
2. Assess the gender balance in the creation of conflict management committees.
3. Formal or informal requirements of institutions mandating "equal gender representation" in the process of managing conflict and building peace.

Review of Related Literature

Gender Dynamics of Conflict Management

Gender dynamics are informed socio-cultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. Gender dynamics can reinforce or challenge existing norms (EIGE, 2020). Every conflict situation creates developmental challenges. The essence of conflict management under such a circumstance is to help build on and sustain gender role changes that result from conflict (OSCE 2001; Kumar 2001; ILO 2001 as cited in Bouta, Frerks & Bannon, 2005). In such a situation, therefore, conflict management should as a matter of necessity include economic assistance programs that would build on the newly acquired skills of women and men, encourage them to continue their

participation in new economic tasks and activities, and ensure more gender balance in accessing productive resources and labor markets (Bouta *et al.*, 2005).

According to Reimann (2014), opportunities for implementing gender-sensitive provisions or demands for gender equality should begin with creating permanent structures at the national and regional levels. An example was cited from the Philippines, where in 2012 a Women's Peace Table was established to bring together women of different religious, social, and ethnic backgrounds and promote their participation. Secondly, it suggests the introduction of quota systems as was the case in Burundi, Kenya, and Somalia that gradually gave a voice to women engaged in different peace processes. Laws were passed in Burundi for example that set a quota of 30% female representation in the higher levels of decision-making. Thirdly, it mentions ensuring legal and political improvements for women as another structure. Burundi adopted and ratified statutes that recognize the right of all citizens to participate in the public life of their country, without discrimination, and they passed laws and provisions that aim to improve the integration of women into political and economic life by. Fourthly, it mentioned the monitoring of the implementation of peace agreements. Fifthly, it was suggested to combine international pressure, with highly personal and local commitments and finally mentioned awareness raising and knowing one's rights through capacity building to promote the participation of women in local land management.

Gender Dynamics of Conflict Management Policies and Programmes

Robinson & Cordaid (2016) advocate that understanding the policy framework of gender, peace, and state building matters firstly because gender equality and women's rights are of great essence, as articulated in Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Secondly, integrating gender into peace- and state-building is of instrumental value as attested to by evidence that interventions aimed at peace- and state-building may be more effective when they are gender-sensitive or linked to promoting gender equality. Thirdly, gender sensitivity enhances accountability, inclusion, and legitimacy, which are key underlying principles of peacebuilding and state building. Finally, applying a gender perspective brings an important analytical dimension to peacebuilding and state-building processes.

To Bouta and Frerks (2002), in a literature review and institutional analysis on women's role in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction, an important lesson learned was that to develop an effective and transparent policy about women in armed conflicts, women and gender policies must be translated into concrete plans of action and qualitative/quantitative benchmarks or targets, which are continuously monitored and evaluated. They also said it was important to develop mechanisms to hold states accountable for not complying with internationally agreed gender policies and objectives such as the UNSCR 1325. Reimann, 2014; Greenburg and Zuckerman, 2009; Strachan and Haider, 2015 are all researchers who espouse the gender perspective in the policies and programmes of conflict management institutions.

In Ghana, the National Gender Policy (2015) is one important national policy that spells out issues on the involvement of men/ boys and women/ girls aimed at removing systemic social-cultural practices that slow down women's empowerment especially ending violence against women and girls and improving gender relationships in homes and public places. The GHANAP I and 2 are also policies that specifically focus on the involvement of men and women in conflict management and thus deal with some gender dynamics in relation to conflict management.

Study Areas

The study covered two districts in the Oti region with the Nkonya community located in the Biakoye district and the Nkwanta community located in the Nkwanta South district. In the Volta region, however, the study covered four districts. The Peki community is in the South Dayi district, the Tsito

community in the Ho West district, and the Alavanyo and Hohoe communities in the Hohoe municipality. The study therefore generally covered two regions in Ghana and five districts in the Oti and Volta regions altogether.

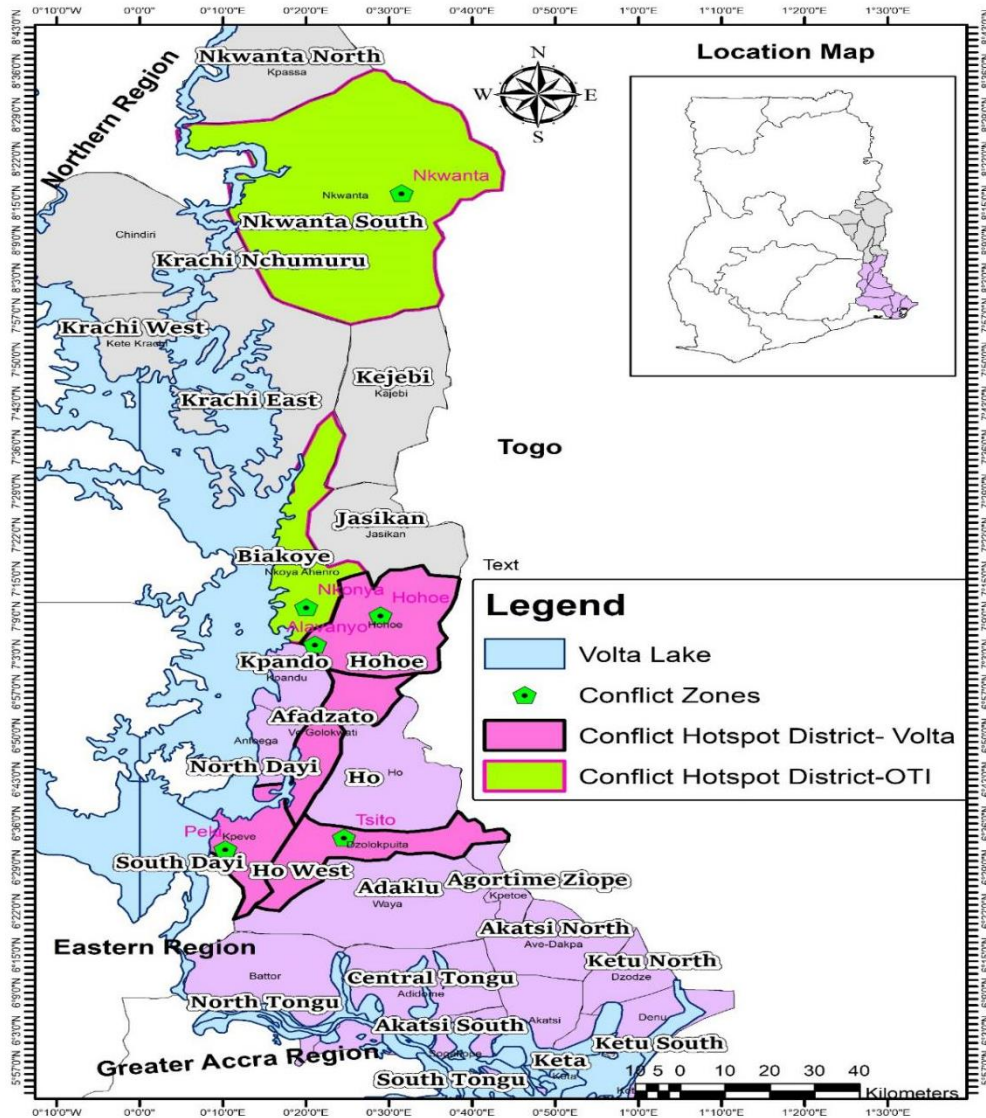


Figure 4.1: Map showing the location of conflict hotspots and their districts of location in the Oti and Volta Regions of Ghana.

Source: HypaSpatial (2019).

Materials and Methods

The study adopted Interpretivism as a philosophy of the qualitative research paradigm with a focus on culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world (Chowdhury, 2014).

A case study design was adopted for the study with data collected through interviews, focused group discussions, and observation. In all, a total of 36 key informants were interviewed from the conflict hotspots and institutions in addition to 48 focus group participants, giving a total of 84 study participants. The data types, population, data collection methods, and instruments are also indicated in Table 1. Narrative thematic analysis was used in bringing out key issues related to the specific objectives of the study. The data collected were interpreted and discussed in accordance with the literature review.

Table 1: Data Types, Population, Data Collection Methods, And Instruments

Type of Data/Source of Data	Study Population	Data Collection Method	Data Collection Instrument
Qualitative/Primary	Key Informants from Institutions and conflict hotspots (Mainly heads of institutions and top ranks as well as traditional authorities)	In-depth interview	Interview Guide
Qualitative/Primary	Gatekeepers and opinion leaders from conflict hotspots/ Communities (mainly Queen mothers, traditional representatives, opinion leaders, the youth, women, and men)	Focus Group Discussion	Focus Group Guide
Qualitative/Primary	Infrastructure and human activities within Conflict hotspots/ communities	Observation	Observation Guide

Results and Discussions

Institutional gender perspectives on policies and practices relating to women in peace and security issues

Emerging themes here were: even though there's education on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, the involvement of women is generally low in all spheres; name-calling by other women results in women shying away from taking various positions in public; some institutions are still maintaining the status quo that women are below men and should therefore work under the authority of men; women being their own enemies and gender equality & mainstreaming should be applied only when women qualify for the positions they are applying to.

Key policies were in place to enhance gender equality and mainstreaming even though their implementation fell short of expectations.

Though most institutions have policies that are aimed at promoting gender equality and mainstreaming, the practice lags. Some institutions such as the NCCE and the Army actively work at bridging the gap between men and women in their institutions, whereas others like the House of Chiefs have sectors where females are unable to assume functional roles traditionally.

The Peace Council's take is that, in peace processes where both men and women participate, the outcomes are long-lasting. In other words, the institution believes once the population of Ghana is composed of both men and women and even with the fact that the population of women is higher than that of men, when it comes to conflict management women should be equally represented. But, as you already know, the women's representation on the Council is woefully inadequate. The nomination of persons to be appointed on the Council is within the domain of the institutions that are mandated to do so and so when they do nominate these individuals, the administrative arm of the institution has very little to do about it, but then we always urge the institutions to nominate women (3rd September 2019).

Fortunately, NCCE for example from the top to the bottom of its structure tries very hard to ensure that the male-female balance is maintained. That is why for example when you look at the structure of the commission, the head is a female. Out of the two

deputies we have, one is a woman. You realize the commission is trying very hard to encourage women (5th September 2019).

In chieftaincy, there are women. Even though men dominate over women, we have a section of women in chieftaincy at the regional houses. We have the research unit; we have the judiciary and the accounts section. In the research unit, ever since, women have dominated, they work there. It's more of registration of chiefs, filling forms - where women can be in that office for long. The accounting office as we know is dominated by both females and males. But the judicial aspect is the pivot, let me say the heart of the institution where a little error can bring so many problems in the traditional areas. As a result, ever since I've been in the institution, I haven't seen females dominating the judicial section. (7th September 2019).

For example, based on the policy that is already there, and the UN resolution, the department at the national level actively gets involved in the activity of the committee and reports periodically. Now every ministry, department, and agency is supposed to have a gender desk officer who ensures that gender equality issues are mainstreamed into the work of every ministry, department, and agency. And that is how come we are offering training to all these people. Training has been offered to the ministries' gender officers and the district assembly's gender desk officers are being taken up. But I can say that almost every district assembly has a gender desk officer – whether the person has the capacity or not, there is somebody who serves as the gender desk officer. And when it comes to empowerment, and empowering women, we mostly organize a forum to create awareness because we believe that when somebody is informed and knows what decision to take that is enough empowerment for the person. But the ideal practice that we think should take place is that the Department of Gender, at the headquarters and regional level, should have a unit that is specifically doing the empowerment issue because sometimes women empowerment issues get lost up in the mainstream agenda. For example, when we are talking about mainstreaming gender issues in the area of participation in politics that one needs specific woman empowerment which can include training women who are interested in getting involved in politics. Because when we tell political parties to mainstream gender into their constitution, they will do it on paper alright, but they will always insist on every woman as well as every man fighting to get there. Unless of course what we should be asking for is a quota system. When we have a quota system or a representation system, we will look at every region, you should present a number of women in your region so that we could have that (6th September 2019).

Females should be encouraged to assume functional roles in all institutions. There should be an established mode of selection in all such institutions to map out a strategy that would ensure equal representation of both males and females to ensure the participation of all the sexes in the process of conflict management. Key policies that support the functional roles of females here in Ghana are the Ghana National Action Plan (GHANAP), 1 and 2. The essence of conflict management in conflict situations where there are developmental challenges is to help build on and sustain changes in gender roles that result from conflict (OSCE 2001; Kumar 2005; ILO 2001 as cited in Bouta, Frerks & Bannon, 2005). Frerks, 2002 talks about women's role in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction make it important for their involvement

Programs of some institutions were geared towards education on gender equality and women's rights.

Based on the mandates establishing them, some institutions purposely educate citizens on gender issues. They educate them on gender equality, women's rights in society, and other empowerment issues.

We do door-to-door sensitization which is community-to-community sensitization for women to advocate for their rights. We, men, have cheated the women for long, so now we are asking the women to cut when the men cut (4th September 2019).

As the name of the organization the Global Action for Women's Empowerment (GLOWA) suggests, we try to generally ensure gender equality. For instance, under the POWER project, there is one activity that we are implementing, is unpaid care work, where we try to educate both men and women, traditional authorities, schoolboys and girls, by making sure that we re-distribute care roles in our homes so that the unpaid care work burden will not solely be on women so that men can also assist their wives. We realized that because of the unpaid care work, most women are unable to engage in economic activities, as a result, the financial burden is always on the man which may lead to misunderstandings in the home which at times result in violence and conflict. So, we are trying to re-orient the minds of men so they get to know that care roles are not solely for women and that it is a shared responsibility so that the women can also have the time to engage in economic activities to enable them also to support in the home in terms of finance. We also try to involve the Queen mothers in most of our activities, so that they are not left out since they are the mouthpiece of the communities, as well as the chiefs (4th September 2019).

“We are a department under the ministry of gender, so our views do not differ from the views of the ministry so in our work we also promote gender equality among boys and girls. We believe that when that level playing field is given to them, in the near future, most of the problems we are facing now will be solved because we believe girls have a lot of untapped resources that can open the prospects of the country (7th September 2019).

The findings above are congruent with the OSCE, 2001(as cited in Bouta *et al.*, 2004). It states that there is a need to educate and sensitize key actors such as legislators, judges, employers, communities, and traditional leaders about gender issues regarding conflict management work.

Women shied away from leadership positions due to “subtle stigmatization”.

Women were demoralized through name callings by other women or not given the opportunity possibly due to traditional gender perspectives of women's role in society.

Traditional societal gender perspectives do influence women taking on leadership positions even when they stand a better chance of assuming them. Women at times demoralize their peers vying for leadership positions and on occasions go to the extent of actively working against their choice to such positions. Kiamba (2008) stated that historically, leadership had gone with the masculinity notion which doubles in the belief that men are better leaders than women, till today. Kiamba, in view of the earlier statement, stated that even though female leaders had increased in numbers, they are normally picked as an afterthought. Societal conventions in relation to leadership according to Højgaard (2002), exclude women. Højgaard again states that the top leadership positions are also regarded as a male domain arguing that this has been the norm for ages and that the cultural construction of leadership is the very source of this difference which is now being contested as more women get into leadership positions. This state of leadership pattern is confirmed by Ngongo, 1993 (as cited in Grant, 2005).

Interestingly, there is enough evidence to suggest that women lead differently from men (Eagly and Johnson, 1990, as cited in de la Rey, 2005). For instance, women portray a more participatory approach, are more democratic, allow for power and information sharing, are more sensitive, more nurturing than men, focus on relationships, and enable others to make contributions through delegation (Tedrow and Rhoads, 1999; Grove & Montgomery, 2000; De la Rey, 2005). Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) also noted characteristics such as building coalitions and advancing individual and community development as constructs women display in their relational styles. He added that women

are also better at conflict management, have better listening skills, and show more tolerance and empathy. The different gifts possessed by men and women, he said should not mean that one is dominant over the other. Possibly the cultural stance of a woman leader is what has culminated in women themselves using it as a weapon and more so as a societally accepted norm to stigmatize their fellow women who have made it to such leadership positions and thus resulting in these women being called names like “Iron Body”, “Man-Woman” and a whole lot in the Ghanaian setting. Possibly these women are rather upholding the culture of the land forgetting development is producing a fast-changing society where everybody matters and where everybody’s right is catered for. Below are statements indicating acts of subtle stigmatization of women leaders by their fellow women in some institutions.

Gender equality and mainstreaming were either on merit or by affirmative action

Gender equality and mainstreaming were easily accomplished when the women qualify for the positions they are aspiring for in institutions, however, affirmative action is applied on some occasions to get more women up the institutional ladder or to encourage them to take on certain roles. Some people also are of the conviction that before women are given positions at places their qualifications should be what would speak for them and not for the fact that they are pushed to such places. A key respondent from the Ghana Police stated this below.

For me, it is nice when the woman qualifies and is picked to be at any place that is institutional. In the Ghana Police, we don’t give any priority to men. It is open to all. Of course, we at times give some level of priority to women especially when it comes to enlistment, the height is reduced for women and at times, even the grades are reduced for women all because we want more women. At times it also creates problems. It creates problems because even in some of the units headed by women, they come and tell us they want people or personnel who are men and not women. (9th September 2019).

All the above statements or findings are buttressing that of Robinson & Cordaid (2016) who advocated that there was a growing body of evidence that peacebuilding and state-building interventions may be more effective if they are gender-sensitive or linked to promoting gender equality.

There was consideration for gender balance in the creation of committees.

The consideration of gender balance in the creation of committees that helped to manage conflicts was overwhelmingly affirmed by a majority of interviewees across the board.

By their nature and their diverse calming roles during conflicts, women were to be equally included as men on conflict management committees.

The findings here are still in line with the findings of Robinson & Cordaid (2016) who again state that applying a gender perspective brings an important analytical dimension to peacebuilding and state-building processes. Gen. John Allen who argued that “No society has ever successfully transitioned from being a conflict-ridden society to a developing society unless women were a part of the mainstream” (Connell, 2016) also confirmed the findings of these key informants from Peki, Tsito, and Nkwanta below.

Yes. I know that they have to consider women. As I have already said men alone cannot do it and women alone cannot do it. They have to come together to form this

committee. If women's representation on this committee is not that adequate, then there is the need to add more women. (5th November 2019).

Just as the Bible specifies that anybody who finds a woman finds a good thing, we as a peace group would always want to have both men and women to work with (10th December 2019).

The women too are doing so well in modern times, so we are ready to involve them in whatever we do (12th December 2019).

A focus group discussion later in the day also endorsed gender balance. It established that, if the gender balance is ensured, it would be good because women naturally love sharing experiences and ideas that work as well as bring to bear short-term ideas that will quickly help the group in taking decisions. Researchers that espouse the gender perspective are, Reiman,2004; USAID,2011; Greenburg and Zuckerman,2009 and Strachan and Haider,2015.

Women perceived as domineering were not to be on committees.

There was this perception, especially among men about women with very strong character i.e., women being domineering and by virtue of that, it was thought that they were not to be allowed onto conflict management committees. The reason for the suggestion was that such women had the penchant to foment trouble and would not help in achieving the objectives of such committees. Key informant statements that vividly point out the non-inclusion of women who were domineering are captured below.

I think the representation of women as it is now should be as it is. Gradually with time, the numbers would increase when the need comes. Women are the cause of most conflict situations. This is because something that a man would see and ignore is what a woman would make an issue. And they are the types who can go to every length to be heard even though they might even not have a case. The Alavanyo case of a fight over water for instance at a riverside was brought back to the community and that was the origin of the Alavanyo/ Nkonya Conflict. I think we don't need an equal representation of men and women on such committees now (21st October 2019).

You know our society has been structured in such a way that females are limited to some areas because of their nature. We are thinking of how to change it. So, the male, and female imbalance composition- that is the problem, but the elders have a way of tapping in very brilliant young ladies and men into our committees. They have been doing it everywhere, you see, but one thing is that as a colleague has said when you come, you feel you must dominate, that is the area we are worried about. So, we have been thinking about how to include them in the system but when they come this is the problem we have with them, but we are managing it (repeated), we are not going to send you out but we feel that you should stay in the committee and work and help to build the committee solidly so it will flourish and do the work because the work outcome will favor all of us, no gender imbalance in there. So, we feel that women's opinions must prevail on some of the issues we need to discuss, but our custom limits women in some areas especially with our council of elders (14th October 2019).

The above views of key informants were confirmed by a group discussion in Alavanyo. It categorically stated that the involvement of women will pick up with time. Observation of meetings in the community also indicated the presence of men compared to women.

Formal or informal requirements of institutions mandating “equal gender representation” or otherwise of committee members in the process of conflict management.

Institutions like the Peace Council had their Acts spelling out how well to involve women to ensure a balanced gender representation at the national, regional, and district levels. Others like the NCCE, House of Chiefs, and the NGO (GLOWA) did not have any formal document spelling out any modes of operation to ensure gender equality.

So, I’ll just go back to our Act. I think the Act is very conscious about the representation of women on the Peace Council Board and that should mean the processes that the Council engages in should result in equal gender representation. So, the Act is very explicit. I think it is expected that there should be 50/50 representation. That is why the President is appointing the Governing Board. The President’s representative in the region, the Regional Minister, is appointing the two representations on the Council. They are mandated to have one woman, one man and if that is the leadership, then, even though the other institutions are not mandated, they are to take a cue from what the government is doing – the President is doing, the Regional Minister is doing. And when we are making the requests to the institutions, we specifically indicate that males/females should be nominated. So, whatever comes up, I think at the end of the day, the spirit of the Act that set up the institution is to have 50/50 representation (3rd September 2019).

It is informal in the sense that we were also brought to the fore by WSR (Women Situation Room) which mandated us to make it as such. It is an embodiment of women leaders in West Africa coming together to stop political wars because of what happened in Sierra Leone and Liberia (4th September 2019).

It’s rather based on strategy. Sometimes you are asked to look at the whole issue and you have to strategize, that is using your own judgment, maybe this will be better for a woman to handle or this will be better for a man to handle (5th September 2019).

Formal and Informal requirements of unequal gender representation on their committees

The GLOWA (an NGO) for instance had an informal structure not supported by any legal framework of theirs. They adopted a mechanism from an organization that allows more women representation on their committees. The House of Chiefs on the other hand has an act that supports the representation of men (Chiefs) in the house and not Queen mothers. This has been a bone of contention between the Chiefs and some Queen mothers who think this should not be the case. The issue has been contested by some Queen mothers for some years now, while the House has also taken no decision yet because they believe their institution is established based on the Ghanaian culture. Below are statements from GLOWA and the House of Chiefs to attest to the explanations.

In the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) that we’re carrying out in that program, there is clear-cut legislation that states that the female should outweigh the male on the oversight committee. They stated it clearly so that the committee, the women should outweigh the men so that if you form a committee where the women are not more, they will not accept it. African Peer Review Mechanism does this to ensure the women’s participation in decision-making is enhanced because if they say that they should be chosen on merit most of them will not get there. So, they make sure that if there are seven members, we are looking for four women and three men so that at least they’ll be there (5th September 2019).

They should allow five Queen mothers to join as some Queen mothers are suggesting, but it is not yet a practice. But for now, when it comes to resolving chieftaincy issues, it is solely the Chiefs (7th September 2019).

Empowerment of women and their ability to participate in managing conflicts and building peace

The themes that evolved revealed that interviewees acknowledged that women needed to be or were empowered. Some pronouncements portrayed a level of empowerment of women whereas others did not.

Female empowerment seemed to be a concept yet to be practicalized in some settings.

Some pronouncements of male opinion leaders though creating the impression of empowering women were vague and seem to lack elements of that. The statements below are some of the vague statements put up by some male interviewees.

Yes, women are empowered. Yes, they have the ability to do it well (5th November 2019).

It is so vital. Yes, women are empowered because they learn from the men who have the experience (10th December 2019).

Women are doing well and must be encouraged to be part of the committees (21st October 2019).

Most women do not have the courage to speak on such platforms, so we sort out to get those who are vocal which accounts for their fewer numbers. We, therefore, ignore those who are passive (12th December 2019).

It will be useful if they receive some training in conflict resolution mechanisms to be empowered (10th November 2019).

The general attitude of females feeling comfortable in the background and not being empowered in any way was reiterated in group discussions. However, experiences from Peki and Tsito showed there was a level of empowerment occurring through the following controversial statements.

Yes, women are empowered in such a way that in our meetings at church and community gatherings, they are allowed to bring their opinion and they are listened to (10th December 2019).

In the committees, for example, nobody steps on the right of the other. And before somebody is chosen to be on the committee it is because of the good conduct and abilities of the person. Our women are therefore empowered to do what they can do and do it better (12th December 2019).

These concepts are however envisaged to act as strategies to enhance gender equality, which is an eventual goal that would make the conflict management processes in our institutions and communities a sustainable process as a result of the involvement of everybody in society.

Limitations

As a result of the purposive selection of study participants in the various study areas, their views expressed may not be exactly the views of the larger community members.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study diagnosed the various conflict management processes in conflict hotspots and institutions bringing out the gender perspectives whose neglect might have contributed to the protracted nature of conflicts as well as the changing (complex) nature of conflicts in the Volta and Oti Regions. Additionally, there was a conceptual framework on gender perspectives in conflict management spelling out ways in which conflict management can be accomplished and how sustainable conflict management, peace, and development can be arrived at.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Further studies should focus on how the management of conflict by organizations in the Oti and Volta regions in Ghana would focus on power dynamics in conflict management or push for more women in conflict managing institutions. Additionally, there should be a focus of policies and programmes on both men and women in conflict management and not one that focuses on just one particular gender.

Conclusion

Institutional gender dynamics of policies and practices of gender equality, mainstreaming, women's empowerment and the involvement of women in peace and security issues revealed that even though there's education on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, the involvement of women is generally low in all spheres. There was name calling by other women resulting in women shying away from taking various positions in public. Some institutions maintained the status quo that women were below the men and so should therefore work under the authority of men. Gender equality and mainstreaming were to be applied only when women qualify for the positions they were applying to. The consideration of gender balance in the creation of committees that helped to manage conflicts was overwhelmingly affirmed across the board. Requirements for equal gender representation on committees were formal or informal depending on statutes establishing the institutions. Some other institutions per their functions had formal or informal requirements for equal gender representations on committees. The need for women to be empowered was acknowledged with some pronouncements portraying a level of empowerment of women whereas others did not.

Recommendations

There should be key policies to enhance training and technical assistance programmes that would build the capacity of the conflict management institutions in implementing their gender equality and mainstreaming policies to involve women. Additionally, institutions tasked with managing conflicts should ensure the enhanced participation of women in their teams cognizant of their unique conflict management qualities.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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