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ANALYZING ETHNORELIGIOUS CONFLICT DYNAMICS AND THEIR IMPACT ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN WUKARI AND IBI, NIGERIA

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Abstract: Conflict remains a pervasive challenge in societies worldwide, with Nigeria experiencing recurrent violent clashes since the return to democracy in 1999. Taraba State, created in 1991, has been notably affected by ethnoreligious conflicts, especially in the Southern region encompassing Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas. These conflicts, rooted in ethnic and religious differences, have had devastating consequences on the general population, with women and children bearing the brunt of the violence. This study investigates the specific impacts of ethnoreligious conflict on women and children in these areas. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the research highlights the severe physical, emotional, and socio-economic toll on these vulnerable groups. Beyond the loss of family members and destruction of property, the conflicts have disrupted social cohesion, trust, and access to essential services. The proliferation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), predominantly women and children, underscores the scale of human suffering and displacement caused by the clashes. The paper concludes by emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable peacebuilding initiatives and policy interventions aimed at protecting women and children, restoring social harmony, and preventing future conflicts in Taraba State and Nigeria at large.

Keywords: Ethnoreligious conflict, women, children, internally displaced persons, Taraba State

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a major problem in any given human society, and it is often inevitable. In Nigeria, conflict is very often the result of political, economic and social instability frequently stemming from bad governance, failed economic policies and in appropriate development programmes stemming from exacerbated ethnic or religious differences in society (Ekpenyong, 2011). Since the re-introduction of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, the country has become a disturbing flashpoint of violent conflicts. These violent conflicts take the forms of either political or ethnic, economic or religious and so on, leading to serious consequences on the nation and its people. According to Thompson (2007, p.59), ethnic and religious mobilization can often be found at the heart of political competition. As with all social cleavages; fault lines within societies form along these identities, creating opposing interests. These differences of interest, in turn, offer themselves to potential or occasional violent conflicts.

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No state, for example, is devoid of ethnic influence, but this is not to say that expressions of ethnicity and religions always result in violence, especially such desires and demands are channeled peacefully through political institutions, just like other clashes of interest within the polity (Adeline and Okechukwu, 2015). Ethno-Religious identity has been a serious factor in the occurrences of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Taraba State, since creation in 1991, has witnessed violent communal clashes across ethnic and religious lines, and these clashes have claimed thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands of people, and fostered a climate of instability throughout the surrounding area. The impact of these clashes can never be overemphasized, thus the need for an article of this nature to outline them, particularly on women and children. This is because the effects of these conflicts on women and children have not been clearly captured. To effectively do this, the article raises and addresses some research questions such as: What are the cases and causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Southern Taraba? How has it affected women and children? How can ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba State be curtailed? The choice of Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas for the study is based on the fact that out of the five Local Government Areas of the Southern Zone of Taraba State, the two are the most hit in terms of violent ethno-religious conflict.

Theoretical perspectives about causes, nature and impact of conflicts.

Scholars have written extensively on the causes, nature and consequences or impact of conflicts. Depending on the school of thought to which they represent, such explanations have tended to place a lot of emphasis on one particular or a set of related theories, while diminishing the importance or explanatory relevance of other competing theories (Ademola 2009, p.41). In order to employ a theoretical approach to this article, a number of theories of conflicts are examined for the purpose of adopting the most appropriate theory. The first to be examined is the innate theory which is broad in coverage, incorporating scholars with biological backgrounds such as human physiology, ethnology, socio-biology, psychology, etc. It contends that conflict is innate in all social interactions, and among all animals, including human beings. However, it argues that humans as animals, albeit higher species of animals, would fight naturally over things they cherish such as cultural/religious identities (Ademola 2009, p.46). Furthermore, when man feels the fulfillment of his socio-cultural and economic needs/goals are threatened, there is the tendency for confrontation of those assumed to be responsible for denial or frustration of their needs/goals. This explains why the Frustration-Aggression theory propounded by John Dollard in 1939 and Ted Robert Gurr's Relative Deprivation theory propounded in 1970 become very relevant in explaining the causes and consequences of ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria generally, and Wukari and Ibi LGAs of Taraba State in particular.

Another theory that is relevant to this article is the Psycho-Cultural conflict theory which emphasizes the role of culture, ethnicity and religion (identity) in inducing conflict. The theory contends that even though there are different forms of identities, the one that is based on people's ethnic origin and the culture that is learned on the basis of that ethnic origin is one of the most important ways of explaining violent conflicts. Identity is thus seen to be the reason for social conflicts that take long to resolve with far reaching negative consequences. On another hand, it is apt to say that eruption of violent conflicts is linked with group pluralism and interactions to achieve their diverse objectives (Deeka, 2002). In seeking relevance or retention of political power, the elites manipulate

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and massage religious and ethnic sentiments. Many of the ethno-religious crises of Nigeria in general, and Taraba State in particular, are rooted in the context of the group conflict theoretical assumption.

From the forgoing, one can deduce that there are several theories applicable in research on ethno-religious conflict. However, the blend of the three theories captured above, provides much closer explanation to the understanding of the causes, nature and consequences of ethnoreligious conflicts in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas of Taraba State.

Geographical Location.

This article focuses mainly on ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas of Taraba State. These Local Government Areas are found in the southern part of Taraba State, which is made up of other Local Government Areas such as Donga, Takum, Ussa and Yangtu Special Development Area. This area is found in the Guinea Savannah region of Nigeria, located in the Lower Benue Valley.

The essence of having a brief knowledge of the geography of the area is to understand how geographical features of the area have contributed tremendously to its peopling, the form and patterns of culture which emerged from their interactions with their environment and their cordial relations. The geographical background of southern Taraba State is captured in Agbu and Ibrahim (2018) that the climate of southern Taraba State Area can be said to be mild, being influenced by the temperature and humidity of the air. The equatorial maritime air mass (rainbearing) and the tropical continental air mass (harmattan) are influential in determining the amount of rainfall and temperature of the area. The climate is significant in the population distribution of the area and more so affects the soil patterns of settlement. Hamman (2007,

p.10) notes that on the whole, there is a uniform temperature in southern Taraba area, with both the maximum and minimum temperatures attaining their highest marks just before the onset of the rains. Rainy season begins at either March or April and ends in Oct/November. However, much of the down pour occurs in June/July with a break of few days in August, while the heaviest down pour descends in September/October (Agbu and Ibrahim 2018, p.153).

Specifically, Wukari Local Government Area is one of the oldest Local Government Areas in Taraba State. It was created in February, 1976, as part of the defunct Gongola State and became part of Taraba State in August, 1991. Wukari Local Government Area covers an area of 4,308km² and it is bounded to the north by Gassol Local Government Area, to the east by Donga Local Government Area, to the south by Benue State and to the West by Nasarawa State and Ibi Local Government Area. It had a population of 238, 283 with 124, 285 males and 113, 998 females, according to the 2006 National Population Census. However, the NPC (2006) projected a population of 318,400 for Wukari Local Government Area in 2016. It lies on coordinates 7⁰51'N, 9⁰47'E (Wikipedia, 2018). Wukari Local Government Area is located on gently undulating plain with mean attitude of about 200 meters above sea level.

The soils are well drained and generally fertile for agricultural production. Wukari Local Government Area has a tropical continental type of climate consisting of two seasons (wet and dry seasons). The wet season starts in April and ends in October, while the dry season starts in November and ends in March. The annual temperature ranges from 27°C to 28°C. The LGA is located in the southern part of the Guinea Savannah. The vegetation cover

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consists mainly of savannah woodland, dominated by *Daniella*, *Isobertina* and grasses of *Andropogon* species (Oruonye and Abbas, 2011).

The LGA is drained by the River Benue, at Jibu and Chinkai and its tributaries, river Donga flowing through Tsokundi and Nwuko, and river Bantaje at Gindin Dorowa. The geographical features and condition of the Local Government Area permits cultivation of crops and rearing of animals. Types of crops cultivated include rice, maize, millet, guinea corn, cassava, yam, groundnut, bambara nut, benniseed, soya beans, melon, sugar-cane, and so on. Economic trees such as mango, cashew, orange and palm are also grown in Wukari Local Government Area. Historically, Wukari town, which is the headquarters of Wukari Local Government Area, today is the seat of the Aku-Uka, the Jukun paramount ruler, believed to have been founded after the collapse of the Kwararafa State by Aku Angyu Katakpa (Agbu 2013, p.39). It became the headquarters of the Wukari Federation during Colonial period and it is inhabited by so many other people such as the Tiv, Hausa, Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Idoma, Angas, etc. However, it is predominated by the Jukun whose chief economic activities are farming and fishing. Their other economic activities today are salt production, trading and commerce, local beer brew, pottery, weaving, and so on. All these economic activities together make life easy going for the people of Wukari and its environs (Agbu 2013, p.39).

On the other hand, Ibi Local Government Area was created on the 27th August 1991, out of Wukari Local Government Area with Ibi town as its headquarters. It is located at the southern part of Taraba State and lies within latitude 8°10'N and longitude 9°45'E (Akoga 2012, p.3). It has a landmass of 2,728.872 km² with a population of 84, 407 based on 2006 National Population Census. It shares boundary with Plateau State on the North and Nasarawa State in the West. The southern border is occupied by Wukari Local Government Area, while Gassol and Karim-Lamido Local Government Areas occupy its North-East axis. It is located in about 350 meters below sea level and has a plain land all over with fairly undulating and many swampy plain areas of fertile land good for the cultivation of rice, sugar-cane, etc (Akoga 2012, p.3). Ibi Local Government Area has a fertile soil and it is drained by River Benue and its tributaries such as rivers Shimakar, Gishiri, Wase and some natural ponds and lakes such as Nwonyo, Isini, Awo, Sai, Aku, Tapga, Baruwana, Akoku, etc.

Generally speaking, Ibi Local Government Area can best be described as an agrarian and aquatic environment. Akoga (2012, p.4) notes that this description is not an exaggeration considering the enormous farming and fishing activities going on in all the three districts of the Local Government. The main occupation of the people of Ibi today is fishing, farming and trading. Quite a good number of youths are working class citizens today in both the Local, State and Federal services. Fishing is the predominant occupation carried out by two major Jukun clans in the town (Wanu and Wurbo). The Hausa are mostly traders. Only Jukun and Tiv living in the villages do produce large commercial quantities of food items or food stuff for both domestic consumption and commercial purposes (Akoga 2018, p12). The types of crops produced in Ibi Local Government Area is not different from those produced in Wukari Local Government Area.

Historically, Ibi is very significant and fundamental. Apart from the fact that it is on a strategic location which paved way for her occupation by the British trading companies, in 1883, a flourishing Ivory market was established in Ibi by the National Africa Company, a French Company (Adeleye 1971, p.208). In 1884, a military garrison was stationed in Ibi to protect the interest of the Royal Niger Company's commercial activity in the

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Middle Benue Valley. Before the RNC Charter was revoked by the British Government and total take-over of Northern Nigeria in 1899, Ibi was the District Administrative Headquarters of the Royal Niger Company between 1886 and 1899 (Ashu 1999, p.4). Ibi was administrative headquarters when Muri Province was created in 1900 and it remained the administrative headquarters of the Benue Province until when it was transferred to Abinsi and finally to Makurdi (NAK/SNP/15/ACC NO 11, 1906; Jacobs 2007, p.337 & Akoga 2012, p.75).

Furthermore, in terms of its historical significance, Ibi did not only accommodate the European trading companies and British colonial officials, but it was the gateway through which Christianity gained entrance into what became southern Taraba, Muri, Adamawa, Plateau, Nasarawa, etc. It hosted the headquarters of the Sudan United Mission (SUM) from 1909 to 1934 when it was moved to Gindiri. All these developments opened up Ibi for other people to come in and, of course, it paved way for the emancipated slaves to abode in it.

Today, Ibi Local Government Area comprises the Jukun, Hausa, Nufawa/Kakanda, Kabawa, Wurkum, Tiv and Fulani. There are also other Jukunoid groups such as Ichen, Kuteb and Kpanzo. There are also the Tarok, Angas, Kwalla, Ankwe, Seyawa and Garkawa who migrated into the area from the Plateau area in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. All these people are adherents of either of the two major religions (Christianity and Islam) in the area.

Overview of ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari and Ibi LGAs.

Southern Taraba State has experienced several conflicts that have either ethnic or religious coloration or both. Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas have the highest share of this nature of conflicts with devastating effects to not only the area, but the state and the nation at large. These conflicts are inter-ethnic, religious or both, thus “ethno-religious” conflicts. Prominent among the conflicts are the Tiv-Jukun conflicts of 1990-1992, 2001-2002 and 2019-2020; Ibi ethno-religious conflict of 1992, 2012-2015; Fulani herdsmen and Jukun/Tiv farmers violence of 2012-2018; and Wukari ethno-religious conflicts of 2013-2015. All these conflicts have their devastating effects on women and children from the area and the state at large.

Jukun and Tiv Conflicts: According to Agbu and Varvar (2017, p.23), the historical link between the Tiv and the Jukun predates colonial period. During that period, their relationship was cordial. However, between the colonial and post-colonial periods, at different occasions, their relationship went sour resulting in outbreak of violent communal clashes between them, such as in 1990-1992, 2001-2002 and 2019-2020. Many scholars such as Atoshi (1992), Adi (1992), Agbu (1992), Adda (1993), Adamu (2002), Hagher (2002), Akombo (2005), Wuam and Ikpanor (2013), Nyitse (2014), Akombo (2016), and Agbu, Zhema & Useini (2019), among others, have come up with different opinions, sentiments and perspectives on the causes and consequences of the Tiv-Jukun conflicts. Agbu and Varvar (2017, p.19) believe that colonial policies imposed on the two groups were responsible for the emergence of sour relationship between them before other factors. The imposition of colonial policies of cash crop production, tax payments, forced migration and monetization, among others, created rural poverty among the peoples (Tiv and Jukun), and in their resolve to solve the problem of rural poverty, viable alternatives such as migration in search for fertile land for farming became necessary.

However, the activities of the migrants’ in the host communities created conditions for communal conflicts between them (Agbu and Varvar 2017, p.23).

In 1990-1992, violent conflict erupted between the Tiv and the Jukun in mostly Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas, affecting almost all settlements. According to Akombo (2016, p.95), the conflict between the Tiv and

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Jukun erupted on 25th September, 1990, on a disputed piece of land in Nwuban in Katon Bagha District. Both communities accused one another of attacking its members in cold blood while working on a piece of land. The incident heightened JukunTiv tension in the District, which eventually engulfed the entire Local Government Area. Furthermore, Best, Idyorough and Shehu (2004) see the causes of the 1990-1992 conflict from different perspectives to include political issues, (political participation in, and control of, Wukari Local Government Council as well as political appointments and other resources); there was also the membership of the Wukari Traditional Council, precisely the desire by the Tiv to be part of the Council (Best, Idyorough and Shehu 2004, Pp.99-100). Other factors included land, rapid population growth of the Tiv, renaming of settlements in Tiv and so on. All these together led to the outbreak of the Tiv-Jukun communal conflict of 1990-1992 which Alubo (2006, p.104) considers as the longest running conflict in which whole villages were razed and there were wide spread of killings and looting.

Maier (2000. Pp.199-207) notes that the 1990-92 crisis recorded widespread devastation: burnt out villages, littered corpses in various stages of decomposition and household items strewn all over. The crisis also triggered large-scale refugees both of Jukun fleeing areas of violence seeking sanctuary in Wukari town and of the Tiv fleeing into Benue State. In the course of the crisis, statistics by Atoshi (1992, Pp22-51), Adi (1992, Pp7-10), and Agbu (2012, Pp98-102) show that almost all settlements along Wukari-Ibi-Sarkin/Kudu; Wukari-Tella; Wukari-Jootar; Wukari-Rafin/Kada-Abako; and Wukari-Tsokundi were burnt down either by the Tiv or the Jukun, affecting severely women and children.

The 1990-92 crisis stands out as the longest running single out-break in the festering conflicts between the Jukun and the Tiv. However, both in magnitude and intensity, it was surpassed by the 2001/2002 crisis (Alubo, 2006, p.106). The immediate cause of the Tiv-Jukun crisis of 2001/2002, according to Agbu (2012, p.97), was an encounter between Fulani herdsmen and Tiv farmers, but later involved the Jukun when Chonku, a Jukun settlement on the border between Benue and Taraba States, was attacked by the Tiv on the reason that the Jukun were supporting the Fulani. Nevertheless, there were remote causes of the crisis as acknowledged by Alubo (2006, Pp.109-110) to include:

1. The refusal by the Jukun to grant the Tiv demand for a place in the Wukari Traditional Council, on the ground that the Jukun traditional council is a forum to propagate Jukun language and cultural heritage, both of which differed from the Tiv (Adamu, 2002), and that just as it is unreasonable for the Igbo in Gboko to demand membership in the Tiv traditional council, or the Igbo in Kano to demand representation in Kano Emirate Council, so also is the Tiv demand for a place in the Wukari Traditional Council similarly unreasonable.
2. The Jukun allegation that the Tiv were engaged in land grabbing without either following due process nor paying respect to the Jukun paramount ruler (Taraba Joint Legal Team 2002, p.21).
3. The persistent demand by the Tiv for recognition as indigenes, with all rights and privileges as the Jukun rather than as settlers with limited rights.
4. The Tiv proclivity for domination of Jukun land and viewing wherever they settled as part of Tivland, and with the Tor Tiv regarding himself as the leader of the Tiv Worldwide thereby seeking to control Tiv people everywhere.

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5. The persistent allegation by the Jukun of the Tiv elite from Benue State consistently seeking to influence and tele-guide affairs in Taraba State and elsewhere in support of 'Great Tivland' thereby stirring trouble in the process in Taraba State.

6. The persistent allegation by the Tiv of the determination by the Jukun to marginalize them politically through always precipitating crisis in order to disperse them before elections, as placing Tiv villages under Jukun villages even when the former are much larger.

7. The allegation by the Tiv of the desire by the Jukun to hold them in perpetual bondage, thereby blocking any move for the creation of an additional Local Government Areas out of Wukari LGA because of the fear that this would lead to loss of control over most of this vast area to the Tiv.

Furthermore, in 2019, another violent conflict erupted between the Jukun and Tiv. Starting from Kente in Wukari LGA on 1st April, 2019, the crisis soon engulfed the whole LGA and eventually to other Local Government Areas in southern Taraba State, with the exception of Ussa LGA and Yangtu Special Development Area. Agbu, Zhema & Useini (2019) have attempted to itemize some of the issues that led to crisis to include suspicion by the Tiv, of Jukun allying with the Fulani in attacking their settlements. However, the trigger incident for the outbreak was the chasing away of Tiv women from Kente market by one Solomon Ihom (Tiv). The incident led to a fight which eventually escalated into violence. However, Fwaje, Paul & Tino (2020, p.137) summarize the causes of the conflict to include dispute arising from the use of land resources, agitation for traditional and political recognition, and claim of land ownership. Between 2019 and 2020 (violence still on-going), hundreds of people have lost their lives, thousands displaced and several settlements and communities destroyed by both Tiv and Jukun. It is even understatement to say that the crisis has devastating effects on women and children.

Ibi Crises: Ibi Local Government Area experienced crises between 1992 and 2012-2015 which had ethnic, religious and political undertone. Examples of such conflicts are the March, 1992, violent conflict within the town, and Ibi ethno-religious crisis of 2012 to 2015. Many have attempted to identify the causes of the crisis. While Akoga (2012, p.149) associated the crisis with Nwonyo fishing festival of March 1992 as the immediate cause of the crisis, several other events are considered as the remote causes of the crisis, prominent among which is associated with the preparations towards the hosting of the 1989 Nwonyo Fishing Festival. The major issue was the insubordinate attitude of the District Head of Ibi towards the Aku Uka, Dr Shekarau Angyu Masa-ibi, Kuvyon II. The District Head declined making any arrangement for the festival as was directed by the Aku Uka, who is a First Class Chief. However, the Aku Uka, used his veto power to ensure that Nwonyo fishing festival was held. Subsequently, the Aku Uka announced the dethronement of the District Head that same day, notwithstanding the fact that his subjects from Ibi, the Jukun-Wanu and Wurbo came out en-mass to participate in the festival in order to save their paramount ruler from shame. The complications that resulted from this development created a rift between Jukun and Hausa/Fulani Muslims, which soon introduced religious colouration. For instance, the Jukun-Wurbo who are Muslims decided to take side with Hausa and their allies against Jukun-Wanu and Wapan who are mostly Christians.

From the turn of events, the Jukun Christians believed that from the March/April, 1989, event, a stage was set for their persecution in Ibi. They were publicly insulted in markets, schools and the Local Government Secretariat.

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Consequently, on 14th May, 1990, in retaliation of skirmishes between the Hausa and Jukun in Wukari, Ibi became tensed up, but for the intervention of the police, the tension did not escalate to open violence. Notwithstanding, the mistrust between the two major faiths in the town kept increasing. The whole issue lied on the fact that the Jukun Wanu/Wapan were considered the enemies of Muslims, particularly HausaFulani settlers (Akoga 2012, p.139).

The 1990/92 Tiv-Jukun crisis in Wukari Local Government Area equally added momentum to the growing tension between the Jukun and Hausa/Fulani Muslims in Ibi. During the crisis in 1990/92, the Jukun people claimed that the Hausa-Fulani supported the Tiv in Ibi instead of being neutral. With the creation of Ibi Local Government Area in August 1991, the situation became worst. The entire Jukun community was mocked and insulted, some Jukun houses located within Muslim dominated areas had stones rained on their roofs and Hausa-Fulani youths chanted: “*Mun rabu da masu zonko*”, meaning we have parted ways with those who plait hair. But that was not true because in Ibi, there were still Jukun Wanu and Wapan. With the political intrigues that brought Alhaji Saleh Usman Danboyi as Chairman of Ibi LGC, the Jukun believed that all his efforts was to frustrate them out of the Local Government. This increased the tension and created more hatred among the Jukun and the Hausa-Fulani in Ibi. One of the major fallout of the foregoing development which eventually produced the 1992 crisis in Ibi was the beating up of late Mr. Solomon Gambo who worked with Water Board at anguwan Wurbo in Ibi (Akoga 2012, p.143). It was alleged that Hausa/Fulani Muslim youths in Ibi, while beating late Solomon Gambo at Anguwan Wurbo, other Jukun Wurbo Muslims did not rescue him until he ran and was rescued by the Galadima of Ibi, then, an elderly Wurbo man who later handed Solomon to the police. When the Jukun youths in town (Christians) heard of the event, they quickly stepped up to rescue Solomon Gambo from the hands of the Muslim youths. The consequence was heavy physical combat between the two groups in February 1992. This marked the beginning of open hostility between the two blocs.

It is imperative to note the Jukun Wanu played a role in the escalation of the crisis. On the night of 4th March, 1992, they together with their women, carried out fishing activity in *Baruwana*, a fish pond across the River Benue north of Ibi, about 4km, without any intervention or interference (Akoga 2012, p.152). On the 5th of March, 1992, when the owner of the pond heard the news and went to see things for himself, he was thoroughly beaten by the Jukun Wanu youths and held hostage, but later released in exchange of another Jukun Wanu youth (Ishaya Aligye) beaten and held hostage by the Hausa/Fulani Muslim youths. Meanwhile, conflict started in Ibi town when Hausa/Fulani Muslims started setting ablaze some Jukun houses in their midst, but skipped the houses belonging to Jukun Wanu Muslims. Thus, they created or divided the Jukun Wanu into two factions- Wanu Christians and pagans versus Wanu Muslims (Akoga 2012, p.153). This became clearly an ‘ethno-religious’ crisis. Between 5th to 7th March, 1992, the burning of houses continued. On 8th March, gun shots were heard all over the town and peace was lost (Atoshi 1992, Pp40-42).

After the 1992, Ibi witnessed a period of an uneasy calm until in 2003 when crisis resumed, though as a spillover from Plateau State. Between 2003 and 2005, crisis engulfed the corridors of Ibi. The crisis started somewhere at Wase in Plateau State between all the tribes, mostly between Christians and Hausa/Fulani Muslims. The crisis escalated to Kambari and Amar in Karim-Lamido Local Government Area and finally engulfed Sarkin-Kudu and Dampar Districts in Ibi Local Government (Akoga 2012, p.164).

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Again, on 30th October, 2009, there was a riot in the Ibi LGC Secretariat, again, dividing the people along religious lines. Properties were burnt down and lives were lost. In addition to the events discussed, there were other occurrences of conflicts within Ibi Local Government Area which took the lines of religion. All these resulted to loss of lives and property worth millions of naira destroyed.

Again, between 2012 and 2015, Ibi Local Government Area experienced series of ethnoreligious crisis, such as the 18th Nov. 2012 crisis and other isolated crises between the years under review. According to a Memorandum (2013), by the Ibi Local Government Chapter of Jukun Development Association (J.D.A), the cause of the crisis could be viewed from both remote and immediate causes. The remote causes include unhealthy relationship between the Jukun Christians and Hausa Muslims (with their allies) in Ibi Local Government Area since the 1980s; the Ibi mysterious fire; the 1992 crisis and political/economic subjugation of the Jukun majority by the Hausa minority, among others.

The immediate cause of the 18th November 2012 Ibi crisis was the forceful penetration of a road-block mounted in front of CRCN Church for security purpose. Igidi (2012) notes that: It all started like a mere quarrel between members of the Boys Brigade of Nigeria, who mounted a road-block near their Church, the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN) at the heart of the town. A Muslim passerby insisted on passing through the road-block which escalated to riots leading to loss of lives. While the Chairman of Ibi Local Government then, Alhaji Ishaka M. Adamu, said that the violence was not sparked off by religious sentiments but politically sponsored, another witness said it was when a Muslim possibly forced his way through the lines and he was beaten mercilessly by the Boys Brigade. He was said to have survived the beaten, went and mobilized his people who came on retaliation mission and allegedly attacked members of the Church. People lost their lives as Christians and Muslim rose up in defense of their religion.

Consequently, houses, shops, and many places of worship were torched, many people displaced, particularly women and children. It is important to note that between 2012 and 2015, pockets of crises took place in Ibi Local Government Area causing destruction of lives and property, and rendering many people homeless, with many taking refuge in other places like Wukari, Jalingo, Abise, This eventually led to the emergence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Wukari, Mutum-Biyu and Jalingo

Wukari Ethno-Religious Crises, 2013-2015: Between 2013 and 2015, Wukari Local Government Area experienced series of ethno-religious crises leading to wanton loss of lives, destruction of property worth billions of naira, and with thousands of people displaced. According to Aku-UKa in Adamu (2016, p.151), “by far, the most devastating event that afflicted my domain was the ethno-religious crisis between the Muslim Hausa/Fulani and nonMuslims, especially the Jukun, which led to wanton killings and destruction of lives and property in Wukari town between 2013 and 2015”.

Cases of crises which that took place inside Wukari town included the 23rd February, 2013, crisis, consequent of football field incident; the 15th April, 2014, crisis; the 15th June, 2014, crisis; the 23rd & 24th September, 2014 crisis; and the 8th November, 2014, crisis; and finally, the 8th November, 2015, crisis (see Adamu 2016, p.158; Zhema and Agbu 2015, Pp.289-290). In addition to these crises, there were series of attacks on most Jukun villages in Wukari LGA in the name of Fulani herdsmen attacks. Jukun villages such as *Ndo-Ikwe*, *Riti*, *Sondi*, *Nwuban*, *Ndo-Yaku*, *Nwukyon*, *Yamini*, *Nayinawa*, *Nwunyun* (*Gidin-Dorowa*), *Tunari*, *Rafin-Kada*, *Nwuko*,

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Nyankwala, Byepyi, Ndo-Idi, Tapari, and Ndo-Manu. Similarly, smaller Jukun settlements all came under attacks during the period under review, leading to people abandoning their ancestral homes. Zhema and Agbu (2015, p.283) note that in this manner, the attacks seemed to be endless. Apart from these attacks resulting in loss of lives and property, there was mass exodus of people from these communities into Wukari town.

The causes of the Wukari ethno-religious crises of 2013 to 2015 were both remote and instantaneous. The remote causes include politics; attack on police Area command and commercial banks in Wukari; indiscriminate road-blocks in Wukari on prayer days; illegal arrest of some youths in Wukari by secret security agents and the Ibi crisis of 2012 (Zhema and Agbu 2015, Pp.283-289). However, Aku Uka (Adamu 2016, p.156) attributes the protracted conflict between Christians/traditionalists and Muslims in Wukari to some external factors which manifest political and religious dimensions. He states thus:

There is this phantom claim that the Muslims are in majority in the town. In addition to this sensitive and totally false claim, some Muslims in Wukari suddenly woke up one morning and made wild claim of being founders of Wukari, which they publicized through paid advertisements in some national newspapers. This no doubt may have triggered the February 23 and May 3, 2013, crisis in Wukari (Adamu 2016, p.158).

The immediate causes were, among others, the 'Football Field' incident of 23rd February, 2013, the obstruction of traditional procession of the Jukun people by some Hausa-Muslim youths in

Wukari on 23rd May, 2013; inciting publication by one Sa'any Sule in the *Daily Trust* of 16th

April, 2013, and other national newspapers, claiming that Wukari was established by Sambo and Dikko who were Hausa from Kano, which, by extension, means that Wukari is owned by Muslims. There was also the speech of the Acting Governor of Taraba State, Alhaji Garba Umar (UTC), at the inauguration of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry on the Ibi and Wukari crisis on 2nd May, 2013, and published by the state-owned newspaper- *Nigeria Sunrise Vol.3, No.17* of 6th – 12th May, 2013, that: "Henceforth traditional rulers and Local Government Chairmen in the State would be held responsible for any breach of peace in their domain". The Hausa-Muslims in Wukari capitalized on this statement and saw it as an opportunity to implement their grand design and desire of removing the Chairman of Wukari LGA and dethroning the Aku-Uka. Thus, they disrupted the traditional burial procession of *Abon Ziken* Manu Abe Ashumate on 3rd May, 2013, to create another crisis situation that would give the Acting Governor reason to take action against the Chairman of Wukari LGA and the Aku-Uka, to achieve their goal (Adamu 2016, Pp.164 -166).

The combination of the aforementioned remote and immediate factors complicated friction in the relationship between the Hausa/Fulani Muslims and the Jukun in Wukari town. The outcome of this development was the eruption of intense crisis between the two blocs. Due to the corrosive nature the relationship between the two blocs was, once crisis erupted in 2013, it lingered up to 2015. The phenomenon destroyed mutual trust between the groups in the town.

Fulani herdsmen versus Jukun and Tiv farmers' conflicts: Between 2013 and 2015, there were violent conflicts between the Fulani herdsmen on the one hand, and Jukun/Tiv farmers on the other hand. Almost all communities in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas of Taraba State faced devastating attacks by the rampaging violent Fulani-armed herdsmen. Several Jukun communities were attacked and several people lost their lives and property worth millions of naira were destroyed. Example of such communities include Akwana

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(4th March, 2013), Ando-Katswen (4th March, 2013), Nwukyon (15th April, 2014), Ando-Yaku (21st April, 2014), Chinkai (24th May, 2014), Nwuko (29th January, 2015), Tunari (multiple attacks, 8th May, 2014, 8th June, 2014, 14th September, 2014, 17th January, 2015 and 25th January, 2015). During the attacks, several people lost their lives and property worth billions of naira were destroyed.

Tiv communities too were not spared in the attacks, moreover, the issue started between the Fulani and Tiv in the area before it tangled the Jukun when one of their community leaders (Ward Head of Ando-Manu) was killed by the rampaging armed- Fulani herdsmen. By the third and fourth quarters of 2015, relative peace was restored in the area. While the Jukun and Tiv were going back to rebuild their destroyed settlements and to restart their normal economic activities and social life, conflict resumed again, in the beginning of 2018, between the Fulani and Tiv. Consequently, Tiv settlements along Wukari – Ibi road and along Wukari – Akwana – Chinkai axis in Taraba State; and Tiv communities on the border of Benue and Nasarawa States were attacked by the rampaging Fulani herdsmen. The consequences were destruction of these communities, with many people losing their lives and property, while IDPs flocked into Wukari town in Taraba State and other towns in Tiv land. For example, on 16th February, 2018, Gborucha, a Tiv settlement along Wukari – Kente road, was attacked by the herdsmen leading to the death of 6 persons and 17 injured. Also, on 25th February, 2018, Jandeikura, also a Tiv community, was attacked leading to 9 deaths and 24 injured.

Effects of the Conflicts on Women and Children in Ibi and Wukari LGAs.

The effects of the ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas of Taraba State are enormous and multi-dimensional. Apart from the fact that the conflicts affected not only the people and area under review, the State and the nation at large, it impacted negatively on women and children.

Focusing on the Southern Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria, Best (2008) provides clear instances how conflicts generally affected women and children. In the case of Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas, the ethno-religious crises examined so far led to the death of several men who were husbands of women that are now widows, and fathers of children that are now orphans. It also led to the death of several women and children in the area. Apart from the death of men, women and children, the conflicts led to destruction of homes, social amenities, places of worship, social contracts and so on. In addition to these consequences are related consequences such as geometric increase in the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), disruption of socio-economic activities and much more distrust between the different identity groups.

In similar vein, during the Tiv-Jukun crisis of 1990/92, as reported by Agbu (1992), Adi (1992), and Atoshi (1992), towns and villages in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas were razed down and many women and children were severely affected. Adi (1992, p.5) notes that the land issue manifested itself glaringly during the 1990/92 clashes when the whole towns of Kente and Fyayi were completely plundered and burnt on the 10th and 11th of November, 1991, with almost all their Jukun inhabitants, most of them women and children, murdered by the Tiv. Agbu (1992, p.16) put the number of those murdered in Kente at 40, while Adi (1992, p.8) put the number of the deaths at 70, mostly women and children.

More so, during the 1990/92 crisis, one Hon. Kasuwa Agbu, the only female member of Taraba State House of Assembly then, was killed by the Tiv on her way to Akwana from Wukari on 16th June, 1992. On 2nd January, 1992, a Jukun woman was shot dead by the Tiv on her way to Ibi. Similarly, on 18th January 1992, Yusufu, his

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wife and children were attacked on their farm at Rafin-Kada by the Tiv. While Yusufu and the grown up children escaped, the wife and their very young child were taken away by the Tiv. The dead bodies of the mother and child were later recovered near Abako (Atoshi 1992, Pp.33 & 35). It is equally reported that during the 1990/92 crisis, children kids were collected and thrown into the burning houses with doors securely locked from outside. Infants were picked by their legs and their heads bashed against any hard object (Atoshi 1992, p.30).

It is important to note that many women and children lost their lives during the 1990/92 crisis in Wukari and Ibi. However, only those deaths that were brought to the police and the hospital were recorded. Therefore, Atoshi (1992, p.43) notes that it is not possible to come out with accurate record of lives lost on both side. Similarly, during the 2001/2002 and 2012 to 2016 crises, many women and children lost their lives, apart from many others rendered homeless thereby becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Alubo (2006, p.105) notes that the crises triggered large-scale refugees of the Jukun fleeing areas of conflict such as Kente, Akwana and Arufu, to seek sanctuary in Wukari and other places in Jukun land on one hand, and the Tiv fleeing into Benue State to take refuge on the other hand. Alubo (2006, p.106) cited Avav (2002, Pp. 233-4) that, there were over 29,000 Tiv refugees documented in various locations in Benue State, especially on the borders with Taraba State.

The same was the situation during the Ibi and Wukari crises of 2013 to 2016. During the crises, many women and children were recorded in IDP camps in Wukari, Mutu-Biyu and Jalingo in Taraba State and Lafia in Nasarawa State. Equally very disturbing was the report that during the crises, many women were raped, while many were manhandled. Alubo (2006, p.133) notes that there were persistent tale of mass rape of Tiv women during the 2002 conflict, in particular. Economically, women were affected consequent of the ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas. For instance, prior to the conflicts, women in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas were involved in trade and commerce. Jukun women were involved in fish business, salt production and sale; Jukun and Hausa women were also involved as middle-men (*baranda*) at the markets in Wukari, Ibi and their environs. Jukun and Tiv women were also involved in the business of buying and selling yams. More so, many women had shops for commercial activities. Agbu (2013, Pp.39-43) notes that, women in Wukari and its environs engaged in buying and selling of textile materials. They owned shops and boutiques where they sold all sorts of fashion materials and second hand clothes, thereby making ends meet and also contributing to their economic well-being. However, due to the conflicts, their businesses were disrupted, and those of them that were supporting their husbands or were bread winners could not do it any more, leading to serious economic hardship. Examples of women affected in Wukari and Ibi are Victoria, Abayiwa Yakubu, Deborah Amuye Bulus, Akefu Yakubu Atama, Naomi Gambo, Keziah Okey, Mercy Bala, Matan Yashi Musa, Hussaina Abbas, Sadiya Gambo and many others.

Socially, the conflicts disrupted educational activities of the children, resulting to many of them out of school. The magnitude of this was the increase in the number of idle children who involved in social crimes in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas. The conflicts equally led to mental stress, psychological torture and disruption of social life amongst women and children. Many women and children became traumatized due to the death of their loved ones and the horror they saw during the conflicts. The tables below is summary of the effects of the ethno-religious conflicts in Wukari and Ibi Local Government Areas as it affected women and children.

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Table 1: IDPs in Wukari & Ibi in 2001/2002

S/N	Location	LGA	No of Displaced	Cause of Displacement
1	Akwana	Wukari	1,936	Communal Clash
2	Arufu	Wukari	3,116	Communal Clash
3	Sondi	Wukari	1,021	Communal Clash
4	Kente	Wukari	2,600	Communal Clash
5	Other Villages	Wukari	4,650	Communal Clash
6	Dorshima I & II	Ibi	1,720	Communal Clash
7	Ibua	Ibi	852	Communal Clash
8	Sarkin Kudu	Ibi	1,630	Communal Clash
9	Other Villages	Ibi	3,980	Communal Clash
10	Total	-	21,505	-

Source: Extracted from Alubo O. (2006, Pp.181-182).

Table 2: Refugees from Nasarawa & Taraba States Crises of 2001/2002 in Benue State

S/N	Camp	Location	Families	Total	Men	Women	Children
1	Sankera	LGEA Prim Sch, Ukum	715	13,880	4,500	5,600	3,780
2	Chito	LGEA Prim Sch, Chito, Ukum	900	25,115	8,105	11,650	5,360
3	Tor-Donga	LGEA Prim Sch, TorDonga, K/Ala	188	4,134	1,153	1,964	1,017
4	Abede	LGEA Prim Sch, Abede	125	2,846	1,114	1,001	731
5	Daudu	LGEA Prim Sch, Dauda	1,125	31,530	11,230	13,120	7,180
6	Agasha	LGEA Prim Sch, Agash	615	19,714	6,110	7,990	5,614
7	Total	-	3,668	97,219	32,212	41,325	23,682

Source: Extracted from Alubo O. (2006, Pp.188-189).

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Table 3: Estimated Number of Christians killed & injured between 2013 & 2015 by Fulani Herdsmen in 4 LGAs of Southern Taraba.

S/N	LGA	Men Killed	Women Killed	Children Killed	Total Killed	Men Injured	Women Injured	Children Injured	Total Injured
2	Donga	87	74	59	220	136	104	71	311
5	Ibi	65	53	57	175	93	86	48	227
6	Takum	49	35	41	125	105	69	45	219
7	Wukari	139	145	94	378	226	169	83	478
8	Total	340	307	251	898	560	428	247	1,235

Source: Extract from World Watch Research, 2015.

Table 4: IDPs from Wukari & Ibi LGAs in Jalingo & Mutum-Biyu (2013 to 2015)

S/N	Location	Men	Women	Children	Total
1	Jalingo	780	1,225	1,091	3,095
2	Mutum-Biyu	637	848	3,497	4,982
3	Total	1,417	2,073	4,588	8,077

Source: Ajibu, I.M. (2020, p.52).

Most of the Jukun people that were displaced from the villages of Ibi and Wukari LGAs were absorbed by their relatives in Wukari town and other settlements that were not destroyed, and Jalingo, the State capital. This happened in 2001/2002 and 2012 to 2015 (Alubo 2006, p.181 & Adamu 2002).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing, it is observed that times of conflicts are times that bring out the worst instincts and impulses in man. These are times when social relationship is at its worst. No one would want to relate happily to a group of people who have, or perceived to have killed or maimed one's relations. It is difficult, if not impossible, to associate and be at home with persons who are hostile to another's ethnic or religious groups. Times of conflicts are also times when promotion of cultural and religious activities cannot take place. At such times, cultural activities such as festivals, folktales, games, and so on, cannot take place. Similarly, religious festivals such as Christmas and Sallah celebrations could not properly hold. In fact, such times breed fear, hatred, acrimony and suspicion. In view of the adverse consequences of crises, members of the communities must, as a matter of necessity, stand up to see that peace is returned into their communities for social, economic and political activities to take their right place. Thus, there is need for the restoration and sustenance of peace in not only Ibi and Wukari Local Government Areas, but the Southern region of Taraba State, the State and the country as a whole. To achieve these shared goals, there are recommendations proffered in this article which fall into the immediate and long terms as presented below.

In the immediate, there is a great need for the provision of adequate security in the area of study by both the Federal and State Governments in order to enable further negotiation for peace, and to secure lives and property of the people. In this case, any threat to peace should receive prompt attention. Mobil Police Barracks should be established along Wukari-Ibi road, WukariRafin/Kada road, and full take-off of the one earlier established at

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Akwana-Arufu axis. Through this means, the people of Ibi and Wukari LGAs would have confidence in the government in the area of provision of security, and many, including women and children, would return to their deserted communities.

Secondly, the Federal, State and Local Governments should, as a matter of urgency, bring up and implement the policy of resettlement of the displaced persons back to their deserted communities. In this case, apart from the fact that security posts must be established in the areas as suggested, government should provide material support to the affected people, especially the women, in order to enable them rebuild their homes that were destroyed during the conflicts.

Furthermore, government should reconstruct markets, schools, clinics and worship places that were destroyed during the conflicts in order to win the confidence of the displaced persons to return home, particularly women and children.

On the part of the people affected, there is the need to put behind them all that had happened and forgive one another for new life to start again in their communities. Tolerance between the various ethnic and religious groups in Ibi and Wukari LGAs is paramount for peace to return in order for the people to return to their communities. Religious and community leaders and the governments must join forces in order to begin peace building campaigns among the people in order to heal wounds caused by the wars. This would restore confidence among the people of the area and trust would also be restored. In other words, collaborations and negotiations have to be adopted in resolving many of the issues and perceptions that contributed to the ethno-religious conflicts in the areas. The people, religious and community leaders, and all other stake-holders must be encouraged to always come together to dialogue, negotiate and reach compromises on how to resolve common problems or perceived crisis.

In view of the above, it is important and necessary for the Taraba State Government to create a new Ministry of Religious and Conflict Resolution, whose duty would be educating the people of Taraba State on the principles of equity, freedom of religion, religious tolerance and power of unity and love for one another. More so, the Ministry would be charged with the responsibility of finding out the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts in the State and, through negotiation with the people, proffer possible ways of eliminating them. The Ministry would watch out for any likely issue that will breed crisis among the people and ensure they are nipped in the bud.

Furthermore, religion should be used not abused. Adherents of the two major religions in the State (Islam and Christianity) must imbibe the moral teachings of these religions such as love for one another, honesty, neighborliness, justice, tolerance, peace, unity and sanctity of human life. This will foster peaceful coexistence among the people of Southern Taraba, and Taraba State at large.

Also, there is the need for the Federal, State and Local Governments, ethnic and religious groups to adopt preventive diplomacy and early warning system as mechanism for attaining and sustaining peace in the areas of study. In order to have a future characterized by peaceful co-existence, courses pertaining to peace studies and conflict management should be included in all tiers of education in Nigeria where diversities must be emphasized, particularly Taraba State.

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In the long term, elements of Western and modern Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism should be adopted by the governments, ethno-religious and political groups in order to restore peace and consolidate it in the areas under review (Ekpelle, 2011). These elements include:

1. **Grass-Root Community Based Activities:** This include community festivals such as Nwonyo and other Jukun festivals in Ibi and Wukari respectively; marriage ceremonies, sharing of community's social amenities, organization of sport competitions and so on. When unity and solidarity is lost to violent conflicts such as in Ibi and Wukari Local Government Areas, for instance, the importance of such community virtue cannot be overemphasized (Suberu 2006; Suberu 2008).
2. **Good Governance:** This is the running of the affairs of government in positive and progressive manner beneficial to the governed and which delivers the public goods. Its attributes include; due process, transparency, responsiveness on the part of government, power sharing, rule of law, competence, separation and devolution of powers, a free virile civil society. When governments do not promote good governance, conflicts become inevitable and goes violent.
3. **Communication:** This is the process of sharing and exchanging information between individuals, groups and potential parties in a conflict situation. It is also the process of interacting and relating with others, meaning that parties to a conflict still talk. In this case, the various groups involved in ethno-religious crises in Ibi and Wukari LGAs, be it Jukun, Tiv, Hausa or Fulani; be it Christian or Muslim, should learn to exchange information with each other in order to create the avenue for conflict resolution. Through this, there would be peace in the long run.
4. **Collaboration:** This is a process in which parties work together on their own to resolve problems through constructive dialogue or other activities such as joint projects. The communities of Ibi and Wukari LGAs should collaborate to reconstruct and jointly use community schools and health centers, markets and culverts. Through this, their injuries would be healed and peace would be returned and consolidated.
5. **Negotiation:** This is the process whereby the parties within the conflict seek to settle or resolve their differences. Also, negotiation is a direct process of dialogue and discussions that take place between, at least, two parties who are faced with a conflict situation. The benefits of compromised solution always out-weigh the losses arising from refusal to negotiate. The goal of negotiation is to reach agreement through joint decisions between parties. Negotiation is a key approach to peaceful resolution of dispute and conflicts that may arise among parties. It is also within the reach and control of parties.
6. **Conciliation:** This is close to mediation. It is a third party activity which covers intermediary efforts aimed at persuading the parties to a conflict to work towards a peaceful solution. Conciliation also involves facilitation.
7. **Mediation:** This is the voluntary, informal, non-binding process undertaken by an external party that fosters the settlement of differences or demands between directly invested parties.
8. **Crisis Management:** In the case of extreme situation of conflict, critical decisions have to be taken or else the conflict may escalate to a point of extreme violence. Sometimes, a crisis is a degenerated state of conflict, where threats to human security, intense violence characterized by fighting, death, injury, large-scale displacement of population occurs as it is the case with Ibi and Wukari LGAs. Once a crisis occurs, it is the responsibility of governments to de-escalate the situation and bring cessation to violence. This may be done

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through various means, including the use of the coercive state apparatus, where necessary (Fred-Mensah, 2000). If the above mechanisms are adopted and implemented religiously, peace would be restored and consolidated in not only Ibi and Wukari LGAs, but Taraba State and Nigeria at large. Finally, it is pertinent that women should be allowed to be full actors in the process of peace building and conflict resolution in the areas under review, the State and Nigeria at large. It is important to note that, in achieving and maintaining peace in any society, there is need for the involvement of both men and women. Thus, women must not be kept at the edge in political discourse, but copiously.

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