

# GENDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPMENT IN THE OTI AND VOLTA REGIONS OF GHANA

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**Abstract:** The Oti and Volta Regions of Ghana have a number of conflict hotspots as old as the ages of the communities themselves. These conflicts must be managed sustainably so they do not degenerate into violent situations time after time. The study analyzed gender perspectives in conflict management looking at the structure and function of conflict management institutions and how they could facilitate sustainable management of conflicts. A case study design was adopted. Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Narrative thematic analysis was used in bringing out key issues related to the structure and function of conflict management institutions. The structure of conflict management institutions across the different study communities indicated that traditional leadership plays an essential role in conflict management. There were more males than females on conflict management committees indicating a low involvement of women in conflict management. The findings also indicated the availability of specialized structures traditionally for conflict management; an interesting blend of conflict managers-traditional elders and religious leaders. The mandate of institutions in conflict management was mainly maintenance of peace, crime prevention, education on conflict avoidance, addressing the needs of the vulnerable, and facilitating conflict resolution drives. Concluding, it was suggested that institutions in charge of conflict management liaise among themselves to create a unique link and framework to enhance the inclusive nature of the conflict management process to meet the development needs of the communities in times of conflict and after. The involvement of women was also observed as essential, cognizant of their unique qualities in managing conflicts. Finally, a uniquely prominent perspective that emerged was that each gender had a unique role to play in facilitating conflict management.

**Keywords:** gender perspectives, sustainably, conflict management, development, conflict management institutions

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## Introduction

The study analyzed gender perspectives in conflict management looking at the structure and function of conflict management institutions. It presents and examines findings that emerged from the qualitative interviews on gender perspectives in the structure and function of conflict management institutions. The structure of conflict management institutions focused on persons who oversaw

managing conflicts when they came up in communities. The function of such institutions pertains to the diverse roles conflict management institutions take on over the course of conflicts.

In the context of this study, gender perspectives involve gender equality, mainstreaming, empowering, and involving men and women in conflict management. In settings where a gendered approach was used, an amicable settlement of conflicts was arrived at (UN Women, 2012; Buvinic, Gupta, Casabonne & Verwimp, 2013). Conflict management is purely nongendered, not attaching much agency to women's participation (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Duncan, 2004; Women, Peace and Security (WPS), 2011; Birkhoff, 2012; Hope, 2019; Ghana National Action Plan [GHANAP 2], 2020-2025). Anecdotal evidence points to the absence of gendered perspectives in the conflict management approach being implemented within diverse conflict hotspots in Ghana.

The Volta Region's communities of Alavanyo, Peki, Tsito, and Hohoe as well as the Oti Region's communities of Nkonya and Nkwanta are some conflict hotspots located in these two regions of Ghana, which have all seen strides in conflict management over time (Kendie *et al.*, 2014). In this study, conflict management refers to various processes of resolving conflict, peacemaking, conflict transformation, and other measures or overtures that ensure individuals, families, and social groups in a given environment coexist peacefully (Bercovitch, 1983; Miall, 2004; Mckibben, 2017). This has the added benefit of facilitating development through the reduction of violence and hostilities (Kremenjuk, 2002; CCR, 2012; Bayer & Schernick 2015; Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2017).

### **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***

- i. To explore gender perspectives in the structure of conflict management institutions.
- ii. To explore gender perspectives in the function of conflict management institutions.
- iii. To assess how the structure and function of conflict management institutions would lead to sustainable peace and development.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### ***Gender Perspectives of the Structure of Conflict Management Institutions***

The structure of conflict management institutions has always involved both men and women with a question mark of the women always lagging the men in terms of numbers for several reasons. Shepherd (2015) states that women have a long history of contributing to global peace and security mostly outside the seemingly formal systems of military decision-making and international dispute resolution. He, therefore, stated that women need to be included in formal and informal processes that underlie the design of post-conflict dispute resolution processes and structures. The viewpoint expressed by Shepherd is reinforced by Currier (as cited in Brahnam & Chin, 2005) who pointed out that women still find a way to organize themselves through grass root activism, non-profit

organizations, and other non-official ways even though they are not involved in official peacebuilding and conflict management efforts.

The Ghana National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2 (GHANAP 2) - which was an amendment of GHANAP 1 in 2020, was to enhance the role of women in the maintenance of peace and security in Ghana in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1352 which indicated locally that females were not deployed for peacekeeping operations in places like Alavanyo, Nkonya, Bimbila, and Dagbon. Women however play fewer leadership roles in patrilineal societies like the Oti and Volta Regions (under investigation) but assume leadership positions like Queen mothers, assembly women in their communities

### ***Gender Perspectives of the Functions of Conflict Management Institutions***

In their study on gender and its role in conflict management, Benharda, Brett & Lempereur (2013) stated, that looking at females and males functioning as third parties indicated that women's traditional leadership strengths of collaboration and participation can result in unique outcomes when they have less rather than more authority over disputants. The results of the work of Bayu (2020) indicated that women in Ethiopia played critical roles in times of wars and peace as community organizers and activists.

The National Peace Council in November 2019 observed that Ghana cannot flourish by stifling women's potential and in so doing deprive itself of its contribution towards conflict resolution. According to the Chairman of the Council, if Ghana was desirous of development, it should be twice as desirous of empowering and including women in conflict management decision-making. He challenged Ghanaians to know that there is much urgency to empower women more than ever as the country's socio-political atmosphere was highly polarized. (Hope, 2019). However, it is interesting to note that, the National Peace Council of Ghana, just like the United Nations, is ironically battling with low numbers of women, especially in their top ranks. In addition to the statement made by the former Chairman of the National Peace Council (Professor Asante) in the paragraph above, a whole number of research and works in Ghana speak to the inclusion of women in conflict management and decision making (Acheampong, 2010; Kilu, 2015; Avornyo & Sekyi, 2015; Shepherd, 2015). The structure and function of Conflict management organizations if it includes women would help ensure development through the reduction of violence and hostilities (Kremenjuk, 2002; CCR, 2012; Bayer & Schernick 2015; Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2017).

### ***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 three districts namely: the Peki community 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.

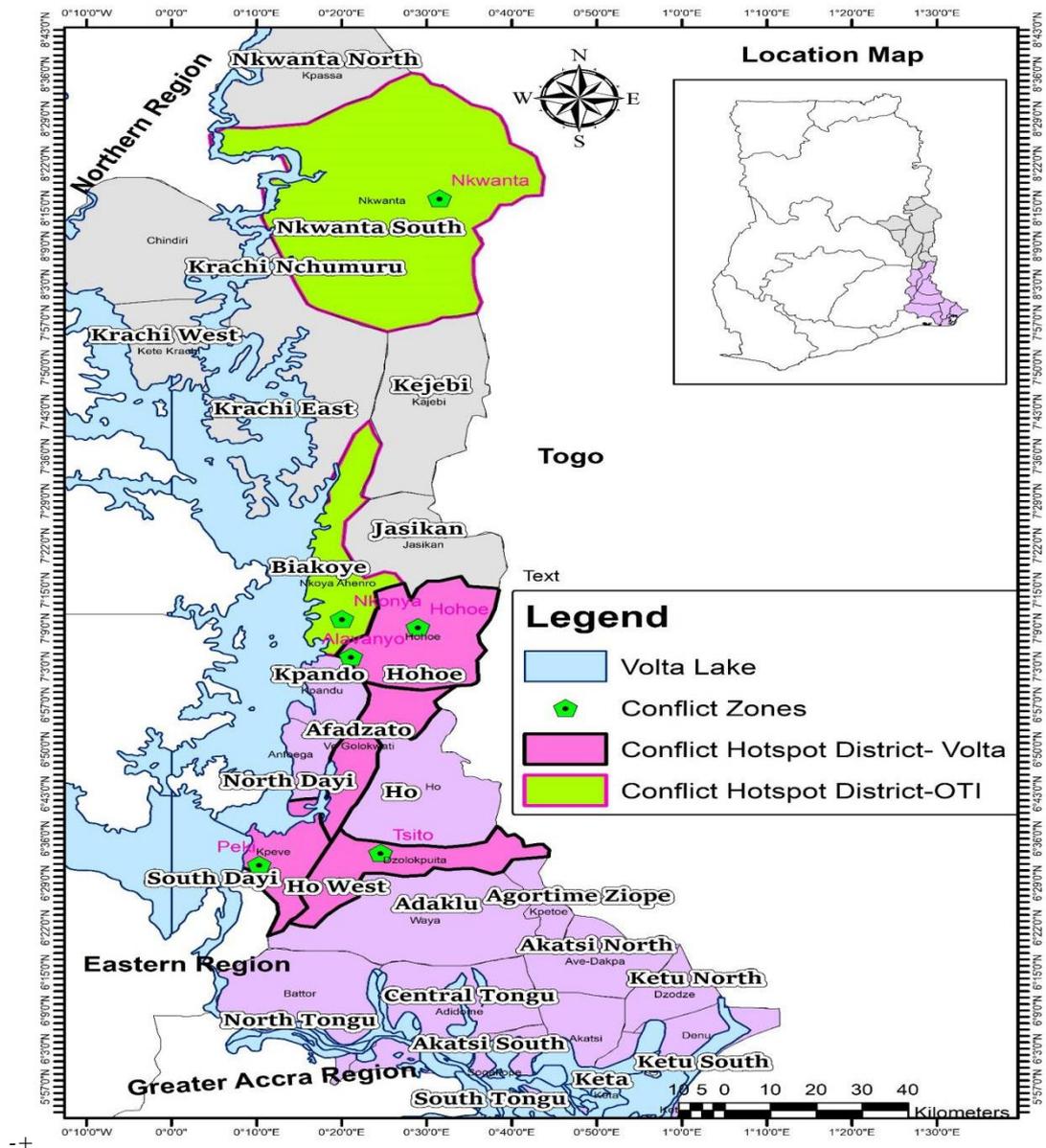


Figure 4.1: Map showing the location of conflict hotspots and their districts of location in the Oti and Volta Regions of Ghana.

Source: HypaSpatial (2019).

## Materials and Methods

The study adopted the qualitative research paradigm with a focus on Interpretivism as a philosophy, which looks for 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, focus group discussions, and observation. The distribution of the sample for the study is indicated in Table 1. 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 2. 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: Distribution of Study Sample – Made up of Interview and Focus Group Participants Key Informant Interview Participants*

Institutions	Sample	Institutions	Sample
National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE)	3	Alavanyo Traditional Authority	3
Peace Council	3	Nkonya Traditional Authority	3
Department of Gender	1	Peki Traditional Authority	3
Department of Children	1	Tsito Traditional Authority	3
Department of Social Welfare	1	Hohoe Traditional Authority	3
House of Chiefs	3	Nkwanta Traditional Authority	3
NGO (GLOWA)	3	Security Services (Police	3
Sub-total of key informants			36
Focus Group Discussion			
Alavanyo	8	Nkwanta	8
Tsito	8	Hohoe	8
Peki	8	Nkonya	8
Sub-total of key informants			48
Total Respondents of the Study			84

*Table 2: 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**

### ***Perspectives on the structure of conflict management institutions***

Perceptions of respondents that emerged from the qualitative interviews in relation to persons in charge of managing conflicts pointed to the essential role of traditional leadership in the structure of conflict management institutions across different communities. There were some permutations of traditional leadership oversight of conflict management reported by participants. Other persons overseeing the management of conflicts included religious leaders, the leadership of youth groups, elderly women, and members of formal peace committees. Political leadership did not seem to have a prominent role in leading conflict management drives.

### ***Traditional elders lead conflict management sessions.***

Traditional leadership of the community was overwhelmingly perceived by study participants to lead deliberations when conflicts were being managed. Such leadership was predominantly the Chiefs, their elders, and clan/Asafo leaders.

A key informant from Tsito confirmed the predominance of chiefs in leading deliberations during conflict management by remarking:

It is the chief and elders who are in charge, and though the ministers contribute to solving some of the problems, it is mainly the chief and elders of the Tsito community who are in charge (5th November 2019).

Additionally, a key informant in Nkwanta after several weeks had this to say as a confirmation:

*It is generally the paramount Chief (12<sup>th</sup> December 2019).*

A later discussion with a focus group in Nkwanta also alluded to the fact that chiefs played a paramount role in conflict management. It was established that a chief in charge of a single lingua town deals with any conflict situation that arises in the community. However, it was noted that in bigger towns with sub-chiefs superintending different lingua groupings, the sub-chiefs were the ones who handled conflicts. Such conflicts it was said, if still unresolved at the level of the sub-chiefs proceeded to the paramount chief and further to the traditional council if still unresolved. The role of the chiefs was again confirmed by an earlier discussion in Hohoe which indicated that, way before the coming of the Europeans, Chiefs were the first to be notified when something happened in Gbi land (Hohoe land). It was also confirmed the chiefs had subjects who are always updated on happenings, so they inform the Chiefs. This act it was said enabled Chiefs and their elders to deal with issues appropriately. The role of chiefs and traditional elders is therefore non-negotiable when it comes to issues of conflict management (Gedzi, 2009).

### ***Traditional Leadership working in tandem with religious leaders and others***

Traditional leadership with oversight responsibilities was observed by respondents collaborating with religious leaders of diverse denominations in leading the management of some conflicts in the community. There were instances when traditional leadership took on leadership roles with the

religious leadership in a supporting role. This was evident in a key informant statement captured in the Hohoe community as follows:

The Elders of the community, the Mallams, the Chiefs, and so on (21<sup>st</sup> October 2019).

Likewise, in the Tsito community, a key informant also reiterated the fact that traditional leaders were taking up leadership roles with religious leaders:

It is the chief and elders who are in charge, though the ministers contribute to solving some of the problems mainly it is the chief and elder of the Tsito community (5<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

To buttress the statements above, a focus group discussion at Peki categorically stated that chiefs and pastors helped in managing conflicts in their community as already stated in statements from Hohoe and Tsito. In all this, the role of chiefs in conflict management was still evidently clear even though they were now enjoying a kind of partnership with pastors. This part of the study reveals cooperation (a necessary tool for conflict management) at its best and which is a very vital foundation of the Dual Concern theory and Thomas Kilmann's Model which is also captured in the conceptual framework.

***Religious leaders had oversight of conflict management in collaboration with community and political leadership and others.***

There were instances when religious leaders primarily took the initiative and led in conflict management or in collaboration with other stakeholders such as traditional, political, and youth leadership. This was what an opinion leader who was a key informant from Tsito had to say.

In the case of conflict management, people approach us as Pastors. People approach their clan elders. They also approach their Paramount Chiefs. Even though the paramount chiefs are not in town, there are representatives such as the Linguist and Okyeame who are all approached to manage conflicts (5<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

The stance of the Tsito key informant was confirmed by group discussions in Hohoe and Peki. In Tsito for instance, the Christian Council, Chief Executives, and the Zongo chiefs all helped to bring peace under such circumstances while leaders of youth groups that the youths confide in were also involved in Peki.

Reasons provided by respondents justifying the leadership roles of religious leaders during conflict management were the fact that traditional leaders at a point in time were perceived to be themselves fomenting conflicts. There was a loss of trust in them resulting in religious leadership getting into the fray. This was indicated by a community leader from Tsito as follows.

But it came to a time when the pastors came together because they realized that the chiefs and elders were more interested in fighting than resolving the conflict, so the pastors came together to form a committee that began to mediate with one committee in Tsito and another in Peki. Since the pastors intervened as far back as 2004, there has been no such conflict situation in Tsito and Peki. (5<sup>th</sup> November 2019)

The inclusion of pastors in issues of conflict management or better put, the use of religion in conflict management is an age-old phenomenon. On the flip side, however, religion could also be a source of conflict especially as pertains to most parts of the Islamic world today. Nyamwaya (2014), states that religion in as much as is destructive can also be successfully used in managing conflicts. He confirmed in his statement that religion can also be used for the management of conflict in order to attain sustainable peace.

### ***Community members lead conflict management and are further involved in traditional leadership***

Findings also revealed that depending on the level and scope of some conflicts, members of the community took the lead in conflict management. Conflicts within the family or the home, for example, were managed by family or clan heads initially. When outcomes were not favorable or progress was stalled, that was when traditional leadership was brought into the process. An opinion leader who was a key informant from Alavanyo indicated this in a statement below.

Conflict management in the community is at different levels depending on the severity of the conflict. They include parents, Family heads, Clan heads, and Community elders including the chief. Minor conflicts among women are handled by the Queen mothers and her elders (10<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

To buttress the statement above, a group discussion at Nkwanta had community leaders and opinion leaders stating that family conflicts were settled by the family leader or clan leader. The chief linguist was then brought into the picture if things don't go well for people at the family stage. The courts are the last resort if conflicting parties are still not satisfied.

The role of religious and traditional leadership in conflict management has been demonstrated in diverse conflict hotspots across the globe. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia as part of the findings of their report noted that civil society representatives such as the religious community, traditional organizations, and other stakeholders participated in contributing to ceasefires that culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreements. The commission did this by explaining its mandate to the stakeholders, as well as educating them on the various roles they could all play in healing the nation through their various groups (TRC, 2009).

Ettang (2018) mentioned the importance of religious actors and institutions in preventing or managing religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Leadership by Chiefs as per the current study is congruent with the findings of Gedzi (2009) who mentioned that historically and in modern times they played and continue to play remarkable roles in conflict management or managing disputes in indigenous areas of Ghana. Gedzi further mentioned that in the past Chiefs resolved conflicts in indigenous courts, a position which was curtailed by the colonial authority but repealed by the Chieftaincy Act of 1971. The Chieftaincy Act however maintained some restrictions on the judicial powers of the Chiefs resulting in them having to act extra-judicially as arbitrators to conflicting parties that voluntarily appeared before them in the community. Adjei & Adebayo, 2014 (as cited in Ibrahim, 2018) also mentioned the existence of "indigenous conflict management mechanisms" in communities prior to the colonial era in Africa. Most of these interventions by the leadership have been informal as opposed to formal conflict management roles.

### ***Involvement of other societal groupings in conflict management***

Youth groupings were observed in the study to have taken on leadership roles in managing conflicts. The leader of one such group in Nkwanta was perceived to have actively engaged in managing conflicts in their community.

Speaking from the perspective of the youth, our youth chairman is the one who directly handles conflict (12<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

Waldman (2009) states that Youth involvement and interaction with conflict or their role in post-conflict peacebuilding and conflict management is a new and emerging concept. The youth in the Central African Republic was engaged in diverse roles in the conflict transformation process during the wars between 2013 and 2016 (Conflict trends, 2017).

Women were identified in the study communities to have provided leadership in conflict management. These were mainly elderly women and those who felt the responsibility to step in to ensure conflicts did not escalate. Some of these women served as referees in that, when such conflicts did not end as expected, they helped in seeking further help in addressing issues for example from the security services or other forms of leadership. A key respondent from Peki had this to say.

At times we also have women to help the men realize the peace we want (10<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

This was re-echoed in a group discussion at Nkwanta which indicated that if you are a woman in an area and there is misunderstanding or conflict, you can call for the conflicting parties and make peace especially if you are an elderly woman. If that happens and there is peace, that ends it. If the parties are not still convinced, the issue can be sent to the assemblyman or better still the police station depending on how the issue evolves.

Women's role in conflict management has received a lot of attention over the past decades. The leadership role of women in traditional settings emanates from Queen mothers who are seen in the image of Chiefs. As noted by Abukari (2019), most Ghanaian communities recognize female leadership with Queen Mothers being essential parts of the chieftaincy institution and dully recognized as leaders in their communities. They are therefore very important personalities besides from the chiefs in conflict management.

Political leadership was the least referred to of the themes with respect to leadership in conflict management in the community. Local political operatives such as assemblymen were those who were perceived to be involved with conflict management. In one such statement, an opinion leader in Hohoe made it clear that:

The political leadership was made up of the Regional Minister/Community Leaders (21<sup>st</sup> October 2019)

A discussion in Nkwanta indicated that beyond the home, the management of conflicts could be passed on to the assemblyman. When politics is introduced into conflict resolution, it operates by means of compromise, conciliation, and negotiation instead of coercion (Center for Multiparty Democracy - CMD – Malawi, 2001). Political leadership at diverse levels requires these skills and competencies to navigate conflicts among their constituents.

***Perspectives on Gender Representation in the Conflict Management Structure.***

There were much more males than females on committees in the conflict management process. Some interviewees were not sure of the male/female representations on the committees. The only exceptions to the rule of men being more were with organizations that had female heads such as GLOWA (an NGO) and the Alavanyo community which had its leader as a Queen mother.

***Gender representation on committees of conflict management was skewed in favour of males.***

A key finding emerging from the interviews was that there were much more males than females on committees in the conflict management process. This cut across all the study communities. Key informant interviews in Tsito, Peki, and Nkwanta all confirm this situation of more males than females are indicated below.

Normally the men or males are always more than the females. Sometimes they take four (4) men and two (2) females (5<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

In fact, at most Committee levels the men are more than the females. But the female court /committees also are dominated by females to deal with issues that concern women (10<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

I think both women and men are on various committees. We don't discriminate, only that almost everywhere, men dominate on such committees than the women (12<sup>th</sup> December 2019)

Group discussions in Hohoe, Nkwanta, Alavanyo, and Nkonya all reiterated the submissions of the key informant interviews. In Hohoe for instance, it was noted that the women were formally relegated to the background in the community, as most conflict management sessions had more males than females, precisely 70% men as against 30% of women.

In Nkwanta however, it was categorically stated that women were not part of such committees and that if even they were, they just made up about 10 % of the members of the committees. Observation also revealed that most of the focus group meetings except for Alavanyo and Nkonya were male-dominated even though the researcher called for a 50/50 representation. These were very interesting revelations on the non-involvement of women in conflict management and showed a gross non-involvement of women across the board.

***Fair gender representation within institutions managing conflict.***

The predominant view that emerged pointed to the fact that fair gender representation in conflict management processes was necessary as each gender brought to bear unique qualities that facilitated the process. De Zwaan and Feenstra (2015) are of the opinion that unequal power relations can contribute to the institutionalization of gender-based violence. According to the World Bank (2012), investing in gender equality and women's empowerment can unlock human potential on a transformational scale. The statement below from a key respondent interview reinforces the need for a look at a fair representation/ gender equality in the process of conflict management which was a predominant view of respondents.

It is good we have a fair representation. Exactly, because we are not the same, the women differ from us; the men also differ from the women. Yes, maybe our levels of understanding also differ from each other, so when the man thinks of violence he may be calmed down by the woman. Men will be ready to fight whilst women will calm them down or women will be ready to let things escalate by shouting or quarreling with others. Men can also calm everything down and vice versa. Anything at all can happen so if the gender 'balances', then we can manage the conflicts very well (5<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

More importantly and as a confirmation of fair gender representation, discussions by opinion leaders of the Nkonya community established that gender balance was very effective in conflict management because the difficult and harsh nature of men could be toned down by bringing in women who would come in with their naturally calm voices to calm down tempers. They were therefore of the opinion that, if women are not part of such sessions, it would be very difficult at times to come to a peaceful conclusion on matters. Also, in a similar discussion in Hohoe, fair representation was seen as really helpful and very important. They noted that it should be the stance of all communities in conflict management as it would inure to gender balance. They categorically stated that a (50/50) representation of men and women should be the case. They were also of the view that women were always more than men in population and should therefore be fairly represented. They also stated that men keep issues to themselves and hardly would want to give explanations whereas women were naturally predisposed to very good conversation and explanations. They finally concluded their discussions by stating that, if conflict management sessions are to be all men, things would definitely not go very well.

An analysis of these statements shows that a fair representation of both genders is essential in the conflict management processes as both bring on board perspectives unique to their type which ensures fairness in deliberations. It also establishes the fact that each gender is also equally endowed with the properties of providing good counsel in addressing conflict situations.

#### ***Male's appreciation of female's role in conflict management.***

Males admitted to having better appreciated the relevance of women to the conflict management process and wanted their voices heard in such situations. This was buttressed in the statement of this opinion Leader.

The most important thing is that we are already saying that men and women have to be involved in conflict resolution. So, I am thinking it should be that. Anything apart from that will not bring peace and unity and therefore the community will not grow. Women naturally know their role and in conflict resolution sometimes you need to send women to the other party to go and talk to them, sometimes when men and men come face to face, you will see that the respect is not there, so sometimes men will listen to women because they have that respect for them, so sometimes we have to use the women as a strong weapon if we want to solve conflicts so that there will be unity and growth (10<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

A male pastor and an opinion leader of one of the communities had this to say to affirm his stance for a fair inclusion of men and women in the conflict management process.

I would love a 50/50 representation because God has given every human the brain to do anything possible. A woman or a man can have very good pieces of advice for our community.

As a pastor therefore I do not discriminate but give everybody the chance to bring his/her view to bear in the church building (Peki Opinion Leader 3- IDI).

In a group discussion, a youth representative of the Zongo community who could not hide his joy of now seeing women on board in their deliberations in conflict management stated with so much passion that:

Years ago, there was that ignorance that made us relegate women to the background but this time it is not so with the Islamic setup. This time we try to seek views from our “Magagiers” within the community. They contribute a lot. God has endowed them a lot with knowledge. In fact, it is very important in all conflict management circles (21<sup>st</sup> October 2019).

***Women’s involvement in conflict management architecture in the past was more in theory than in practice.***

Conflict management institutions have always had a structure involving both men and women with a question mark of the women always lagging behind the men in terms of numbers for several reasons. Shepherd (2015) states that overcoming such gender assumptions underlying the design of post-conflict dispute resolution processes and structure and working toward greater inclusion of women in formal and informal processes was a way out. The tradition of the low levels of involvement of women in conflict management sessions especially the very formal sessions was echoed by some community leaders that gave some hope for the inclusion of women. These community leaders also related to Shepherd’s statement of overcoming such gender assumptions, in their various statements below. First is a key informant from the Nkonya community.

The most important for me is for the voice of women to be heard. Because sometimes when you go for reconciliation sessions, women don’t talk in these sessions, they just sit and are not called to give their opinion (14<sup>th</sup> October 2019).

Discussions in the Hohoe community highlighted the fact that in the past they never involved women but now when conflict management issues come up, they add women leaders and other women representatives. They now made sure they involved at least two women before going for any conflict management session. This they said was because they realized their contributions to a greater extent helped to add up to that of the men to calm down tempers and ensure a peaceful atmosphere in their communities.

In the Nkwanta community, group discussions pointed out that Ghana was growing and had to change its old ways. The respondents also confirmed that at first women were not regarded in such instances of conflict management but that the generation of today had realized that mothers were better at resolving conflicts basically because their involvement always culminates in the achievement of peace. They concluded they had therefore decided any issue that borders on the management of conflicts should involve women as well as men.

An analysis of the above statements is indicative of the fact that gender mainstreaming is catching up with conflict management institutions. The mere fact that respondents are saying they never involved women in the past but are now doing that is an attestation to the fact that gender is being mainstreamed into the institutional framework of conflict management institutions. This will help in

empowering both men and women and eventually lead to gender equality which would also culminate in the involvement of women in peace and security architecture.

***Non-feasibility of fair gender representation in some circumstances***

There were instances where fair representation by gender was perceived as not feasible in all circumstances as there were no women with the needed competencies to be involved, as in the church for example. The following statement from an opinion leader and a church leader from Peki in a group discussion was indicative of this.

A fair gender representation would work in some instances and not work in other instances. In the community where we are looking for people to form a peace committee, the 50/50 could be gotten for both men and women, but in instances like trying to get Pastors' representation for a peace committee in a church, it would be difficult to get a 50/50 representation basically because women pastors are few in number (10<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

***Perspectives on the functions of conflict management institutions in conflict situations***

Maintaining or bringing peace, facilitating amicable management, settlement, or the resolution of conflicts in the community were themes that emerged from interviews with respect to the perceived objectives and concerns of conflict management institutions in conflict situations.

***Conflict management institutions maintained or brought peace to the community.***

A key theme that emerged from the various communities was that conflict management institutions were perceived as those to maintain or ensure that peace prevailed in the community. Some key informants from Tsito and Hohoe indicated this below.

Normally the objective of conflict management is to bring mutual understanding or live in peace with each other (5<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

To bring peace to the Community (21<sup>st</sup> October 2019).

In the first place, if you are a community leader and there is conflict among some individuals or groups in your town, you have to be very fast to see what will bring about peace in the community. You have to send the "Tsiamé", a sub-chief to do some background checks on the conflict and send the feedback to you as the chief. The various parties involved in the conflict are called the "Tsiamé" who finds out from each of the parties what has caused the existing state of conflict. After picking the feedback from the "Tsiamé", the chief then sits the parties down as a leader and tries to settle the conflict amicably (12<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

In group discussions, the Peki community observed that their main aim generally was to ensure a peaceful community. They stated they are peace-loving people who hate conflicts and bloodshed. They concluded that even though people refer to them as a conflict hotspot because of the occurrences in the past, they would want to say that they are a peace-loving community now.

***Conflict management institutions facilitated amicable management, settlement, or the resolution of conflicts.***

Another emergent theme was that conflict management institutions were perceived to facilitate the amicable management, settlement, or resolution of conflicts in the community. Statements of key informants from Peki and Alavanyo who were opinion leaders who attested to this were as follows.

Our concern is to ensure an amicable settlement (10<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

My major concern has always been to resolve the issues that brought about the conflict and to restore relationships back to normalcy (10<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

In a group discussion, it was observed that there was a misunderstanding causing a problem that should be solved. Additionally, it was noticed that conflicts happening in the community were basically among individuals or groups. It was also established that the chief's role was to ensure that there was an amicable settlement of minor conflicts whereas conflicts among various tribes which were seen as a security threat were reserved for the police who are called to see how they can relate to the situation and ensure some calm or peace. All these expositions buttressed and confirmed the earlier statements of the key informants who all perceived the function of conflict management institutions to be the amicable settlements of conflicts.

To Bercovitch, (1983) the purpose of conflict management, is to affect the entire structure of a conflict situation so as to contain the destructive components in the conflict process (e.g. hostility, use of violence) and help the parties possessing incompatible goals to find some solution to their conflict. Effective conflict management according to Bercovitch succeeds in minimizing disruption stemming from the existence of a conflict and providing a solution that is satisfactory and acceptable. The findings of the study basically talking about achieving peace, amicable management, and resolution of conflicts are all congruent with the findings of Bercovitch.

Additionally, the military of the 66 Artillery Regiment from the Volta Regional Capital was also observed patrolling the outskirts of Alavanyo and Nkonya as well as the disputed land area which separated the two communities. Also, there was a heavy presence of members of the Volta Regional Police Service at various barrier posts erected before these two communities. All these pointed to activities that would help limit the probability of conflicts coming up again and thus help in amicably settling the existing conflict which had metamorphosed over the years into different complex forms.

These findings which indicate moves that are tailored towards ensuring an environment free of conflicts and which is generally peaceful are in line with the findings of Bercovitch on the purpose of conflict management. Similarly, the findings are also in line with that of Marquis and Huston Mckibben (2017), who state that considerate management fosters an environment that minimizes precursory conditions for future conflicts and organizational stasis.

**Perceptions of male and female involvement in contributing to the success of the conflict management process.**

There was the perception that both genders have important qualities that come to bear when approaching conflict management, hence the need to have both males and females as part of the process always. These were evident in key interviews conducted in the communities of Peki, Hohoe, and Nkwanta as stated below.

Yes, it's important so I normally explain to them that men and women are all important in ensuring a peaceful community (10<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

Yes, we involve both men and women (10<sup>th</sup> December 2020).

Yes, I consult both males and females in resolving conflicts because women always know about the real cause of conflict whereas men don't have the patience to listen to the main cause of the conflict before they jump in (21<sup>st</sup> October 2019).

In the Peki community as a conflict hotspot, group discussions suggested that conflict when it surfaces affects the community as a whole and does not factor in the fact of whether one was a man or a woman. This they said was the basic philosophy of the people of Peki and Tsito to an extent that both men and women were involved in issues that would help do away with conflict and ensure peace in the two communities. They also made it known that the communities did not restrain women from helping out in ensuring peace in the two communities. It was also confirmed that even in times of journeying for peace programs, their women were with them. They also went down memory lane remembering something that once happened in their town which warranted a 24-hour curfew. They reiterated there were some deaths during the occurrence and that it was women who went for the dead bodies, dug their graves, and buried them. They, therefore, concluded that since then, the financial issues in their Peace Committees were handled by women showing how well they revered them. These confirmed earlier statements from the key interviews above perceiving both genders as important in the process of conflict management.

In Tsito, it was evident that when you visited their churches, leaders who were male and female elders dealt with conflict cases and managed them. In the same way, they went about the process of conflict management in the church, the communities also had male leaders, who were chiefs, and female leaders who were the Queen mothers who also dealt with conflict cases. If the case concerned the females, and the females know more about it, they sat and took a decision on it. On the other hand, if the males had the opportunity, they helped. Both men and women in Tsito, therefore, worked together to manage conflicts in their community.

The findings above correlate with the findings of Birkhoff (2012), who stated gender affects and indeed permeates, conflict dynamics at the societal and individual levels. Kofi Annan, 2005 (as cited in Manchanda, 2012) also stated emphatically that "Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men." The involvement of both men and women in the process of conflict management which was perceived by both genders as important for successful outcomes, therefore, falls in line with Kofi Annan's view. Almost all the commonly listed structural causes of conflict have a gender dimension that should be monitored (UN Women, 2012). The findings above therefore are highly congruent with this position by the United Nations.

**Each gender had unique roles that contributed significantly to facilitating the conflict resolution process.**

As if to further justify the contribution of both genders, respondents shared their perspectives on the unique qualities of each gender and how these would contribute to resolving conflicts thus leading to peace in the community. These were outlined in statements from key informants from the Volta Regional Capital as indicated below.

Women should not be sidelined. In some communities, you see that when it comes to conflict resolution, they call men only together, but I am of the view that women should be added to decision-making in solving conflicts so that when the two sides have agreed on something it will be lasting, but when one party accepts peace and the other party does not accept it then it has become a problem, so I think women and men should be involved in solving conflicts (5<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

Gender roles play a significant role in the causes and resolution of conflict. Mediation processes are also an opportunity to sensitize parties in the conflict about these roles. An understanding of these roles sometimes facilitates the conflict resolution processes in our communities (10<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

When we leave out the women to do their own thing and the men to go their way what will happen is that you will not have people with mindsets that take decisions. This will not help in community development and it will not help to bring about peace and unity. So, women have to be involved, men should play their part, women should also play their part and through these things, all will be fine (5<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

In involving both men and women, we look at the roles each play in starting conflicts and the roles each play in resolving them so we know the need of each other. We so much treasure the roles each of us plays in resolving conflicts in our community (10<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

It is very important to involve both men and women in an all-societal activity (10<sup>th</sup> December 2019).

Group discussions held in the communities indicated the involvement of both males and females in deliberations on what is to be done to ensure peace between members of the community. They also indicated the achievement of good results if males, as well as females, are factored into the equation of decision making. In relation to the findings above, a study by Gichuru (2014), in Somalia's capital as a case in point, saw women involved in peace-building processes after the collapse of Siad Barre's regime in 1991. Similarly, another study by Chebet (2011) looked at how women were involved in the violence related to Kenya's post-election violence (2007/2008) and the subsequent roles they played in managing and resolving it.

### **Delimitation**

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.

### **Suggestions for Further Studies**

Further studies could focus on how the management of conflict by organizations including Oti and Volta regions in Ghana would draw up or push for more women in the structure and function of conflict-managing institutions.

## **Conclusion**

The structure of conflict management institutions across the different study communities indicated that traditional leadership plays an essential role in conflict management. There were much more males than females on conflict management committees. The only exceptions to the rule of men being more were with organizations that had female heads such as GLOWA (an NGO) and in Alavanyo where a Queen Mother's influence was substantial. The concerns of conflict management institutions in conflict situations were maintaining or bringing peace, facilitating amicable management and settlement, or the resolution of conflicts in the community.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommended that formal/state institutions should be cognizant of their traditional, religious, and developmental counterparts and actively solicit their involvement in conflict management. Also, 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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