# Reimagining Community Peace-Making and Comprehending the Role of Venda women in Conflict Resolution in Malala Communal area, Beit bridge District Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** The study explored the role of venda women in resolving conflicts in Malala in Beitbridge district. Lederach's peace building approach guided the study. Basing on ubuntu philosophy in the understanding of ontological and epistemological issues surrounding the reality of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms by venda women, the study was qualitative in which a case study design was used. Unobtrusive observation in the Malala community, followed by focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were carried out from a sample of [N=26] participants with the use of thematic guiding notes. Findings indicated the roles of venda women (makhadzi) that involved arbitration, negotiation, conciliation, mediation and reconciliation were effectively employed and found to be powerful in facilitating compensation, reparation and forgiveness between parties in conflict. The research established that most rural communities are battle grounds of conflicts and people rely heavily on venda women (makhadzi) as they were noted to be more effective in conflict transformation. The study discovered that such reliance is due to the extensive application of indigenous customary law based on ubuntu, and methods of conflict transformation and reconciliation in the adjudication of conflicts during the family and community disputes. In order to yield maximum fruits in conflict transformation, the makhadzi should acquire relevant training, especially in statutes governing their institutions in order to rejuvenate their dexterity that was established to be incapacitating venda women.

**Keywords:** Venda, Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Transformation, culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the pre-colonial era, women have been important in the peace building processes as they have constituted a significant number of their communities in Africa. The Venda society is no exclusion in this as the difficult task of peace building has traditionally been done by both men and women in partnership. According to Muthelo (2017), Venda women have played prominent roles in peace and conflict resolution processes. Historical research on the origins of Vhavenda ethnic groups has been described by Bernita-Ross (2017) as controversial and contested due to politics, dominant ethnic perspectives, research- trends, and the positionality of researchers. Traditionally, Venda women played a unique role in the reconciliation process in several societies, their place in society puts them in a strong position to encourage dialogue between disputing parties Bernita-Ross (2017).

The social organisation of the Venda indicates that they have an advanced type of culture as compared to other African ethnic societies. It is unique in the sense that women are given the high positions both in administration and religious rituals. Muthelo (2017), Kabanda and Munyati (2014) ascertain that there are certain women within the *Vhavenda* culture whose main roles are to maintain security and integrity at both family and community levels. The *Makhadzi* (who are paternal aunts) are regarded highly among the Venda as custodians of religious and traditional knowledge and as a resource to the family and community. Therefore, this can be one of the indicators that women can hold authority for sustaining and preserving customs and in resolving disputes. The Makhadzi acts as a conduit of communication, acting as a negotiator or a mediator. As custodians of these community, Makhadzi traditionally serve a vital role in protecting communities, sacred environments and maintaining a harmonious balance between community and spiritual life Muthelo (2017). Moreover, for many centuries the role of Makhadzi has extended to managing the relationships of individuals at family, clan, community, and society level.

Colonialism and colonial legacies have undermined and overlooked the social role of makhadzi in community conflict resolution. Specifically, politicians, chiefs, and multinational corporations reinforce imperialist authority to undermine Makhadzi traditional roles and cultural knowledge practices Muthelo (2017). Vhomakhadzi once played a central role in their clans by advising chiefs on community affairs and presiding over customs that connect with sustainability. Presently however, chiefs and politicians ignore specific Makhadzi community-organizers. In this context, Makhadzi and Venda women are socially and economically vulnerable

within national, provincial, and local traditional leadership structures—and subject to compromised livelihoods, as well as basic lack of citizenship rights Muthelo (2017). Women's roles in and contributions to conflict resolution are underutilized or wholly ignored in mainstream peace building and constitution making processes.

Zimbabwe, like any other country in Africa and beyond, has been a bleeding nation as a result of socio- economic and political conflicts since pre-colonial antiquity. These were arguably, according to Raftopolous (2006), brutish episodes of conflicts affecting Zimbabwean societies where majority of rural folk [67 per cent, (Chigwata, 2016)] of the population resides. Since then, most rural communities were turned into theatres of social, economic and political conflicts. Yet endogenous systems of conflict transformation were placed at the heart in resolving, settling, managing and transforming conflicts through traditional conflict transformation approach that was [and still] deeply embedded in the people's cosmology and culture in post conflict reconstruction, (Francis, 2008).

## OBJECTIVES
1. To identify the roles played by Venda women in conflict resolution processes in Malala area, Beitbridge.
2. To examine the women's vulnerabilities during conflicts in Malala area, Beitbridge district.
3. To ascertain measures which can be implemented to increase recognition and efficacy of women's participation in conflict resolution processed in Malala.
4. To assess the effectiveness of conflict management strategies being used by Venda women in Malala.

**Theoretical Framework**
**Lederach's Conflict Intervention and Peace Building Pyramid**
Lederach acknowledges that for any given conflict situation, there are many different possibilities to approach conflict transformation work which he terms lenses. This study is informed by Lederach's conflict intervention and peace building pyramid of actors' approach. Lederach's pyramid gives to that all sectors of a society must participate in the building of peace. In this view Lederach (1997) presumes that in many conflict situations (especially when dealing with society-wide conflicts), there is a hierarchy present in the wider surroundings of the conflict (the society at large) which is reflected in the conflict itself. He further put forward that when analyzing a hierarchical situation, people are then inescapably faced with the necessity of choosing where to start within this structure, thus the choice between "top-down+" and "bottom-up" approaches. In short, a top-down approach would assume that the people at the top of the hierarchy ("the leaders") are in a position to determine the course of the conflict, whereas a bottom-up approach would assume that those at the bottom ("the grassroots") are more able to lay secure foundations for future (Lederach 1997). The Academy for conflict transformation (1998:2) asserts that, Lederach's 'Pyramid of Actors' allow people to narrow down the search for the right actors to carry out particular approaches to conflict transformation.

Furthermore, Lederach (1995) presupposes an emphasis on long term peace building, involving complementary roles of human and material resources within the various levels of society rather than mediation of external actors. Those levels are represented by a pyramid of the affected population, a wider part of which is represented by grassroots leaders (community leaders, leaders of local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), refugees camp leaders), followed by a narrower part of middle-range leaders (ethnic, religious leaders, academics, experts, leaders of humanitarian and NGOs), and a country's political and military top leaders and is demonstrated below (Lederach 1997).
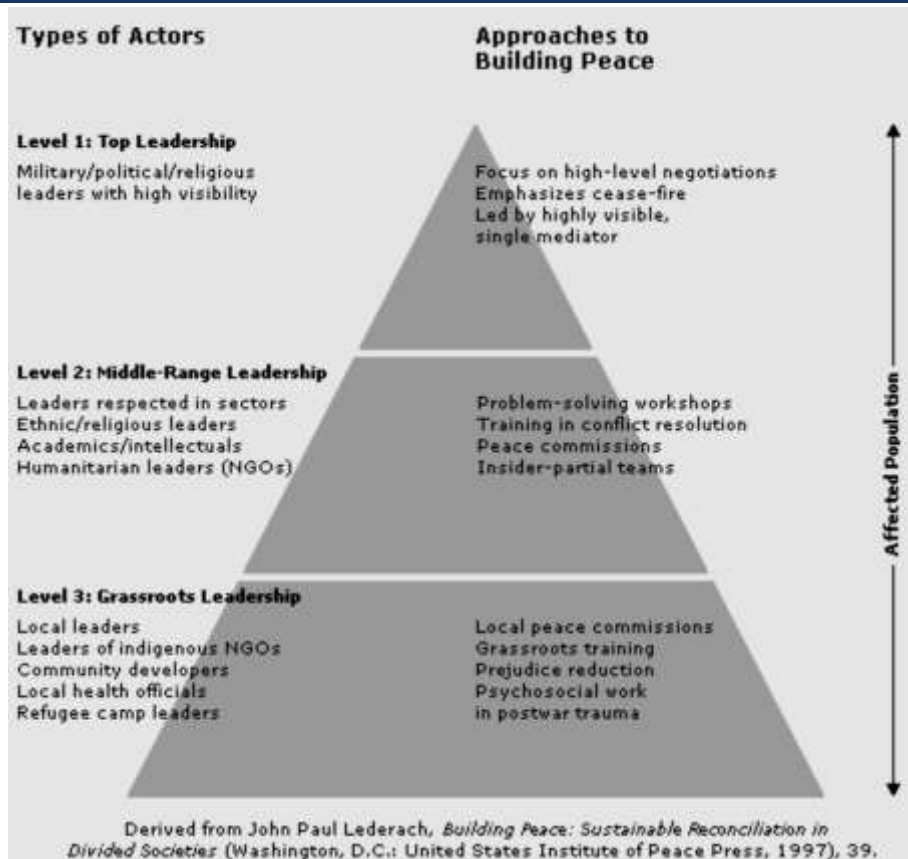
Conflict intervention and peace building pyramid Figure 1 Adapted from John Paul Lederach, Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies (1997:39).

## Level 1: Top Level Leadership

The top leadership is a small group sharing characteristics of high visibility, power and influence. Top leaders generally have more influence, because they are more visible and benefit from established hierarchical structures. The top leadership usually does not experience the direct occurrence of the conflict but the grassroots and sometimes they are even feared by the society itself. At this level woman are usually side-lined.

## Level 2: Mid-Range leadership

Though they might be several ways to think about the middle range (Lederach 1997) observes that they occupy formal positions of power or leadership, but are not always part of or controlled by governmental systems, or formal opposition movements. These people are expected to play the roles of carrying out problem solving workshops, training in conflict resolution, peace commissions and insider partial teams. Tocci (2008:10) presumes that mid and grassroots CSOs also induce conflict transformation by fostering societal reconciliation, through inter-communal dialogue, peace commissions and by fostering functional cooperation and communication across communities. Tocci (2008:10) posits that more

importantly, civil society links the three stylized levels of society in Lederarch's pyramid.

## Level 3: Grassroots Level

The level represents the base of the society in analysis. According to Lederach (1997:2) "during a conflict situation, life among the majority of people here is characterized by day-to-day problems, perhaps even the fundamental need to find the food, water and shelter they need for survival." The leaders have expert knowledge of the local situation, direct personal experience of the hostilities, and witness to the daily manifestations of the prejudices, discriminations and emotions behind the conflict. Level three involves putting in place local peace commissions to promote and monitor peace, training grassroots community groups, programs designed to reduce levels of stereotyping and prejudice and culturally appropriate psychosocial and trauma healing programs. Moreover, (Laderach, 1997) submitted that, there is vertical and horizontal interaction between various actors. This interaction however, is very pertinent in ensuring inclusiveness and sharing different perspectives in as far as conflict transformation is concerned.

## METHODOLOGY

The approach followed in this study is qualitative descriptive research methodology as it enabled the narration and interpretation of nature/extent of the role of women in conflict transformation among the venda people. This approach was appropriate to this study as it enabled to establish the nature and even the effectiveness of women's contributions and roles in conflict resolution initiatives being used. A total of 26 participants took part in the study. Focus group discussion and structured interview schedule were used to collect data from the venda women. students, student union leaders and university administrators respectively. The collected data were presented in tabular form. Verbatim responses from open-ended questions were captured by themes and qualitatively interpreted.

### Causes of Women's Vulnerabilities during Conflicts

There is no doubt that conflict affects women and men differently. Whenever there has been conflict, women and children have been known to suffer disproportionately during and after war. Women and children are often the most vulnerable and prone to being hit the hardest. Throughout history, there has examples of terrible abuses against women and children, from the 1.1 million children killed during the Holocaust to the many women and children raped or killed during the Rwandan Genocide UNFPA, (2015). Women who survive these atrocities often have to live with trauma caused by vivid and terrifying images of rape, war, and death for the rest of their lives. According to UNFPA (2015), women also suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, stigmatisation, and sometimes unwanted pregnancies. They are faced with the daunting task of keeping families together after displacement, providing food, clothing and shelter in what is in most instances, destroyed infrastructure, for their children and their families.

Women suffer from societal perceptions that their role in the family overrides all other roles and lack support from other family members. This is in spite of the fact that participation of women through gender equality has become a prominent issue at the global, national, and district levels through the enactment of laws, policies, and conventions.

### Patriarch and Women in Conflict Transformation in Zimbabwe

Similar to the case of gendered economic impacts, however, women in most (but not all) post-conflict contexts have been unable to formalise and translate political gains made during conflict into post-conflict political representation, Hughes (2009). Although there are examples of Zimbabwean women having taken political roles at community and national levels in countries, evidence of their participation in conflict resolution is not consistent. Post-independence, Zimbabwean women have not made inroads into power structures at the community level and at higher political levels hence the country insisted on quota system so that women can assume leadership positions and try to create some gender balance, Bushra and Sahl (2015).

Zimbabwe, a signatory that advocates for women's representation and participation, has made significant efforts towards gender equality and women empowerment. The Zimbabwean government developed a quota system upholds the principles of gender equality and equity based on the country's Constitution. Section 56 of the Constitution provides that, "the state must promote gender balance to ensure that women fully participate in all the various spheres of Zimbabwean society." Section 80 notes that every woman has full and equal dignity of the person with men and this includes equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.

In Zimbabwe, the way traditional sociocultural and religious ethics bind women inevitably affects development at all levels, Kasere and Chapera, (2013). Dodo (2013) explored the compatibility of endogenous conflict resolution practices with African democracies. The research report noted that the Shona culture is a conservative patriarchal society that values its culture, norms, and beliefs, at the end shaping one's behaviour. The leadership roles such as conflict resolution has been dominated by men hence these systems and practices have been to some extent responsible for the pathetic conditions of women up to this day. In the Shona culture, women are believed to be physically weaker than male members so much so that women are encouraged to consult. However, there is also a myth that women need men by their side to excel, Biri and Mutambwa, (2013).

According to Kasere and Chapera (2013), African women, Zimbabwe included, have the following roles: woman, mother, and wife. Women are subordinated because of social, religious, and cultural practices and beliefs in the society. This is supported by Chigwata (2014), who said that during the formative years in African society, female and male children were taught some

societal beliefs and practices that emphasized maleness above femaleness. These inhibited females' participation at all levels and in all spheres of development process. Therefore, participating in leadership roles such as conflict resolution in community or at national level becomes enormous due to the sociocultural practices and beliefs that affect the female gender negatively.

The empirical research studies reviewed focused on women being perceived as victims after a conflict where they are the ones who suffer from sexual abuse, rape and being displaced due to the conflict. Brayden and Ishnu (2017) asserted that conflicts are highly gendered and the focus on gender in terms of conflicts remains neglected particularly in Zimbabwe. This research sought to understand the roles which Venda women play in resolving conflict in their cultural setting. Political conflicts have often bred a culture of violence in the rural parts of Zimbabwe where women have been threatened or been victims of politically unstable environment and all the evils that go with it. Due to the fact that this is a sensitive topic it has not been looked into by many researchers. The concept of vulnerability is important with regard to conceptualising both poverty and violence in society. Hence it is imperative that research is

conducted. Women clearly play a crucial role in conflict prevention, management resolution and post conflict reconstruction. This underlines the need to document the roles which they play at grassroots levels in their own communities hence the focus of this study on Malala Ward 6, Beitbridge.

## RESULTS
### Demographic Details
The research looked into the demographic background of the respondents as the research found it imperative to know who was filling the survey. According to Dyer (2016) demographic details allow the study to determine whether the target audience is reached and whether or not the information being gathered is relevant to the study. Moreover, knowing the distribution of demographic details of the respondents help in determining on how the research sample replicated the study population. Demographic questions in surveys help in determining some variables which might influence the respondent's choice of answers. Caldwell (2015) expressed that a good survey design means that accuracy and inclusiveness are accomplished. Moreover, inclusivity was the backbone of the study.

**Table 1:** Demographic Data

| Demographic factors | Venda Women | | NGO representatives | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| **Age Range of Respondents** | | | | |
| 20 years and below | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 21 to 30 years | 6 | 23.1 | 0 | 0 |
| 31 to 40 years | 7 | 26.9 | 2 | 66.7 |
| 41 to 50 years | 5 | 19.2 | 1 | 33.3 |
| Above 50 years | 8 | 30.8 | 0 | 0 |
| **Educational Qualifications** | | | | |
| Primary level | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Secondary level | 21 | 80.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Tertiary level | 5 | 19.2 | 3 | 100 |
| **Marital Status** | | | | |
| Single | 2 | 7.7 | 0 | 0 |
| Married | 16 | 61.5 | 3 | 100 |
| Divorced | 1 | 3.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Widowed | 7 | 26.9 | 0 | 0 |
| **Women Experience for NGO Reps** | | | | |
| 0 to 2 years | | | 0 | 0 |
| 3 to 5 years | | | 0 | 0 |
| 6 to 10 years | | | 1 | 33.3 |
| Above 10 years | | | 2 | 66.7 |

In the above Table 1, the age range of all respondents across all categories was between 21 years and above 50 years, none of the respondents were 20 years and below. The highest number of the respondents in the Venda women category (30.8%) were above 50 years of age, the second highest (26.9%) were in the 21 to 40 years' age range, this was then followed by 23.1% who were between 21 to 30 years and lastly 19.2% were between 41 and 50 years. In the NGO representatives' category, the majority of 66.7% were between 31 to 40 years whilst the minority of 33.3% were above 50 years. Having a higher number of participants who were above the legal youth age was an advantage to the researcher as older Venda women are more active in conflict resolution and are more respected by the community. Also older women have the indigenous knowledge which they impart to the younger generations and communicate with the members of outer communities according to the Venda culture. Another factor could be due to the fact that the younger people of Beit bridge flock into the neighbouring South Africa in search for greener pastures leaving their parents to take care of the grandchildren. The research employed disparities in the age ranges in order to obtain views of participants from different generations with different perceptions.

Furthermore, when it came to the educational qualifications of the participants, 80.8% of the Venda women had reached secondary level as their highest educational qualification and 19.2% who had reached tertiary level. Whereas in the NGO representative's category all (100%) respondents had reached tertiary level. According to Davies (2016), having literate respondents in a research study enhances the reliability and validity of their responses. Furthermore, educational level is a determinant to other many aspects of social life which influences or prevents conflicts. The educationally improved reasoning capacity could mean that the participants had greater capacity at conflict management as alluded to by Stacia (2018).

The majority of the respondents (61.5%) were married, in the category of participants who were NGO representatives were all married. This was followed by 26.9% which is rather significant who were widowed. Thirdly, 7.7% of the participants were single. Lastly, 3.8% were divorced. Traditionally in the Venda culture, unmarried women were considered of lower social status hence every woman anticipated getting married.

Also married women were more respected hence in a better position to be part of the important decision making events which is an important factor in this study. More so, 66.7% of the respondents in the NGO representatives' category were the highest experiences and the remaining 33.3% had 6 to 10 years. These findings indicate that; the respondents were experienced professionals who understood the importance of this study hence the higher chances that they would take this survey seriously.

**To identify the roles played by Venda women in conflict resolution processes in Malala area, Beit Bridge**
The roles played by Venda women in conflict resolution processes are identified. In order to do this, the research first sought to understand how the women in Malala area managed conflicts and several ways were mentioned by the women during focus group discussions. These methods are outlined below as well as the actual quotes from the focus group participants.

**Avoiding Conflict**
"*Athipfani nadzindwa. Ndikhwini ubva khazwo ndishavhe mikosi. Samuthu oaluwaho ndiita hezwo uitela mulalo. Nazwauri zwisumbedza ualuwa. Nidothogomela uri hezwo tshifhinga tshitshiya nathayidzo iyadzika. Zwimpha natshifhinga tsha uhumbula uri ndisongogidimela udzhiya dzinama salandoitwa khanwe vhathu.*" FDGI7

I don't like conflict, so the best way is to go out of my way and avoid noise. As an adult doing that for the sake of my peace is a big win and sign of maturity. You will notice that as the time passes an argument then ceases being a problematic issue. It also gives me a chance to think and not make impulsive decisions which have bad effect on everyone – FDG17

The above sentiment was supported by two of the key informants who explained that some women use avoidance approach in order to buy time and give the conflicted parties the opportunity to cool down so that tensions may be decreased.

KI3 noted;
"*UFhumula zwivhafha tshifhinga tshau zwisedzulusa vhaite tsheyo yolugaho.*" K13
Avoidance enables them some time to regain perspective, refrain from making rushed decisions which have adverse effects. – KI3

Another interesting response was obtained from another participant who stated the following;

*"Mufumakadzi hangoteya uvha navhuhali, otea udzika nau thonifha. Ukakavhedzana zwiita uri tshithu tshitukutuku tshishanduwe tshivhe tshihulwane. Ngazwinwe zwifhinga muthu ndiyadibvisa dzikhakhathini utsireledza tshirudzi tshanga"* FDG9

For a woman it is not good to be aggressive, a woman must be calm and respectful. Confrontations are not good and they always escalate small things until they are big issues. Sometimes it is better to avoid bad situations and maintain your dignity. - FDG9

Most of the participants agreed that they would like to avoid conflicts as much as possible. Whereas key informants (NGO representatives) warned about the use of avoidance as a way of solving conflicts when they explain that the emotions which are associated with unresolved disputes usually accumulate over time setting up for worse explosive conflicts in future. The above statement by FDG9 underlines the notion by one of the NGO representative who echoed that women tend to prefer avoidance style when they think that the potential cost of confronting a dispute can outweigh the benefits of addressing it. This means that depending on the outcomes, avoiding conflict can be an appropriate approach. KI2 advised that what is important is to know the appropriate uses of the conflict avoidance approach.

**Obliging**
*"Zwiya ngauri usapfana hahone ndiahani, Mufumakadzi otea uditsisa kha mukalaha wawe na vhahulwane vhawe. Uditsisa zwisumbedza tshiimo shavhudi nazwauri umufumakadzi ane akona ufhata asapwashi"*. FDG10

It depends with the type of misunderstanding, a woman should try and oblige with her husband or her superiors. Obliging shows good character and that you are a woman who can build and not destroy. – FDG10

Some scholars argue with the above sentiment when they explain that obliging places high value on the other party but a low value on oneself, perhaps reflecting a person's low self-esteem. However, when the research probed further another respondent had to explain as follows;

*"Udikokovhedza asitsumbo yausakhwatha vho lini nango usakona fhedzi itsheyo yavhudi yamufumakadzi usumbedza ulivhuwa vhahulwane khaye nango mukalaha wawe. Zwimufha*

*natshifhinga tsha usedzulusa thayidzo nauhumbula dzinwe thandululo.*" FDG21

Obliging is not a sign of weakness or failure but it is a wise strategy which allows the women passively appreciates those that are older than her or her husband. She also gets time to assess the whole situation and think about the other solutions. A woman's decision to oblige to someone during conflict may be heavily influenced by culture.

**Consulting Other Senior Community Members**
One most effective way which was mentioned by the participants was by consulting the elders or family members who had senior positions, these are Makhadzi and Kotsimunene. Since the study focus was on women's conflict resolution strategies the researcher probed further about Makhadzi because Kotsimunene (uncle) is a male.

**The role of the Makhadzi**
The respondents were asked to explain the role of Makhadzi and the following findings were made;
*"Vhomakhadzi ndivhafumakadzi vhandeme vhaiti vhasiyalala. Vhadzhiya vhudifhinduleli khau lugisa dzikhakhathi khadzi mbingano, mitani natshishavhani. Vhadzhiya tsheyo dza vhuthongwa dzau disa thandululo khadzi thayidzo. Vhana maanda amoya udzhenelelaho khashango line ratshila khalo nashangoni lavha matomboni."* FDG10

Makhadzi are phenomenal women who traditionally serve an important role in managing relationships of people at family, community and society levels. They make important decisions on how disputes can be resolved. They have the spiritual powers to be intermediates between this physical world which we live in and the spiritual world of our ancestors. - FDG10

The above finding indicates that Makhadzi mediates in situations and this makes her an important conduit for communication between the disputing parties or those affected by the conflict.

*"Vhomakhadzi ndimufumakhadzi wandeme anangi waha ngavha matombono utandulo thayidzo. Vhashumisa ddila dzofhambanaho utandulo, zwitshiya ngathayidza yahone. Tshifhingani tshindzhi vha athu nga uri ambedzani navha-navha vhasa khopfana uswikela vhowana thandululo. VhoMakhadzi vhana vhutali vha usedzulusa thayidzo isathu ugonya.*" – FDG9

Makhadzi is special woman ordained by the Gods to create solutions for conflicts. Usually they use different strategies depending with the issue at

hand. Most of the time they try to discuss, brainstorm around engage with the conflicting parties until common ground is reached.

"*VhoMakhadzi vhavhu kuma vhaya dzika vha ambela fhasi nga ipfi ladzikaho hezwo usthi ombiwa nga ho thayidzo. Vhukoni havha vhuita uri vhadzikise nyimelo.*" – FDG14

Makhadzi are skilled at taking the viewpoints of other people during mediation and preventing disputes from escalating. All the above responses indicated that even though women are insubordinate to men in the Venda culture, Makhadzi are a special class of women who play critical role in the public sphere and whom the society highly regards. The study sought to find out if Makhadzi still had the power to perform their duties without interference. The actual question was, "*Does Makhadzi still have the power to perform their duties without interference from other individuals or stakeholders?*" This question was directed to the key informants. There was a convergence of views with regards to this one as a significant number of respondents agreed with this notion while others disagreed.

FDG1 stated the following;
"*Nazwino VhoMakhadzi a vhatsha thonifhiwa ngadila ine vhatea uthoni fhiwa ngayo. Ngamandesa ngavhabva dda vha sapfesesi siyalala na ma itelo ashu atshi Venda.*" – FDG14

Yes, Makhadzi is no longer respected as much as she is supposed to. Especially by people from outside our community who do not understand the Venda cultural practices. During focus group discussions, a similar question was also asked to the participants and the majority of the explained that they felt Makhadzi was no longer respected as she should. One interesting opinion which was received is as follows;

"*Ma itelo maswa athithisa siyalal yashu, vhathu vhavhona unga vhona malugelo acho. Rindadzi kereke dzinyadza siyalala yashu. Zwinavhatungu ingauri vhatuku vhakhoxedza maitelo asiyalala lori londota minwahani yofhiraho*"

The new norms are eroding our culture, people think they now have human rights, we have these charismatic churches everywhere which undermine our culture. It is so sad that our young people are losing the precious culture which has kept us thriving for many years.

"*Vhanna vhashu vhathetshelesa vhokhotso navhomme vhamuyadzi kerekeni ufhira rine*

*vhabebi vhavho. Hezwa hunatha yidzwo mutami vhangonamba vhaya kerekeni. Khauri vhaambana VhoMakhadzi. Ungari vhadzhiyelwa mihumbulo.*" – FDG6

Our children now listen to their spiritual fathers and mothers from Pentecostal churches more than us their parents. Whenever there are disputes in the family they would rather approach their church than Makhadzi. It is like they are brainwashed. The above respondents indicated that the effect of churches on culture affected the behaviours of the younger generation of Venda women as they had changes the ways of their parents. They no longer consulted Makhadzi for conflict resolution as the norm but rather went to church for assistance.

**To Describe the Women's Vulnerabilities during Conflicts in Malala Area, Beit Bridge District**
In order to find out the Venda women's vulnerabilities during conflicts, the researcher had to ask the respondents to state the conflicts which they had witnessed and how they were affected by them. Findings indicate that the most common conflicts that were mentioned by the participants were matrimonial conflicts.

**Marital Conflicts**
"*Dzikhokhathi dzimbingano ndidzone dzodalesaho dzinendandi vha. Azwingo leluwa dzithayidzo dza tshelede, imishumoni thayidzo dzavhana, navhamutani vhakhoya South Africa tshipembedzi engedza dzithayidzo dzine ravha nadzo.*" – FDG14

Marital conflicts are the most common types of conflicts that I have seen. People are facing economic challenges, work related stress, issues with children, long distances as spouses go to the neighbouring South Africa have all contributed to the high levels of marital conflicts that were are experienced.

"*Thayidzo dzambingano dzisongo tanduliwa dziita uri vhathu vhatalane namalwadze asafheli nkadziBP. Hunwe thundu nyathovha ngauri wamunna udzhiya tshinwe natshinwe asiya mufumakadzi asina tshithu. zwaita thayidzo kwamufumakadzi*" – FDG26

When unresolved, marital conflicts can lead to divorce, stress, high blood pressure and other health problems. And in some cases even loss of property because the man takes everything and leaves a woman with nothing which might lead to destitution on the part of women. The above notion expresses that marital conflicts can have adverse

physical, and psycho-social effects on women. Another common type of conflict that seemed to be raised by the respondents was inheritance based conflict. One of the participants noted the following; *"Ritangano nathayidzo mitami hutshivhokovhiwa, hezwo mashoka amuna vhasthivhonyanga udzhiyala sthilikadzi na vhana thundu dzothe. Hezwo zwiyawanaleya. Asi uri vhatada thundu fhedzi, vhatoda zwothe natshilikadzi."* - FDG8

We experience a lot of conflicts within families on inheritance, where relatives of a dead husband want to grab property from the widows and their children. These are still very common. Not only do they want to inherit property, they also want to inherit widows. Many responses from the discussions indicated that the issue of inheritance was a challenge to many Venda women at Malala area which left them vulnerable and dependent economically. Johns and Clare (2017) postulate that disputes about inheritance conflicts have led to adverse outcomes for women's freedoms and rights because of patriarchal practices.

**Social Conflicts**
*"Vha zwi divho uri Beitbridge ikanula mashango mavhiliu. Vhathu vhadzhisa vhaya hone unyangona namishumo nanwe vhaswika vhatho mita. Huna tshifhinga hatha vhathu vhanyago ridzhiyela mushumo yashu, hezwa zwodisa thayidza. Ngauri ro hona uri avhango dhiyi zwamivhundu yashu. Ndivhu matshela havhana vashu."* – FDG5

As you know that Beitbridge is a border town, many people from all over the country come here for opportunities and others settle and start families. There was a time some of these people wanted to take over our community projects and there were disputes. Because we said no you cannot take our heritage away from us, it is for our children."
*"Tshifhingani tshindzhi dzindwa ndidzavhathu vhasadzi mivhunduni yashu. VhaVenda avhapfani nadzwindwa. Avhapfani nau amba. Vhanwe vhahumbula uri rizwidahela vhada fhano udzhiya zwothe namivhundu yashu. Riyakona utalifha hezwo ritshinyaga utandulula dzinanga hedzo. Vhana vhashu vhodafhata gai kharalu ratendela mumwe na mumwe uri afhate fhana?"* – FDG13

Most social conflicts involve people who are not from our area. Venda people are not violent by nature; they don't like talking. Some people think that is a weakness and then they come here to take

everything (land) away from us. We know how to be diplomatic when we handle sensitive issues. Where will our children build their own homes and fields if we allow everyone from everywhere to come and settle? The issue of allocating land to people from outside Beitbridge seemed to be thorn in the flesh of the participants as they talked emotionally about it. The researcher had to probe further to find out if it had been resolved and the following response was raised by one of the participants,

*"This is a matter that were are still deliberating with our political leadership. We are trying to find a way which is diplomatic and not harsh to the people who are settling. However, it has become frustrating because the talks have been ongoing for years now and we still haven't arrived to a solutio*n." – FDG16

The researcher then sought to understand how the above mentioned conflict affected them as local women. The participants explained that they felt that the allocation of prime land to outsiders was going to affect their children. According to the Zimbabwean Constitution Section 282 the chiefs are mandated to promote cultural values of their communities and that includes land allocation and distribution.

**To Assess the Effectiveness of Strategies and Opportunities Associated with the Strategies Being used by Venda Women in Malala are in Managing Conflicts**
The participants from both categories were asked if they had successfully resolved conflicts or disputes in Malala. The findings showed that women were more successful in solving family level conflicts due to the important roles played by Makhadzi.

*"Mita mindzhi itsho yoima ngali vhanga laVhoMakhadzi. Huszivho vhathu vhodotalana maduvha othe havha nadzi khakhathi mitani,"* – FDG9

Most marriages and households still stand because of Vhomakhadzi, without them people would be divorcing every day and there would be chaos in households. However, when it came to the social (land) issue, it seems that the strategies used by Makhadzi were not very effective this was evidenced by the fact that the participants explained that the talks on how land should be allocated had been ongoing for years. During this discussion the researcher also noted a patter between women and older women. The following

Dube, S. and Chikohora, E

Sarc. Jr. Hum. Cul. Stud. vol-1, issue-1 (2022) pp-1-15

are some of the responses from women in the 21 to 40 years' age range;

"*Ndothagomela uri mitanganoni vhafumakhadzi vha a hevhodzana ngashavha, vhasakho vhudza munwe namunwe ari mutanganoni. Hezwo zwiita ngama itelo asiyalala usangaga uamba phandda havha rangaphandda navhakalaha.*" FDG4

I have noted that during the meetings where conflicts and disputes are held, women will just whisper and murmur at the back, having discussions amongst themselves which are not addressed to the meeting as a whole. This is because of the culture of not wanting to speak in front of men and leadership."

"*Rivhotshila khashanga loshanduwaho. Maitele aVhoMakhadzwi khamuvhunda hatshashuma. Ngauri vhuthu nama itelo oshanduwa. Vharanga phandda avha tshahudza VhoMakhadzi ngadila yoteyaho. Ndohumbula uri ndingazwa vhasekho tandulula thayidzo ubva murahuni.*" – FDG 16

We now live in a radical world were diplomacy is not always the answer. The methods being used by Vhomakhadzi on the land issue does not work because humanity and morals have changed. Political leaders do not value Vhomakhadzi the way they did before our generation. I think that is why they have not been able to resolve this issue for so long.

"*Mbudziso yanga ndiuri ndingani VhoMakhadzi vhotendelwa uambela vhamwe vhafumakadzi mitanganani iyo? Ndinangaha uri vhadifhinduleli hashu hofhambana vhudipfi havhanwe ovhungadivhiwi songa VhoMakhadzi vha tshiniambela khasiya lavho. Ndisakoyadzo vhaimo havho fhedzi ndipfa unga sango rikhotshilo shangani lisafani nalakala narine rotea ushandula maitelo ashu.*" – FDG20

*My question is why should only Vhomakhadzi be allowed to speak on behalf of all women in these meetings? Surely our preferences and opinions are different and ours remain unheard because Vhomakhadzi speak for themselves only. Not to disrespect their roles but I feel that since we now live in a modern world where the way of life and culture are changing we need to embrace new inclusive methods of doing things.*"

The following are the responses from women above the 40 years' age range;
"*Ukuxazulula indaba yomhlabathi asiyo ndaba elula ikongaga tshifinga. Laba oVhoMakhazi bayaphatheke enhlelweni lezi futhi ngilesure*

*yokuthi ngolwazi lwabo abaluphiwa ngabaphansi, bayakhulumela sonke*" – FDG16

Resolving a big dispute such as this land issue takes a lot of time. Vhomakhadzi are very participative in these talks and I am sure that due to their spiritual wisdom and experience, their input will benefit us all.

"*Ulugiga thayidzo yazwamavu omuvhundini washu zwidzhiya tshifhinga tshilapfusa. Fhedzi VhoMakhadzi vhakokona uwana ddila yaitshimbidza mafhunga zwavhudi. Tshivenda tshiri "Usala murahu azwiambi usaswika" Ringagidima rasuvha rawela fhasi risathu uswika Nango zwitshidzhiya tshilapfu. VhoMakhadzi vhakhotada kudzhiwe tsheyo yolugela tshitshavha.*" – FDG13

"*The land issue is not a gender issue, but Vhomakhadzi have been able to ensure that smooth talks prevail. In Tshivenda they say, 'Usala murahu azwiambi usa swika.' Translated into English it means that it is important to note that running does not mean that you have arrived. When might run and slip and fall along the way. That is even though it is taking a long time, Vhomakhadzi want the right decisions to be made for the benefit of our community.*"

FDG4 brings to light how women attend meetings with opinions which they did not raise to the meeting house due to the social norms around what is considered as proper behaviours in a meeting. The response from FDG20 not only reflects the age gap of understanding the cultural way of things but also shows how participation of women in decision making is limited to a certain class of women (Vhomakhadzi). These women felt that the presence of women in meetings does not guarantee them the space to meaningfully contribute. When the researcher probed further it was explained that women did attend the meetings but their contribution were limited. Only Makhadzi could substantively participate with the leadership. Limiting the participation of women in decision making is an obstacle in their conflict resolution participation as well.

The above findings also reflect how the efforts to resolve a conflict take a long time which frustrated the younger generation of women while older women sounded patient and displayed a sense of trust on the manner in which Makhadzi handled the matter. These findings outlay the generational differences between Venda women. Frustration displayed could be due to lack of patience by the

younger women in how conflicts were resolved. Higher levels of ambition and desire could be the influencers of this lack of patience. Are the international and national protocols on women development and empowerment in the context of conflict resolution being observed at Malala?

*"Hukhandivha nathiyazo malugana nazwagata. Nango mulayo waZimbabwe vhafumakhadzi khakezwa. Vhafumakhadzi vhakhadivha vhosedzana nadzithayidzo ngaliivhnga lamaitelo asiyalala"* – K13

There are still challenges on conflicts which are related to inheritance, despite the fact that the Zimbabwean law clearly deals with inheritance and grants women the right to inherit property. Local women still face challenges due to the cultural beliefs. The above illustrates how the dominant Venda cultural practices posed an obstacle to women facing inheritance conflicts despite the national law. Inheritance laws are key in reducing inequalities and disputes when it comes to the distribution of wealth. Also despite the fact that inheritance laws guarantee both men and women the capacity of make a will, the participants echoed that they did not have any wills written down. When asked if their husbands had wills, the same sentiments were also echoed. This was a group question where the participants were asked to answer by show of hands. This finding exposed the Venda women's vulnerability to inheritance conflicts in the case of the death of the spouse. Also this finding brings a different perspective altogether, there is need to integrate cultural understanding and legal reforms in looking at the women's inheritance rights at cultural settings.

*"As an organisation, our goal is to design transformative environment that fits with the ongoing international development methods of improving women's participation in conflict management processes at community level. However, this is a very culturally conscious group of people and the transition take time."* KI3

*"There has been notable efforts, especially by political parties to incorporate women into their leadership structures. This means that indeed the international and national protocols are being observed in Malala."* KI1

However, a participant of focus group discussions challenged the above sentiment when she stated that political parties are more concerned about just equalling the numbers of men and women in their structure and not the actual effective contribution of women. All these responses indicate the importance and correlation of leadership and conflict resolution. They highlight the importance of women's equal participation in decision making and leadership where women cannot just be present where decisions are being made but also raise issues, suggest solutions and claim their space. In other words, participation in leadership enables participation in conflict resolution by women. Women are disproportionally affected by conflicts and as a results there are higher inequalities which leave them prone to the adverse effects of conflicts. This necessitates their involvement in bringing solutions and responses in conflict resolution strategies so that their needs are not excluded and rights undermined.

**Ascertain Measures Which Can Be Implemented to Increase Recognition and Efficacy of Women's Participation in Conflict Resolution Processes in Malala Area**

The study sought to understand the views of the respondents on the measures that can be used to improve the recognition and efficacy of women's participation in conflict resolution processes. Younger looking women echoed the same sentiments that there is need for all women, regardless of class to be given the opportunity to contribute in decision making at community level. When women are underrepresented in decision making processes, the resolutions suggested are less likely to reflect on their needs and priorities.

FDG12 had the following to say;
*"Vhafumakhadzi vhothe vhotea uri imelela muvhinduni. Risongolitsha vhafumakhadzi vhatuku vhatshiri dziyela tsheyo vharu ambhela. Udi azwidivha ndisiyalala fhedzi moitelo oshianduwo. Ngingani chafumakadzi vhotendelwa utandulula thayidzo dzamitani nadzambingano hilouri nathayidzo dzinwe dzikhovha kwama"* - FDG12

All women should stand up and be leaders of the community, we should not let a few women decide and speak for us all. I know it is culture, but things have changed now. Why should women be only allowed to solve home and marital disputes only when social, economic and political disputes are also affecting them? In agreement, other participants explained that if no decisive actions are taken to empower and enable more women (who were not Makhadzi) then equality in terms of conflict resolution will not be reached in the next future. Other younger looking women even suggested that Venda women need to participate in

national politics where they will call for rural women empowerment and for better representation to be adopted and enforced. Participants also raised the issue of movements and civic spaces where they mentioned that Venda women should start movements which will hold their local leadership to account and drive social change in Malala area.

The following statement was raised by one participant;
"*Rotea ututuwedza vhafumakhadzi uri vhadzhendele mivhunduni vharange phanda mitanganoni uri vhamwe vhufumadzi vhakone udiambela vhasa ofhi tshithu. Rotea ufhiwa tshfhinga tshaudiambela tsho edana mitanganoni udifana navhana naVhoMakhadzi*" – FDG23

There is need to encourage women to participate in the community spaces and conducting meeting in a way that all women are allowed to contribute without fear of being judged. We should be given turns to speak moderated by those chairing the meetings just like men and Vhomakhadzi do. The respondents suggested that more support should be offered to women by local grassroots organisations, political leaders and government to ensure that women are more informed about their rights as well as to build their social capacities so that they can be able to handle conflicts by themselves effectively. A key informant suggested an interesting viewpoint when she explained that supporting women with regards to conflict resolution matter includes providing them with platforms to discuss, understand their constraints and design effective methods of responding.

## DISCUSSION

Research findings showed the several roles played by Venda women in conflict resolution processes in Malala area at Beitbridge which included avoiding conflict, obliging, consulting with the senior community member such as Makhadzi. Most of the participants agreed that they would like to avoid conflicts as much as possible. However, this finding concurs with that of Brown. *et al*., (2015) who discovered that Avoidance Approach was more dissatisfying for women. The same scholar explains that the relationship between conflict avoidance and lack of satisfaction was bidirectional for women. Also in contrast with the focused group discussion participants, the key informants (NGO representatives) warned about the use of avoidance as a way of solving conflicts when they explain that the emotions which are associated with unresolved disputes usually

accumulate over time setting up for worse explosive conflicts in future. Hughes (2010) is of the opinion "that most of these tendencies can be traced back to growing up in a society which dismissive. People who use the avoidance style to resolve conflict are those who usually expect negative outcomes and find it difficult to trust the other person/party or their reaction. More so, by using "avoiding conflicts' the Venda women could be cutting off the honest communication which is critical and compromising their true desires. Open and honest communication is described by Hughes (2010) as a critical standard for conflict management and resolution.

Moreover, findings indicated that the most common conflicts that were mentioned by the participants was the marital conflicts. Socio-economic factors were mentioned as the common cause of marital conflicts. The majority of young people including married ones are constantly travelling to the neighbouring South Africa in order to look for greener pastures. Notions from the participants expressed that marital conflicts can have adverse physical and psycho-social effects on Venda women. In line with this, Auberry (2018) notes that marital conflicts produce a number of personal, familial, physical and psychological outcomes. In their study, Munduate and Kubaswa (2018) report that marital conflicts led to women experiencing fear, anxiety, depression and hopeless about their future.

Another common type of conflict that seemed to be raised by the respondents was inheritance based conflict. This is when disputes occur following the death of a family member and trying to determine who inherits what. Many responses from the discussions indicated that the issue of inheritance was a challenge to many Venda women at Malala area which left them vulnerable and dependent economically. This could be an indicator of how Venda people still die intestate leading to inheritance disputes which are handled by Makhadzi. However, Makhadzi are not experts when it comes to contentious probate solicitation. Johns and Clare (2017) postulate that disputes about inheritance conflicts have led to adverse outcomes for women's freedoms and rights because of patriarchal practices. The issue of allocating land to people from outside Beit bridge seemed to be thorn in the flesh of the participants as they talked emotionally about it. Findings indicated that the participants were concerned with the continuously allocation of land to people who

were not from Malala are in fear of having their children displaced in the near future.

Findings illustrated how the dominant Venda cultural practices posed an obstacle to women facing inheritance conflicts despite the national law. Even though such national legislation and standards are critical in handling the matter of inheritance, there is an urgent need for a parallel programme that addresses the cultural environment with regards to inheritance conflict.

The participants felt that organisations were more concerned about just equalling the numbers of men and women in their structure and not the actual effective contribution of women. Biri and Mutambwa (2013) advise the need to accelerate not only equality in numbers but also in participation and contribution. In their study, Biri and Mutambwa (2013) found that having more women in decision making roles may translate into lower quality of representativeness. They explained that the concepts which force gender balanced composition led to lower quality in terms of women participation. The existing social and systemic barriers in the Venda community seem to hinder effective participation of women when it comes to conflict resolution. Furthermore, young women echoed the same sentiments that there is need for all women, regardless of class to be given the opportunity to contribute in decision making at community level. They felt that Venda women, including Makhadzi were empowered to solve home and marital disputes but limited when it comes to economic and political matters which affected the entire community. These participants expressed the need to promote and encourage women's participation in the community spaces. The different views displayed a generational gap which was also discovered by Su (2016) in her study. Su (2016) concluded that wide cultural gap generations have led to miscommunications and negative atmospheres in community engagements. Su (2016) recommends that realizing personal differences between generations as well as how they absorb information allows proper engagement which satisfies all parties in the dialogues. All this led the research to ponder in the generational differences in conflict resolution and how that can affect the effectiveness of women in these initiatives.

It was also suggested that more support should be offered to women by local grassroots organisations, political leaders and government to ensure that women are more informed about their

rights as well as to build their social capacities so that they can be able to handle conflicts by themselves effectively. There is need to support women with regards to conflict resolution matter includes providing them with platforms to discuss, understand their constraints and design effective methods of responding.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that not every woman, but the Makhadzi played the major role in conflict resolution processes at Malala area. The approaches being used which include avoidance, obliging and consultation with the senior community/family members indicated the patriarchal ideology in which the women had to go out of their way or an extra mile in ensuring that the conflicts are resolved at their expense. Modernisation seems to be slowly eradicating the Venda traditions as the younger generation is learning new things in school and in churches. Some of the respondents blamed the new church systems for eroding the Venda culture whereby family members now sought for advice from the church leadership rather than Makhadzi. More so, most of the conflicts which have been experienced had physical and psychological impact on women. The study concludes that Venda women at Tshinavazvimi area were not fully aware of their rights when it came to marital and inheritance conflicts. In the absence of Makhadzi, Venda women could be feeling powerless to bring about the transformation which they want.

Venda women were playing important roles in conflict resolution, however disparities exist between men and women, younger women and older women. A traditional patriarchal society system exists in Malala area where female participation is limited unless if one is a Makhadzi. The responses under this objective displayed the generation gap between younger Venda women and older ones. The younger ones displayed dissatisfaction on the strategies and opportunities associated with the strategies being used by Venda women whilst the older ones were content. The research noted that the younger women did not share the same cultural references with the older women. This could perhaps be the reason why the older women felt that the young generation was being misled by their churches. This study concludes that many concerns of Venda women remain unaddressed even if they attend the engagement meetings because they did not air their concerns.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The traditional Venda community norm seems to the restricting the participation of younger women in decision making. There is need to give young women the opportunities and platforms to voice their concerns in the decision making processed which impact them. To promote their participation Government, NGOs and other interested stakeholders should establish some minimum level of female representation at dialogues from family up to national level. Also women should be trained in public speaking and leadership in order to ensure that they become more eloquent and confident as this promotes their chances of being heard.

There is need for expert solicitors for conflicts such as marital conflicts and inheritance conflicts who can work hand in hand with Makhadzi when it comes to handling such matters given the complexities involved in such disputes. The Venda community needs to be educated about the importance of professional marital counseling while incorporating and emphasizing the importance of cultural practices.

The participation of women in conflict resolution should be enhanced through important areas such as members of decision making bodies and policy making. Policies which involve empowering women need to be enacted. Community leadership needs to ensure that the decisions which affect women's livelihoods are prioritized. In other words, women are not supposed to be passive bystanders in their own communities but should be proactively involved to ensure that their voices are also heard.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Source of support:** Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

**Cite this article as:**

Dube, S. and Chikohora, E. "Reimagining Community Peace-Making and Comprehending the Role of Venda women in Conflict Resolution in Malala Communal area, Beit bridge District Zimbabwe." *Sarcouncil Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies* 1.1 (2022): pp 1-5