

The Gendered Impact of Conflict and the Role of Women in Peacebuilding in Nigeria

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Abstract

The gendered dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding in Nigeria have garnered increased attention due to their profound implications for societal stability and sustainable peace. This study investigates the complex effects of conflict on women, analyzes the roles and tactics employed by Nigerian women in peacebuilding initiatives, and identifies the socio-cultural norms, institutional obstacles, and resource limitations that hinder women's involvement in peacebuilding activities in Nigeria. However, it is important to recognize that women are not solely passive victims of conflict. They also play critical roles in shaping conflict dynamics and working towards peacebuilding efforts. Women in Nigeria have demonstrated resilience by engaging in various forms of activism, advocacy, and community mobilization to address the root causes of conflict, promote dialogue and foster reconciliation. By prioritizing gender-responsive approaches and amplifying women's voices, this study aims to develop and advocate for peacebuilding strategies that are more inclusive and sustainable. The research will adopt a secondary methodology, primarily relying on the analysis of existing literature, academic articles, reports, and other relevant secondary data sources. The analysis will synthesize findings from diverse sources to address the research objectives and contribute to a deeper understanding of the gendered dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding in Nigeria. In conclusion, this study underscores the indispensable role of women in peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. By prioritizing gender-responsive approaches and amplifying women's voices, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders can foster more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding strategies that address the diverse needs and aspirations of all segments of society.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Conflict, Nigeria, Peacebuilding, Women's Rights

1. Introduction

In recent decades, while the incidence of interstate wars has declined, internal violence within states, particularly in impoverished nations like those across Africa, has intensified. Over the past two decades, civil conflicts have more than doubled, surging from 30 in 2001 to 70 in 2016. These conflicts are particularly concentrated in impoverished countries, such as various African nations, marked by a dangerous combination of fragile institutions, inequality, discrimination, and social unrest. This grim reality is further compounded by the escalating intensity of natural disasters, food crises, growing threats of climate change, terrorism, and unprecedented levels of displacement, all of which are fundamentally reshaping the global landscape (Oxfam Intermon,

2019). Both men and women, alongside children, bear the disproportionate brunt of these violent conflicts. Although women were once viewed primarily as victims of war's aftermath. Nowadays, women are increasingly becoming deliberate targets of warfare strategies. They endure heinous acts such as rape, displacement, and socio-economic disruption, both within their own countries and as refugees (Alao, 2012). In today's conflicts, which encroach upon private spheres, women's security and identity are threatened, with many conflicts driven by religious or ethnic tensions, notably visible in countries like Nigeria and across Africa, where extreme violence undermines women's rights and perpetuates gender-based abuse (Oxfam Intermon, 2019).

African countries, particularly the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is home to a significant number of internally displaced persons, with millions being displaced within their own countries. Somalia and Nigeria also top the list of nations with a high number of displaced individuals, further reinforcing Africa's status as the continent with the largest number of internally displaced persons globally (The World Bank, 2022). While comprehensive gender-disaggregated data on conflict involvement is scarce, media reports suggest that women and children are disproportionately affected. As the fragility within communities deepens, with increasing civil unrest and crises, women bear the additional burden of maintaining household stability and securing their families. Amid escalating crises, many women are increasingly compelled to act as primary agents of peace (Alao, 2012). However, women are not merely victims in these conflicts. They assume diverse roles, serving as combatants, victims, civilians, leaders, and caretakers.

In fragile contexts, women and girls acquire new skills and contribute to peacemaking and the reconstruction of local economies and communities. Buvinic, Gupta, Casabonne and Verwimp (2013) underscore the differential impacts of conflict on genders, with men bearing a disproportionate burden of war mortality, while women and children constitute the majority of refugees and the displaced. Moreover, gender inequality significantly shapes adaptive responses to conflict, with widowed women facing heightened vulnerability to poverty (Buvinic et al., 2013). The twentieth century witnessed about 250 armed conflicts globally, resulting in over 110 million casualties. This includes 233 groups in 93 countries engaged in political, ethnic, or military struggles, with more than 20 million refugees fleeing conflict zones (Servae, 2008; Cramer, 2006). Notably, African countries like Nigeria have been deeply affected by violent conflicts, hindering development and causing significant fatalities (Adolfo, 2005). Nigeria, in particular, has been plagued by ethnic and religious conflicts, which have intensified over the years. The country has experienced a surge in violence, with the number of casualties dramatically increasing, particularly since the late 1990s. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by this violence, facing threats from various armed groups. However, the full extent of violence against women remains largely unknown due to underreporting and a lack of disaggregated data.

This paper seeks to bridge the gap between understanding the impact of conflict on women and recognizing their critical role in peacebuilding. Nigeria stands as a focal point for various forms of violence in the region, including violence against women, with a significant portion of casualties recorded in recent years occurring within its borders. This is largely attributed to ongoing conflicts in regions such as the Delta, Middle Belt, and Lake Chad. By contributing to the existing knowledge on the subject matter, this study will address the complexity of conflict

effects on women, role analysis amidst institutional obstacles, and how women navigate these challenges and actively participate in peace building initiatives. This study adopts Agency Theory to delve into how Nigerian women navigate and shape their roles in conflict and peacebuilding processes. It aims to uncover the barriers women encounter, including institutional obstacles and socio-cultural norms, and to highlight their diverse and crucial roles in fostering peace amidst adversity. Agency Theory offers a compelling lens through which to examine these dynamics. It posits that individuals have the capacity to actively influence their circumstances, albeit within the constraints of societal structures (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). This perspective is particularly relevant in conflict settings, where women are often perceived primarily as victims rather than as active agents of change. Such perceptions are deeply rooted in the prevailing gendered and masculinized narratives of war, which tend to overshadow women's agency and their multifaceted roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Shepherd, 2016).

This paper consists of five sections. The first section, the introduction, sets the context and rationale for the study, highlighting the significance of examining the gendered impact of conflict and the role of women in peacebuilding in Nigeria. The second section, the conceptual review, synthesizes existing research on the gendered dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding. The third section, places emphasis on the theoretical framework and the methodology used in this study. The fourth section, examines the effect of conflict on women, the fifth explore the roles and tactics employed by Nigerian women in peacebuilding, exploring their contributions and the challenges they face. The fifth section, conclusion, underscores the importance of gender-responsive approaches in fostering inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding strategies, emphasizing the need to amplify women's voices and address diverse societal needs.

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Conflict-Affected Areas

Conflict-affected areas are regions profoundly impacted by ongoing or recent conflicts, where social, economic, and political structures have been severely disrupted. Understanding these areas is vital for effective peacebuilding, humanitarian intervention, and sustainable development efforts. This review explores the characteristics of conflict-affected regions, the challenges they face, and strategies to foster resilience and recovery amidst adversity. Conflict-affected areas are marked by heightened insecurity, weakened governance structures, and disrupted essential services. These regions often experience widespread poverty, food insecurity, and human rights violations exacerbated by displacement and humanitarian crises. The presence of violence and instability profoundly impacts the livelihoods and well-being of populations, creating complex environments for development and peacebuilding (UNHCR, 2020).

The challenges in conflict-affected areas are multifaceted, encompassing economic devastation, social fragmentation, and psychological trauma among communities. Destruction of infrastructure and loss of productive assets hinder recovery efforts, while insecurity and instability deter investments and impede socio-economic progress. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive approaches that integrate humanitarian aid, development assistance, and peacebuilding initiatives to rebuild trust and promote sustainable peace (UNDP, 2017; World Bank, 2021). The impact of conflict on development and peacebuilding efforts is profound, hindering progress towards achieving sustainable development goals. Displacement and refugee

flows strain resources and challenge humanitarian response capacities, while the legacy of conflict perpetuates cycles of poverty and vulnerability. Efforts to strengthen governance, enhance access to basic services, and foster economic opportunities are essential for rebuilding communities and promoting stability in conflict-affected areas (UNESCO, 2020).

Effective strategies in conflict-affected areas focus on building resilience and fostering recovery through integrated approaches. These include supporting livelihood opportunities, enhancing access to essential services such as healthcare and education, and promoting social cohesion and reconciliation. Empowering local communities, particularly marginalized groups such as women and youth, is critical for sustainable peacebuilding and development. By addressing the root causes of conflict and investing in long-term solutions, stakeholders can help rebuild societies and create pathways towards lasting peace (UNDP, 2017; World Bank, 2021). Understanding the dynamics of conflict-affected areas is crucial for designing targeted interventions that address immediate humanitarian needs while laying foundations for long-term development. By adopting holistic approaches that combine humanitarian assistance with peacebuilding and development programming, stakeholders can support communities in overcoming challenges, rebuilding trust, and fostering resilient societies capable of sustaining peace amidst adversity.

2.2 Gender Based Violence

GBV includes intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and abuse, child abuse, female infanticide, and child marriage (Arango et al. 2014). These forms are exacerbated by instability, displacement, and breakdown of social structures, significantly impacting women's physical, mental, economic, social, educational, and legal well-being (Ezeigwe, 2019; Ibrahim, 2019; Gressmann, 2016; Oluwole, 2019). Such violence impedes gender equality and the achievement of a range of development outcomes. Experiencing violence precludes women from contributing to or benefiting from development initiatives by limiting their choices and ability to act (UN General Assembly 2006). The deprivation of women resulting from violence should be of central concern to governments and to societies at large as an intrinsic human rights issue and because of the epidemic's negative impact on economic growth and poverty reduction. GBV leads to severe physical injuries, health issues, trauma, anxiety, depression, and PTSD among women in conflict zones (Ezeigwe, 2019; Ibrahim, 2019). Economically, it disrupts livelihoods and perpetuates poverty, while socially, survivors face stigma and isolation (Odumosu, 2018; Anugwom et al., 2018). Educationally, GBV disrupts girls' education and limits access to justice due to weakened legal systems (Gressmann, 2016; Oluwole, 2019).

GBV in conflict settings is exacerbated by the breakdown of law and order, displacement, pre-existing cultural norms, gender inequalities, and economic hardships (World Bank, 2021; UNHCR, 2020; Oni, 2020; Odumosu, 2018). Effective responses to GBV require strengthening legal frameworks, improving healthcare access, promoting economic empowerment, engaging communities in dialogue, educating about gender equality, and enhancing security in refugee and IDP camps (UN Women, 2021; Ojo, 2021; Amadiume, 2020; UNHCR, 2020). GBV profoundly impacts women in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria across multiple dimensions. Addressing GBV necessitates comprehensive strategies encompassing legal reforms, healthcare improvements, community engagement, and gender-sensitive peacebuilding efforts. Understanding these dynamics is critical for fostering sustainable and inclusive peacebuilding processes in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, conflicts have led to widespread destruction of lives and properties, with gross human rights violations perpetrated against civilian populations, particularly women. Conflict has profound psychological impacts on women, including trauma, anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Exposure to violence, loss of loved ones, and displacement contribute to the deterioration of mental health among women in conflict settings. However, access to mental health services remains limited in Nigeria (Ezeigwe, 2019; Ige et al., 2018). Adebayo (2020) explored the prevalence of gender-based violence in conflict-affected areas through qualitative interviews, revealing alarming rates of sexual violence, rape, and domestic abuse against women. The study underscores the urgent need for intervention and support services to address this issue. Ibrahim (2019) conducted a longitudinal study on the impact of conflict on women's mental health, finding a significant increase in symptoms of trauma, anxiety, depression, and PTSD among women directly affected by conflict.

Women in conflict-affected areas of Nigeria face multifaceted challenges, including precarious living conditions, limited access to healthcare and education, and increased vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking. Odumosu (2018) employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate barriers to economic empowerment for women in conflict zones, highlighting limited access to formal employment, financial services, and land ownership. The destruction of infrastructure and disruption of markets further exacerbate their economic disempowerment (Anugwom et al., 2018; Omeje, 2017).

Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution is one of the ways women are shaping conflict in Nigeria. Women in Nigeria have actively engaged in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. Grassroots initiatives led by women, such as the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), have played crucial roles in community dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict mediation. Their involvement has contributed to sustainable peace and social cohesion (Amadiume, 2020; Oluwole, 2019). Women activists and organizations have been instrumental in advocating for the rights of conflict-affected women in Nigeria. They have raised awareness about gender-based violence, pushed for legal reforms, and campaigned for the implementation of policies addressing women's needs in conflict settings. Their efforts have led to the development of gender-responsive interventions and support services (Ezeigwe, 2019; Okoli & Kamanu, 2020). Conflict situations have created opportunities for women's increased political participation and leadership roles. Women in Nigeria have utilized their experiences and networks to actively engage in politics, advocating for peace, gender equality, and conflict-sensitive policies. Women-led initiatives like the Women Situation Room (WSR) have contributed to peaceful elections and inclusive governance (Amadiume, 2020; Oluwole, 2019). Peacebuilding efforts led by women have emerged as a crucial component of conflict resolution in Nigeria. Musa (2020) conducted case studies of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives, demonstrating the critical role played by women in promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

Access to healthcare is another significant challenge for women in conflict zones. Conflict exacerbates maternal and child health issues, as revealed by Abdullahi's (2018) retrospective study, which found significant increases in maternal and infant mortality rates in conflict-affected areas. Ojo's (2020) survey of healthcare providers in conflict-affected areas exposes challenges in accessing healthcare services, including inadequate infrastructure, medical supplies, and security concerns, emphasizing the need for improved healthcare delivery strategies.

Intersectionality shapes the experiences of marginalized women in conflict zones, with complex interactions of gender, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status influencing their vulnerabilities. Oni's (2020) intersectional analysis of marginalized women's experiences in conflict zones uncovers intricate connections between gender, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status. This highlights the importance of adopting comprehensive strategies to tackle various forms of oppression in peacebuilding endeavors. The economic empowerment of women in conflict zones presents a complex challenge, as elucidated by Odumosu (2018). Through a mixed-methods approach, Odumosu identified barriers such as limited access to formal employment, financial services, and land ownership, alongside opportunities for entrepreneurship and skills development. Adewale's (2016) comparative analysis of women's political participation in conflict versus non-conflict zones underscores disparities in representation and participation, necessitating targeted interventions to enhance women's political empowerment.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study adopted agency theory, the issues surrounding women's roles in peace processes can be better understood through the lens of this theory. Agency theory is defined as the capacity of individuals to shape their own life circumstances, recognizing that actions perceived as free are often influenced by societal structures (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). In the context of conflict, women are frequently viewed as victims rather than agents of change, rooted in the prevailing notion that war is a gendered and masculinized narrative. This perspective diminishes the concept of agency as it relates to women (Shepherd, 2016). Understanding agency is crucial for addressing power relations within society.

In Nigeria, power dynamics are typically masculinized, resulting in the subordination of women. Shepherd (2016) emphasizes that women should be recognized as agents of change rather than merely victims of violence. She critiques the perspective that men are the sole perpetrators and women the sole victims of violence in conflicts, arguing that this view overlooks women's active roles in war. By only portraying women as victims, their agency is undermined, which in turn hampers the development of peacebuilding activities where women's experiences and contributions can be fully integrated. Shepherd advocates for shifting the narrative to acknowledge women as active participants in conflicts—not just as victims but also as decision-makers, negotiators, peace activists, and military participants. Recognizing women as agents rather than victims strengthens their roles in social transformation and enhances their contributions to peacebuilding efforts. This shift is essential for promoting gender equality and empowering women in conflict and post-conflict settings.

The study utilizes secondary data, drawing on related literature from various sources such as journal articles, online materials, academic archives, and books

4. Complex Effects of Conflict on women

Conflict tends to affect women disproportionately exposing them to sexual or gender-based violence such as rape, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancies. These often compromises their psychological and reproductive well-being. According to Lombe (2023) cited in Colarossi (2024), ... “in normal situations, about one in five women are likely to experience gender-based violence in their lifetime -during war(conflict) this is even worse.” The following are ways through which we can examine the complex effect of conflict on women.

4.1 Health

Good health is critical to women's ability to manage with their multiple responsibilities. Women's health issues on which conflict may have an impact include psychological and reproductive health as well as general health and issues concerning women's access to food and community support. The conflict inflicted psychological and emotional pain on both genders. Notwithstanding, the plight of women was particularly pronounced. There was the case of about twenty women and girls captured by the Boghom people and taken to a village called Kangyal in Kanam Local Government Area. The women and their daughters suffered the worst form of sexual abuse as their captors took turns on them every evening for three months. When they were finally saved, five of them were pregnant and tested positive to HIV/ AIDS. Conflict reduces the standards of living and availability of resource which can lead to destruction of health, well-being and education services, extensive rape which may give rise to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS, and also psychological stress or trauma, and the inability to recover such stress can pan out in a mental illness. Trauma is defined as a psychological state resulting from an extreme experience or situation. Possible causes of trauma in conflict situations include the following: injury or torture, imprisonment and or sustained threat of death, witnessing torture or butcheries, violent or humiliating death of loved ones, assault, destitution, loss of home, property, livelihood, destruction of one's community, forced migration.

4.2 Disability

Women are disproportionately affected by disabilities resulting from conflict-related incidents, such as landmine explosions and accidents. In regions like Somaliland, where landmines are prevalent, women and children are particularly vulnerable due to their involvement in activities like gathering fuel and water. Disabled women also face significant challenges in accessing prosthetic devices and engaging in productive activities, exacerbating their economic vulnerability and dependency.

4.3 Women in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Camps

Basically, women and children constitute about 80 percent of the millions of refugees around the world. Other refugees including internally displaced persons are deprived of their properties, goods and also loss of their right to freedom of movement to return to their homes for fear and instability. In Nigerian States like Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, women suffer a lot due to the deprived living conditions. The overcrowded housing conditions in camps also aggravate the dangers of other forms of domestic violence. Children being separated from their caregivers during displacements leads to an increase in the number of female-headed households, which may add a monetary burden and expose them to exploitation and abuse. With this scarcity of basic essentials, female heads of homes in particular will be forced to engage in transactional survival sex act or contracting child marriage or forced marriage, and will be more exposed to other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse within the environment of camp. Due to poor security and infrastructure, including limited reporting mechanisms and reduced access to an already weak justice system, women and girls are more susceptible to rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Also, in refugee camps in Bukuru, Jos (a south Local Government Area of Plateau State) it was discovered that when researchers from the Institute for Peace and Conflict were there, they were

told that 31 pregnant women at the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps were delivered of their babies at different camps. Reports from their spokesperson in charge of women in the IDP camps said in an interview “that the women who gave birth were earlier taking refuge at the police stations and premises of Bukuru central mosque before they were subsequently taken to another house which was converted to serve as a temporary maternity”. Out of the 31 women that put to bed only two babies didn't survive although the two mothers were in very good conditions. In a newspaper report, one of the nurses in charge of the maternity centers created mentioned that “some bullets were removed from some of the pregnant mothers’ bodies who were shot during the crisis, and they had to undergo some operations to suture them”

Lack of nourishing food in the camps is due to their population, although some Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) have visited some camp grounds to enhance the supply and distribution of food stuffs and apparel. Different groups have surfaced to contribute liberally for the refugees. Other repulsive experiences include Snake bites in the bush while trying to escape, high rate of widowhood, forced marriages, loss of children, premature births due to fear and pressure, mothers abandoning new born babies due to lack of finances and incapability to survive,

In an interview, Vonnann Dashe, president of the Gani community development association, on 5th November 2004 mentioned that, “Women were subdued to violence and difficulty because they had to worry about the fate of their children. Some of their children actually got killed and others were wounded while others were assaulted by the attackers. They weren't only physically harassed but also sexually abused and degraded”. It was also gathered that apart from the fact that women were assaulted, they were also divorced by their husbands, which facilitated a worse emotional stressful and painful condition. The resort to divorce by men whose wives had been sexually abused was a means of dealing with the humiliation acquired from the conflict.

4.4 Early Pregnancy, Marriage and Education

Access to education has been severely affected by the conflict. Estimates of between 800,000 to 1.3 million girls are unable to access education as a result of the destruction of schools, displacement, and the dangers of conflict in Yemen (Al Naami and Moodley, 2017; Gressmann, 2016; Heinze, 2016). It's important to acknowledge that women and girls experience conflict differently from men and boys. The protection of women and girls often means a disruption in their education. Especially when armed forces are present, the walk to school can become hazardous enough for parents to prefer to keep their daughters at home. In the case of the Aboke girls in Northern Uganda, for illustration, One Hundred and Thirty-Nine girls were specifically targeted, removed from a girls’ boarding school, and forced into the rebel forces (De Temmerman, 2001). Such incidents make parents understandably reluctant to risk sending their daughters to school, and coerce them to develop strategies to protect their women and children as best they can. In Kosovo, after 1999, many minority girls remained out of school because of fear of rape and abduction (Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003). In Rwanda, during and after the conflict, girls tended to stay close to their homes, remaining for the most part with their mothers; education was the first of their activities to be sacrificed (Oxfam 1999).

Early marriage and early pregnancy are also ways in which conflict affect women. This has a significant impact on girls education, causing early drop out. Conflict can exacerbate the factors which contribute to low school registration of girls. These include parents being unable and

unwilling to spare the costs(direct and indirect) of sending girls to academy, and the safety and security concerns about girls traveling the long distances from home to school, and then being at risk of sexual harassment from teachers (Watchlist, 2003). Women teachers are also averted from attending school by insecurity and lack of safety, and economic necessity can make it impossible for them to teach. This is certainly the case in southern Sudan, where teachers receive no regular salary and women, many of whom head households, cannot afford not to be earning an income (Kirk, 2003). In other situations, early marriage can be a way for parents to protect their daughters, and to ensure that even if she's the victim of sexual violence, her future prospects won't be compromised. In Northern Uganda, families have married their daughters to host members in order to protect themselves, the family honour, and that of the girls. The same also happened in Somalia(UNICEF, 2001).

4.5 Change in roles

Conflict and its after effect can also be a time when gender roles have to change, and the practical and economic imperatives of survival and reconstruction take precedence over education. When a husband/ father is away fighting, has been killed or has fled, women and even young girls are left heading households. After the genocide in Rwanda, the female population was for a time at 70, and the population of southern Sudan is one third male, two thirds female (Obura, 2001). Conflict tends to result in women taking on additional responsibilities (El- Bushra et al, 2002), and economic necessity may mean that they're forced into income generating activity rather than attending school. In post-conflict Somalia, in the absence of men, women have become increasingly involved in income generating activities, and in household decision-making. However, girls educational opportunities haven't improved with their mothers ' income-earning potential, as the daughters of working mothers have had to take on extra domestic responsibilities(Bekalo, Brophy & Welford, 2003).

4. Women's Impact on Conflict Dynamics in Nigeria

Contrary to being mere victims of war, women in conflict-affected regions like Nigeria are assuming leadership roles and actively engaging in addressing both the consequences and root causes of prolonged violent conflicts. However, the involvement of Nigerian women in peace-building has historically been marginalized and unstable, primarily confined to non-formal grassroots or community-based initiatives. Throughout history, Nigerian women have played significant roles in both peacetime and wartime situations, serving as traditional peacemakers, priestesses consulting with deities to guide decisions on warfare, and even as singers boosting morale during battles. Examples include figures like Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Moremi of Ife, and Efunsetan Aniwura, showcasing the long-standing tradition of women contributing to peace efforts in Nigeria (Olaitan, 2018).

Even during precolonial and colonial periods, Nigerian women actively participated in various forms of resistance against oppressive colonial rule, such as the 1929 Aba Women's Riots and the Egba Women's Riots led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. This highlights the enduring significance of women's roles in shaping societal responses to conflict and oppression (Byfield, 2003). The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted on October 31, 2000, underscored the importance of integrating gender perspectives into conflict prevention, resolution, and peace-building efforts at all levels. Since then, there has been some progress,

albeit limited, in recognizing and incorporating women's contributions to conflict resolution and post-conflict peace-building processes (Ilesanmi and Agbu, 2014).

Before Resolution 1325, initiatives like the Kigali Declaration of 1997 emphasized the positive and active roles of women in peacemaking and peacebuilding, acknowledging their traditional peacemaking roles and advocating for their equal involvement in peace initiatives at all levels (Kigali Declaration, 1997). In Nigeria, various grassroots efforts led by women have been instrumental in resolving conflicts and promoting peace. For instance, the activities of groups like Umuada have facilitated the resolution of land disputes between communities, while women-led peace networks in states like Plateau have helped strengthen women's leadership, elevate gender equality, and enhance the protection of women and children in conflict settings (Nwolise, 2004; Imam, Biu, and Yah, 2020). Women in Nigeria have also organized marches, rallies, and campaigns to raise awareness of human rights abuses and advocate for peace. They have actively participated in local vigilante units and community-based initiatives to counter extremist groups like Boko Haram, demonstrating their resilience and determination to contribute to peace-building efforts (UN Women, 2020).

Moreover, women-led non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Kebetkache Women Development and Galaxy4Peace have been at the forefront of advocating for peace and empowering women at the grassroots level. These initiatives aim to bridge gender gaps, promote peaceful coexistence, and ensure women's active involvement in peacebuilding and policymaking processes across Nigeria (Osah and Odedina, 2017; Ajunwa, 2020). Nigerian women's roles in shaping conflict dynamics extend far beyond being victims of war. Their active participation in peace-building efforts at the grassroots level reflects their resilience, agency, and commitment to fostering sustainable peace and stability in their communities and beyond.

5. Roles and tactics employed by Nigerian women in peacebuilding initiatives

Despite these challenges, Nigerian women like other African women, play important roles in peace building and this stands out (Agbalajobi, 2020). Nigerian women demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness in navigating these obstacles. Olaitan (2018) cited in Anundu & Origbo, 2022:116, argues that for centuries, women in Nigeria have played important roles in peace and war situations, mainly as traditional peace-makers, as priestesses who consult with the gods to determine whether or not it was right to go to war, as singers of praise for men during battles as a boost to guarantee their victory. Independent Nigerian women have also adopted the use of advocacy, mobilization, and community engagement, they leverage their social networks, traditional leadership roles, and grassroots initiatives to foster sustainable peace and social cohesion.

Advocacy is a primary tool utilized by women activists and organizations, aimed at raising awareness about gender-based violence and the unique challenges faced by women in conflict zones. By lobbying policymakers and engaging in public campaigns, they strive to influence policy reforms that promote gender equality and address the needs of conflict-affected women (UN Women, 2020).

Mobilization plays a crucial role as well, as women mobilize their communities for collective action. This includes organizing marches, rallies, and community meetings to amplify their voices and demand accountability from authorities. Through these efforts, they create spaces for

dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict mediation at the grassroots level, contributing to social cohesion and peacebuilding initiatives (Amadiume, 2020).

Utilizing their extensive social networks and traditional leadership roles, Nigerian women leverage existing community structures to facilitate peace processes. These networks enable them to bridge divides, build trust among conflicting parties, and negotiate ceasefires or agreements that benefit their communities. Their involvement in traditional peacemaking roles, often overlooked in formal peace negotiations, proves essential in resolving local conflicts and promoting inclusive peacebuilding (Ilesanmi and Agbu, 2014).

Despite facing resource limitations, including funding constraints and inadequate institutional support, women-led organizations persist in implementing gender-responsive interventions. These initiatives aim to provide essential services such as healthcare, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment programs tailored to meet the specific needs of women and girls affected by conflict (Okoli & Kamanu, 2020). By addressing these multifaceted challenges, Nigerian women demonstrate their resilience and resourcefulness in navigating obstacles to peacebuilding, ultimately contributing to sustainable peace and stability in their communities.

There are also specific tactics adopted by Nigerian women in the process of building peace within their communities. Studies shows that, Nigeria have adopted various tactics and strategies for peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes (Imam, Hauwa, & Yah, 2020; Oluwaseun, 2021; Onyesoh, 2021; Falade, 2022; Anundu & Origbo, 2022; Oruwari, 2022; Tukur, 2023; Gbadeyan, & Osadola 2023). In some instances, there were informal peace process strategies adopted such as in Borno, Niger Delta, Adamawa to mention a few. Sometimes, these women organized across religious divides by setting aside their religious differences to fight for a common cause (Imam, Hauwa, & Yah, 2020). We also have some formal initiatives like the Community Women Peace Architecture Dialogue, which is a monthly dialogue meeting of women leaders at the Local Government Area of Jos-South in Plateau State (Falade, 2022). Federation of Ogoni Women's Organization FOWA is another initiative adopted by women in Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Through the actions of FOWA women actions became highly publicized. The women engaged actively with the elders and the youths in the struggle against shells activities and for the political autonomy of their land. women's nonviolent protest against Chevron in Escravos (Delta State) Anundu & Origbo, 2022. There are also a number of women led non-governmental organization that have worked across the country to ensure peace in conflict and fragile settings.

5.1 Factors Hindering Nigerian Women's Involvement in Peace Building Initiatives

There are a number of factors that hinders women's involvement in peacebuilding activities in Nigeria. Some of these factors include Violence Against Women (VAW)/Gender Based Violence socio-cultural norms, institutional obstacles, resource limitations and situation.

5.2 Violence Against Women (VAW)/ GBV

The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in

public or in private life (United Nations, 1993). Gender-based violence is often used interchangeably with violence against women, (Krantz, 2005).

In recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence, the Council of Europe stipulated that VAW "includes, but is not limited to, the following" (Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, 2002):

- a. Violence occurring in the family or domestic unit, including, inter alia, physical and mental aggression, emotional and psychological abuse, rape and sexual abuse, incest, rape between spouses, regular or occasional partners and cohabitants, crimes committed in the name of honour, female genital and sexual mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women such as forced marriages;
- b. Violence occurring within the general community, including, inter alia, rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in institutions or elsewhere; trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation, and economic exploitation and sex tourism;
- c. Violence perpetrated or condoned by the state or its officials;
- d. Violation of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict, in particular the taking of hostages, forced displacement, systematic rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and economic exploitation.

In conflict and post-conflict affected areas of Nigeria, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, GBV escalates dramatically. Women and girls are frequently subjected to abductions, sexual slavery, and forced marriages, tactics intended to destabilize and terrorize communities (Ezeigwe, 2019; Ibrahim, 2019). This violence not only traumatizes the victims but also disrupts their social structures, making active engagement in peace processes exceedingly difficult (Human Rights Watch, 2014). GBV poses a direct threat to women's safety and well-being, creating an environment of fear and oppression. Survivors often suffer from long-term physical and mental health issues, including trauma, depression, and anxiety, which diminish their capacity to contribute to peacebuilding. Health services in conflict zones are typically inadequate, leaving survivors without essential support. The economic repercussions of GBV also cannot be overlooked, as many survivors lose their livelihoods and social support networks, further entrenching their dependency and restricting their mobility (Amnesty International, 2015). Also, barriers to active engagement in peace processes extend beyond physical and psychological impacts. Cultural and societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality often blame victims, discouraging them from seeking justice. The lack of effective legal protections and judicial failures to prosecute GBV cases compound these issues, fostering a culture of impunity. Traditional gender roles confine women to domestic spaces, excluding them from political and decision-making processes. This exclusion is exacerbated by the threat of GBV, reinforcing the notion that public domains are unsafe for women (UN Women, 2015).

5.3 Socio-Cultural Norms

Socio-cultural norms play a significant role in hindering women's involvement in peacebuilding activities in Nigeria. These norms often relegate women to traditional domestic roles, limiting their participation in public and political spheres, including peace negotiations and decision-making processes. Deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs and practices perpetuate gender inequalities and reinforce stereotypes that undermine women's leadership potential. For example, in many Nigerian communities, women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities over public engagement, which restricts their ability to participate actively in peacebuilding efforts. Socio-cultural norms often relegate women to domestic roles, limiting their participation in public and political spheres, including peace negotiations and decision-making processes. These norms perpetuate gender inequalities and stereotypes that undermine women's leadership potential in conflict resolution efforts (Amadiume, 2020). Additionally, cultural norms that devalue women's contributions in leadership and decision-making create an environment where their voices are marginalized (Amadiume, 2020). The enforcement of these socio-cultural norms not only limits women's opportunities but also discourages them from seeking roles in peacebuilding activities, thus perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and inequality.

5.4 Institutional Obstacles

Institutional obstacles further marginalize women's voices in peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. Discriminatory laws and policies often limit women's representation and participation in formal institutions and peace negotiation teams. For instance, political and legal frameworks that fail to ensure gender parity in decision-making bodies result in a significant underrepresentation of women (UN Women, 2020). This exclusion means that women's perspectives and experiences are not adequately considered in shaping conflict resolution strategies. Additionally, the lack of institutional support for women-led initiatives and organizations or limited representation in formal institutions and peace negotiation teams hinders their capacity to mobilize resources, implement effective peacebuilding interventions and shaping conflict resolution strategies. (Oluwole, 2019). Without a supportive legal and policy environment, women face significant barriers in advocating for change and participating meaningfully in peacebuilding processes.

5.5 Resource Limitations

Resource limitations are another critical factor that hinders women's involvement in peacebuilding activities in Nigeria. Women-led organizations often struggle with inadequate funding, lack of access to technical expertise, and insufficient infrastructure. These constraints impede their ability to sustain peacebuilding efforts, deliver essential services, and support women affected by conflict. For example, many women-led organizations lack the financial resources necessary to conduct extensive outreach, provide training, and support victims of conflict-related violence (Okoli & Kamanu, 2020). Additionally, the absence of adequate technical expertise and infrastructure limits their ability to implement and monitor peacebuilding programs effectively. The scarcity of resources not only affects the operational capacity of these organizations but also undermines their credibility and influence in the peacebuilding arena.

Women bear the brunt of conflict, facing various forms of violence and displacement, yet they have demonstrated resilience and agency in navigating these challenges. From enduring gender-based violence to assuming unexpected roles as heads of households, women experience unique

hardships during and after conflicts. However, amidst adversity, women have emerged as powerful agents of change, actively engaging in political and peacebuilding initiatives. These efforts are vital contributors to peace and stability.

Women-led Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are also playing an increasingly influential role in advocating for gender equality and empowering women and girls. These organizations not only raise awareness about women's rights but also provide essential skills and resources to help women protect themselves from violence and participate in peacebuilding efforts. By amplifying women's voices and promoting their leadership, these NGOs contribute to the restoration of normalcy in conflict-affected areas. In conclusion, women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes is essential for achieving sustainable peace and development. As women continue to assert their rights and advocate for change, it is imperative to support and amplify their efforts. By recognizing and harnessing the potential of women as agents of peace, societies can build more inclusive and resilient communities by harnessing the potential of women as peacebuilders. Addressing GBV in conflict and post-conflict settings is crucial, as emphasized by international recommendations, to ensure that women's participation in peace processes leads to a more equitable and peaceful world.

Prioritizing Women's Empowerment in Conflict-Affected Areas: It is essential to prioritize the empowerment of women in conflict-affected areas, specifically addressing their unique roles and challenges in peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria, where conflicts often stem from ethno-religious tensions.. Governments and international organizations should invest in programs and initiatives that promote women's education, economic opportunities, and leadership skills. By providing women with access to education and vocational training, tailored to their needs, stakeholders can enhance their capacity to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts and economic development (Gopal, 2018; UN Women, 2020).• **Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Institutional Mechanisms:** It is crucial to strengthen legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms to protect women's rights and address gender-based violence effectively. This includes enacting and enforcing laws that criminalize violence against women, providing access to justice for survivors, and ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions (United Nations, 2021). Additionally, efforts should be made to raise awareness about women's rights and available support services within communities (WHO, 2019).

Promoting Women's Participation in Decision-Making Processes: Promoting women's participation in decision-making processes is essential for building inclusive and sustainable peace. Governments and international organizations should strive to increase the representation of women in political institutions, peace negotiations, and other decision-making bodies. This can be achieved through quota systems, affirmative action policies, and capacity-building programs aimed at enhancing women's leadership skills (UNDP, 2017; Oluwole, 2019).

Supporting Women-Led Initiatives and Grassroots Organizations: Supporting women-led initiatives and grassroots organizations is critical for amplifying women's voices and advancing gender equality in conflict-affected settings. Governments, donors, and civil society organizations should provide financial resources, technical assistance, and networking opportunities to empower women-led organizations to address the unique needs of women and girls in their conflict zones (Peace Direct, 2018; Women for Women International, 2020).

Promoting Collaboration and Partnerships: Lastly, it is essential to promote collaboration and partnerships between different stakeholders including governments, civil society, and the private sector, is essential for advancing women's rights and gender equality in conflict-affected areas. By fostering inclusive partnerships that actively involve women in planning, implementing, and evaluating interventions, stakeholders can create sustainable solutions that promote a more peaceful and equitable world for all (UN Women, 2018; World Bank, 2021).

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