

## **THE NEED FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

Nigeria as a nation has been devastated by conflict, resulting in destabilization, displacement, and infrastructural destruction, all of which have gender-specific consequences. The impact of conflict on Nigerian women has been severe. In North-east Nigeria, for example, an estimated 70% of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are women and children. This paper is very pertinent at this era by examining conflict and peace building in Nigeria. It addresses how Nigerian women have performed important roles as peace builders, peace negotiators and peace educators in both families and society in the past, but which are currently been neglected. The paper conclude by emphasizing the important roles that women's play and that must be recognise in order to accelerate conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Women, Conflicts, Peace, Nation Building, Nigeria.

### **What is Gender?**

The term 'gender' refers to the culturally expected behaviours of men and women based on roles, attitudes and values ascribed to them on the basis of their sex, whereas 'sex' refers to biological and physical characteristics. National and international agencies and actors responding to conflicts and their aftermaths use this definition widely. Yet, to more deeply understand the ways in which gender shapes and is shaped by events and actors involved in conflict, peace and recovery, we need a more sophisticated gender framework for analysis and action.

To begin, gender is perhaps most apparent in the social differences between females and males. These differences inform how individuals are viewed, and how they view themselves. The differences between males and females are learned and deeply rooted, but cultural, contextual, and subject to change over time. Through interaction with other key factors – ethnicity, religion, class, sexual orientation – gender acts to critically inform identity. Yet gender is more than people's identities. Gender is a social structure that is flush with symbolic meaning. Gender is a way of categorizing, ordering and symbolizing power, of hierarchically structuring relationships among different categories of people and different human activities in a manner symbolically associated with masculinity and femininity. (Adekeye, 2010).

Gender, at its heart, is a structural power relation that rests upon a central set of distinctions between different categories of people, valuing some over others. Gender

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roles and relations organize authority, rights, responsibilities, access to resources, and life options along the lines demarcating those groups. Gender systems of power require political, social, economic, cultural, legal and educational institutions, which actualize and underpin this distribution of power and, at times, justify unequal access and treatment.

#### **What is Peace?**

The crucial question now is explaining what peace entails. Albert Einstein defined peace as: “not merely the absence of war, but the presence of justice, of law, of order, in short of government”. In its most myopic and limited definition, peace is the mere absence of war. However, this definition has been seen as a vacuous, passive, simplistic and unresponsive escape mechanism too often resulted to in the past without success. This definition also has a serious oversight in the fact that it does not put into account the residual feelings of mistrust and suspicion that the winners and loser of war harbour towards each other (Kane, 2012). According to Woolman (2015), another way of thinking about peace is to have it defined in negative and positive terms. Peace as a mere absence of war is what Woolman refers to as negative peace.

Negative peace is defined as a state requiring a set of social structures that provide security and protection from acts of direct physical violence committed by individuals, groups or nations. The emphasis is on control of violence. The main strategy is disassociation whereby conflicting parties are separated. The ideology does not deal with causes of violence, only its manifestations. These policies are thought to be insufficient to assure lasting conditions of peace. By suppressing the release of tension resulting in social conflict, negative peace efforts may instead lead to future violence of greater magnitude.

Positive peace in contrast lays emphasis on a pattern of cooperation and integrations between major human groups. It is about people interacting in cooperative ways; it is about social organization of diverse people who willingly choose to cooperate for the benefit of all human kind. It is a state so highly valued that institutions are built around it to protect and promote it. Here, there are no winners nor are losers, all winners. It also searches for positive ways to resolve underlying causes of conflicts that produce violence.

Positive peace is perceived by many in different ways due to how it is used in many areas, but for the sake of simplifying it, conflict pertains to the opposing ideas and actions of different entities, thus resulting in an antagonistic state.

#### **Conceptualizing Conflict Resolution and Peace Building**

Conflict exists in all countries and in every level of society. Conflict per se is not necessarily a negative force; rather it is a natural expression of social difference and of humanity's perpetual struggle for justice and self. Conflict resolution is directed at understanding conflict processes and alternative non-violent methods that help disputing parties reach mutually acceptable positions that resolve their differences.

Miller (2003) sees conflict resolution as “a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from

management or transformation of conflicts.” Miall et al. (1999) indicate that by conflict resolution, it is expected that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved, and behaviour is no longer violent, nor are attitudes hostile any longer, while the structure of the conflict has been changed. Mitchel and Banks (1998) refer to conflict resolution as:

- i. An outcome in which the issue in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries; and
- ii. Any process or procedure by which such an outcome of peace is achieved are also regarded as conflicts resolution. Boutros-Ghali (1992) defines the term peace building as ranging from specific tasks that might derive from a comprehensive peace agreement – such as helping to disarm the parties, canton troops, and hold or destroy weapons; monitoring elections; fielding civilian police; and repatriating refugees – through far broader and less tangible objectives such as the restoration of order, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening governmental institutions, and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation. Kofi Anan (1997) defines peace building as “the various concurrent and integrated actions undertaken at the end of a conflict to consolidate and prevent a recurrence of armed confrontation.

The objective of peace building is to strike a balance between ‘negative’ peace and ‘positive’ peace. Because conflicts usually leave their mark on the post settlement process in form of broken lives, shattered and divided communities distrust, and hatred, the task of constructing a self-sustaining peace is never an easy one. The post-settlement peace building in such circumstances becomes what Grenier and Daudelin (2015) call the “peace building market-place” (the cessation of violence) is traded for other commodities, such as political opportunity (election) and economic advantage (land). They argue that, “exchanging resources of violence against other resources is arguably the pivotal type of ‘trade’ in peace building.

The way in which gender is integral to peace, and violent conflict makes it clear that a gendered analysis of peace building is essential to preventing and mitigating new violent conflict in societies while helping them recover from current conflicts. According to Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (2002), peace building is the effort to strengthen the prospects for internal peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflict. The overreaching goal of peace building is to enhance the indigenous capacity of a society to manage conflict without violence. Ultimately, peace building aims at building human security, a concept which includes democratic governance, human rights, rule of law, sustainable development, equitable access to resources, and environmental security. Peace building may involve conflict prevention, conflict resolution, as well as various kinds of post-conflict activities. It focuses on the political and socio-economic context or humanitarian aspects. It seeks to institutionalize the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

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Peace building and resolution are here considered to constitute simultaneous and reinforcing sets of activities with an intricate and organic relationship much as human rights principles relate to broad development goals. One cannot be done without the other. It is therefore important that all sectors of society, which are present in one way or another in all aspects of an ongoing conflict, are represented in negotiations and actions that seek to lay the foundation for peace and post-conflict resolution.

#### **Women and Post-Conflict Peace Building**

During the past few years, there has been an increasing recognition by government, international organizations, and civil society of the importance of gender equality and empowerment of women in the continuing struggle for equality, democracy and human rights, as well as for poverty eradication and development (El-Bushra, 2000).

In nearly every country and region of the world, there has been progress on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, although this progress has been uneven and the gains remain fragile. A great challenge facing the world today is the growing violence against women and girls in conflict. In today's conflict, they are not only the victims of hardship, displacement and warfare, they are directly targeted with rape, forced pregnancies, and assault as deliberate instruments of war. Women are deeply affected by conflicts, which they have had no role in creating. Conflict and its aftermath affect women's lives in ways that differ from the impact on men. Men in communities under attack tend to abandon public spaces to avoid being conscripted, attacked, or taken hostage. This increases the burden placed on women to hold communities together in the absence of men at war.

On the other hand, women as symbols of community and/or ethnic identity may become the targets of extensive sexual violence. Conflict in some places has highlighted the use of rape as a tool of warfare. In Nigeria, women are raped as a means of ethnic cleansing by herdsmen, serving not only to terrorize individual victims but also to inflict collective terror on an ethnic group. An intensive literature explores the interconnections between the roles of women and men in conflict situations and the politics of identity and agency. Literature shows that women may be victims, but they also often participate actively as soldiers, informants, couriers, sympathizers, and supporters.

Conflict brings with it terrible human rights consequences for all involved – children, women and men. The impact of conflict on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women, in particular, is often devastating. In spite of the fact that conflict has a high level of impact on the lives of women, it is disheartening to note that they are not fully involved in the peace building process because of its gendered nature. Women's interests have been neglected by the peace process, which has resulted in male-centered approaches to peace and security. The intrinsic role of women in global peace and security has remained unrecognized since the creation of the United Nations.

In the past decade, many countries have embarked upon the difficult transition from conflict towards resolution and peace building. The international

community's role in this transition has shifted from narrow humanitarian and relief activities to more comprehensive efforts to foster sustainable peace. At the same time, the community has shifted from a stepped approach from relief to development to one that combines a broader package of concurrent steps. Development organizations have become increasingly engaged in activities during post-conflict, devoting time and resources to supporting this transition. Building a lasting peace that sustains post-war economic, political, and social development requires the full participation of all citizens. Yet it is increasingly recognized that the role of women in post-conflict settings has received inadequate policy attention.

On the whole, attempts to address the human rights consequences of conflict, including the particular impact on women, can only be comprehensive and long-lasting if women play active part in all the relevant processes and mechanisms given the gender-differentiated impact of war on women. It is important to know that preventing a war is entirely different than resolving one once it has begun. In order to prevent conditions that give rise to violent conflict from coalescing, capable societies must be created.

These societies are characterized by three components:

- i. Security,
- ii. Well-being,
- iii. Justice for all of its citizens, including its women.

According to Lute (2002), women's roles in promoting these three causes provide examples of their activities towards preventing the emergence, spread, or renewal of mass violence. The belief that women should be at the centre of peace building and resolution processes is not based on essentialist definitions of gender (Lisa & Manjrika, 2015). The field of sociology makes a distinction between sex, and gender. Human beings are not born 'men' or 'women'. Masculinity and femininity is learned, rehearsed, and performed daily (Butler, 1999).

It would be naïve to assert that all women respond in a similar manner in a given situation or that women are 'natural peace builders' (Lisa & Manjrika, 2015). Gender identity is performed differently in different cultural contexts. Gender identity must always be viewed in relationship with an individual's other identities such as his or her ethnicity, class, age, nation, region, education, and religion. It is important to note that there are different expectations for men and women in various sector of the society and gender roles shift with social upheaval. In conflict situation, men and women face new roles and changing gender expectations. Their biological and sociological differences affect conflicts and peace building. In all, most societies value men and masculinity more than women and femininity (Lisa & Manjrika, 2015).

Despite this existence of 'sexism' or 'patriarchy', there are some widely accepted reasons why women are important to all peace building processes. Women are important because they constitute half of every community, and the task of peace building, a task which is so great, must be done in partnership with both women and men. Secondly, women are the central caretakers of families in most cultures, and everyone is affected when women are oppressed and excluded

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from peace building. Therefore, it is essential that women be included in the peace building process.

Women play important roles in the process of peace building, first as activists and advocates for peace, women wage conflict non-violently by pursuing democracy and human rights. Secondly, as peacekeepers and relief aid workers, women contribute to reducing direct violence. Thirdly, as mediators, trauma healing counsellors, and policymakers, women work to 'transform relationships' and address the root of violence. Lastly, as educators and participants in the development process, women contribute to building the capacity of their communities and nations to prevent violent conflict. This is made possible as a result of socialization processes and the historical experience of unequal relations and values that women bring to the process of peace building (Lisa & Manjrika, 2015).

### **The Plight and Role of Women in Nigeria's Peace Building**

Women's participation in the Nigeria's peace building helped to integrate gender equality into democratic governance and the peace building framework. This was as a result of the quotas in the peace agreement and Nigeria's new constitution. Pressure from women's organization contributed to a culture of negotiation for national peace. The participation of women was initially inconsistent due to lack of political will by all sides and in some cases strong resistance by political parties.

Nevertheless, these institutions have not been able to totally eradicate conflicts springing up in different parts of Nigeria. A look at the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria that started in 2002 with the objective of opposing what it considers to be secular westernization of Nigeria, has led to the death of thousands of innocent citizens and the brutal abduction of women who have been enslaved, forced into marriage by their captors and have also been forced to pick up arms and become terrorists themselves.

Women around the world are now being used by terrorist groups to commit atrocities, either willingly, by being enticed and brainwashed or forced into it. Research has shown that an estimated 4,500 westerners have travelled to the Middle East to join Jihadist groups in Syria or Iraq with one in seven being women.

With the coming to light of a recent report on how women are allowed to be raped by South Sudanese soldiers in lieu of their wages only goes to show the dehumanization of women and how they are the ones at the receiving end of the horrors of war. That being said, women have however risen to find for themselves a voice in a world where they are relegated to playing the role of victims. This determination has given birth to women like Leymah Roberta Gbowee of Liberia who led a women's peace movement called "women of Liberia mass action for peace". This movement helped bring an end to the second Liberian civil war in 2003, which also ushered in a period of peace that enabled free elections with the emergence of Ellen Johnson as Africa's first democratically elected female head of state in 2011. Gbowee is just one out of hundreds of women changing the stereotypical image of women's role conflict and peace building.

However, women participation in policy making, peace building and peace negotiations is still faced with setbacks despite the passing of the UN SCR 1325 (2000). Gender balance in peace negotiations requires the inclusion of both women and men at all stages and in all roles within such processes. These include peace keeping missions,

peace building teams, transitional justice mechanisms and international development agencies. The two phases of conflict resolution processes that have been identified as track one diplomacy, which is the use of an instrument of foreign policy for the establishment and development of contacts between the government of different states through the use of intermediaries mutually recognized by the respective parties, and is a more formal form of resolving conflicts, and then on the other hand is the track two diplomacy which is used to describe negotiations or processes that include non-governmental organizations (NGO) or private citizens are considered to be less formal. Such negotiations take place wholly outside formal government or intergovernmental institutions but they can also serve as a basis for track one. Historically women are more involved in the less formal track two processes. These are peace marches and protest in their local communities or the work they do in the sidelines to aid the injured but when it comes to participation in formal processes or negotiations for meaningful participation in peace talks more often women are excluded or marginalized. The sad reality however has been that very few women have been included in official negotiations at peace negotiation processes around the world.

Generally, issues such as poverty, struggle for scarce resources, lack of infrastructures and violations of human rights are identified as the root causes of conflicts in the society. In this regard, effective strategies for empowering women should be put in place. Informal activities such as peace marches and protests, intergroup dialogue, the promotion of inter-cultural tolerance should be encouraged to be spearheaded by our women. In Nigeria for instance, women such as Fummilayo Ransome Kuti and Margaret Ekpo started movements that brought about changes in Nigeria.

There are obvious reasons why women are important to the peace building process. For example, they constitute half of every community and the difficult task of peace building must be done by men and women in partnership. Women are also the central caretakers of families and everyone is affected when they are excluded from peace building. Women are also advocates for peace, as peacekeepers, relief workers and mediators. Women have played prominent roles in peace processes in the Horn of Africa such as in Sudan and Burundi, where they have contributed as observers.

It is clear however that women's participation in peace and conflict resolution is seriously limited and inhibited by quite a number of factors that range from societal, cultural psychological and sociological factors. Some of which include the following:

1. The prevalence of rape and sexual assault: This form of abuse generates fear and helps to silence campaigns for social, economic and political rights.
2. Women are most likely to have fled conflict, and take on responsibilities such as primary care giver and providers for dependants, which makes participation in peace building more difficult.
3. Cultural pressures against women putting themselves forward that pressure women to refrain from travel, and not to engage in important public arenas. Where women do participate, they may not have the required education or training.
4. Lack of resource and access to employment opportunities and to productive assets such as land, capital, health services, training and education are impediments to women active participation in peace building.

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5. Women's movements do not have established mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the gender agenda in post-conflict settings. For example, in Southwest male-dominated structures have not seen the need to implement agreed affirmative action.

Apart from the cultural and psychological factors highlighted above, there are also a number of political factors that act as constraints to women active participation in peace building. As seen in the example of Nigeria peace building and conflict resolution process, provisions in peace accords fail to make reference to women as actors and agents of change for peace. The language of the agreement was weak, and deprived women of a political space where they could contribute to the building of peace as recognized partners. Women are generally defined as members of vulnerable groups, together with the elderly and the handicapped, as part of the category "women and-children". They are first and foremost considered as hopeless victims unable to take charge of their lives, and this approach deprives them of the expected responsibility. The following are the political challenges faced by women in their quest to participate in peace building in Nigeria:

1. Lack of Political Strength and Political Vision: Women suffer from "political illiteracy". They lack an ideological framework that could give teeth to a strong position adopted by a collective women's. Peace building as a political activity and therefore requires political strategy for engagement (Rono, 2000).
2. Lack of experience, exposure and skills in negotiation, advocacy and lobbying techniques: Women have always been kept secluded from the political arena and sphere of decision-making; therefore, in many situations they are unable to participate.
3. Lack of a Political Platform: Without a political platform, women are on the margins of action and lack confidence in participating in the peace building process.
4. Lack of visibility: Women's conflict-resolution activities are confined to the informal sector, very often at the periphery of official peace negotiation. In addition, where women contribute to the promotion of peace effort in their domain, they are not usually invited to participate in formal negotiations.
5. Lack of Resources (Material and Financial): Most of the time women's groups lack the means to back up their actions. In some instances, they are unable to get across to the media network to enhance their peace campaign because they do not have a budget for multi-dimensional activities. They work on a voluntary basis at the grassroots levels, pooling their own resources together to get an office, desk, and phone line.
6. Lack of sustainability in political participation: Representation does not necessarily mean meaningful and recognized participation that has an impact on substantial inputs in peace agreement. In addition, once a peace process is over, women often return to more traditional activities, losing their gains and public presence. These losses make it very difficult for women to return to the public stage later when resolution begins.



**Conclusion**

Though women are amongst the most vulnerable victims in war and conflict situations, yet they could also be very potent and viable triggers of peace mechanisms. Women therefore have a role in ensuring a peaceful and healthy society. They can do this by inculcating sound moral instruction into the younger generation. Naturally, children tend to gravitate more to their mothers than fathers. This provides a good platform for mothers to impact positive virtues of peace to their children and wards right from childhood because they would grow up appreciating and imbibing strong virtues of peace which would ultimately make them strong advocates of peace and stability in their own generation.

The inclusion of gender quotas for the legislative processes in some countries establishes a more durable solution and demonstrate the growing influence of women in institutions and national legislatures, this does not guarantee meaningful participation. Women must be able to participate in substantive ways during negotiations. Therefore, capacity building and training programs should be implemented in order to encourage and equip those women that desire to be involved in the peace building with the necessary tools needed to contribute effectively. Ultimately, the role of women in peace building cannot be overemphasized. This is because with women constituting more than 50% of most societies, they have a very crucial role to play in the peace building of any nation.

**Recommendations**

There is a need to overcome the obstacles that hinder women from participating in peace building and post-conflict resolution process and this can be achieved through the following:

1. Women need to take advantage of the transformative experiences and the resulting weakened patriarchal order to build up a strong women's movement before it is too late and kick against the traditions that oppress women.
2. There should be establishment of movement that would help to build bridges between different groups in civil society, thus bolstering the continue struggle for respect for women's rights and opinions.
3. For Nigerian woman to be effective in the peace building role, they must organize themselves, strive for institutional, political and legal representation, and create solidarity and support through local, regional, and international networks.
4. The international community must also continue to facilitate the involvement of local women in peace negotiations.
5. The community should also help to promote more gender awareness, and to review the content of laws that perpetuate discrimination against women, constitutional reforms, judicial reforms, election participation, as well as access to and control over economic resources, education, and training. This is because despite the ground breaking contributions made by women's groups, gender equity mechanisms created during peace negotiations still remain weak.
6. Peace operations in Nigeria need to support women's group and local peace building initiatives by seeing women as untapped resources and dynamic elements of post-conflict societies in Nigeria.

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7. There is also a need to provide information about the concerns that women have, thus empowering women as major and serious actors who should be included in conflict resolution and peace building

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