

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF GENDER NORMS IN CONFLICT AND PEACEBUILDING IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines how gender norms shape conflict experiences and peacebuilding processes in Northern Nigeria, where persistent ethnic, religious and political tensions continue to drive communal violence, insurgency and banditry. It investigates how prevailing gender roles influence the participation of men and women in peacebuilding and assesses whether these roles promote or hinder sustainable peace. The study adopts a qualitative research design, using focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews conducted across three states in Northern Nigeria. Participants included community leaders, women's groups, youth representatives and peacebuilding practitioners, providing diverse perspectives on gender and conflict. The analysis is guided by the gender norms perspective, which explains how socially constructed roles influence conflict experiences, decision-making and peacebuilding participation. The findings reveal that entrenched gender norms significantly influence peacebuilding outcomes. Women remain largely excluded from formal peace processes despite their active involvement in informal mediation, reconciliation and community reconstruction. Men are widely perceived as warriors and protectors, limiting their participation in non-violent peacebuilding activities. Cultural and religious beliefs reinforce these unequal roles, creating barriers to inclusive participation and weakening the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions. The study concludes that prevailing gender norms undermine inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria. It recommends that policymakers, civil society organisations and traditional leaders adopt gender-sensitive peacebuilding frameworks that challenge harmful gender norms and promote the meaningful participation of both women and men in formal and informal peace processes. Such inclusive approaches are essential for strengthening conflict resolution, promoting social cohesion and achieving lasting peace in Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: *Gender norms; Conflict; Peacebuilding; Northern Nigeria; Inclusive participation.*

1. Introduction

Violent conflict has become one of the defining development challenges of the twenty-first century, affecting societies across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America (United Nations, 2023). Contemporary conflicts increasingly manifest as terrorism, organised crime, communal violence, ethnic confrontation and ideological extremism, with consequences extending beyond fatalities and infrastructure destruction to weakened institutions, displacement and deepened social inequalities (World Bank, 2022; United Nations, 2023). Among the most significant dimensions of these crises are gender relations, since socially constructed expectations of masculinity and femininity shape vulnerability, access to resources, displacement experiences and participation in peacebuilding (UN Women, 2022). Consequently, international frameworks such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 recognise gender as a central element of conflict analysis and sustainable peacebuilding (United Nations Security Council, 2020; OECD, 2021).

Across sub-Saharan Africa, insecurity is driven by weak governance, competition over resources, religious extremism, ethnic divisions and youth unemployment (African Union, 2021; World Bank, 2022). These conflicts reshape traditional gender roles by placing men at greater risk of direct violence while compelling many women to assume responsibilities as household heads, income earners, caregivers and community mediators (UN Women, 2022). Women also contribute to informal peacebuilding despite receiving limited institutional recognition, demonstrating that conflict transforms gender relations in ways that influence resilience and recovery (African Union, 2021; OECD, 2021).

Nigeria reflects these continental patterns through persistent terrorism, armed banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, kidnapping and communal violence (International Crisis Group, 2024). These security challenges have displaced millions, disrupted livelihoods and education, and weakened confidence in public institutions (World Bank, 2023). Northern Nigeria has experienced the greatest burden, particularly from the Boko Haram insurgency and expanding banditry across the North-West (UNDP, 2024). Since 2009, the insurgency has contributed to more than 350,000 deaths and displaced over three million people (UNDP, 2024). Gender norms shape responses to these crises, with men frequently expected to defend communities while women sustain households, protect children and rebuild livelihoods under difficult conditions (UN Women, 2022; OECD, 2021).

Zamfara State represents one of the areas most affected by armed banditry, characterised by repeated kidnappings, cattle rustling, village raids and killings that have disrupted agriculture and displaced rural communities (SBM Intelligence, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2024). These conditions have intensified gendered responsibilities, as men face pressure to provide security despite limited capacity, while women increasingly shoulder economic, domestic and emotional burdens (African Union, 2021; UN Women, 2022). Although responses have largely prioritised military operations and humanitarian assistance, limited attention has been given to the influence of gender norms on insecurity and peacebuilding. Examining gender dynamics in conflict-affected communities in Zamfara State therefore offers valuable insight into how gender relations shape both the persistence of insecurity and prospects for sustainable peace (OECD, 2021).

Importance of Understanding Gender Norms in Peace and Conflict

Gender in Northern Nigeria is more than identity, it is norms, limitations and entrenched beliefs. All this is decided by these expectations that are silently passed along, to speak, to fight, to run and not to run. Perspectives on gender norms when peace and conflict are considered do not help but are necessitated. Most societies bring up men as protectors, but when they experience a feeling of fear or traumas, they are either scorned or disregarded. Women, who are supposed to stay behind, many a time do not enter into peace conversations despite most displacement, sexual violence, and care-related aspects falling on their shoulders (Abubakar & Bala, 2022). However, they are also underground school organizers, militant negotiators or family holders in unimaginable circumstances. Overlooking these gender facts implies overlooking the drivers and the prevention of violence. To illustrate, a strict gender division can satiate into insurgent-group recruitment. Lack of work and respect in society might cause young men to resort to violence as a way of proving their masculinity. Women who are typically interpreted as victims are sometimes couriers or informants or even fighters (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). Peace movements are superficial unless this fact is recognized. In addition, sustainable

peace should be indigenous. Without women elders and youths at the peace table, solutions and experiences of the women and youths are excluded. The examination of gender norms in the shaping of behaviour in times of crisis brings us closer to establishing peace that not only is possible but is also reasonable and inclusive.

Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria is one-legged, that is, they look at the conflict, but not at the gendered origins that lie under it. The majority of interventions tend to treat men as warriors and women as slaves and victims, without paying much attention to the cultural, religious, and traditional determinants of role allocation in wartime, as well as in a peaceful state. Gender norms determine who is armed and not, who is allowed to speak at the community forums, and who is left silent with pain. When solutions are oblivious to these gendered patterns, peace is as tenuous as ever, despite continuous efforts made by NGOs and government. There is no literature with a rigorous discussion on how gender expectations breed conflict and how it might be utilized to build peace. Until these invisible codes are examined and scrutinized we shall continue to re-construct shattered towns without restructuring the shattered ideologies in them. The study is aimed at closing this gap and to provide an understanding on whether or not gender norms may maintain violence or provide a gateway to sustained peace in Northern Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

Nigeria follows culture, religion and history in gender norms. According to Eze (2020), expectations in most of the communities are directed by patriarchy. His paper presented in Enugu demonstrates that men tend to be decision-makers in the family and society (Eze, 2020). Okoye (2022) criticizes those moments when Eze uses rural data. Okoye observes that in Lagos the fluidity of roles is evident in urban areas (Okoye, 2022). Abubakar (2021) investigates the relationship between the media and Kano and concludes that radio plays continue to perpetuate conventional roles of women, restricting their movements (Abubakar, 2021). Yet, the sample used by Abubakar is narrow and it might not be representative of broader Northern situations. Eze (2020) and Okoye (2022) disagree about the speed of norm development. Eze indicates the gradual change and okoye points out quick change among the youths. Abubakar (2021) demonstrates that media may strengthen and reject established norms, but she does not discuss social media effects. Collectively these works show diverse points of view. They emphasize geographical and age differences between rural and urban lives. However, they fail to add quantitative data on a regional basis. That leaves a knowledge gap about the way gender norms do change.

2.2 Gender and conflict: global and African perspectives

The vulnerability and agency of women is usually a central theme of global efforts on gender and conflict (Adewale, 2021). Adewale (2021) conducts a review of UN reports that demonstrates how women turn out to be targets in violent environments. He condemns the international research because it disregards local issue. Nwachukwu (2022) focuses on analyzing the post-war reconstruction of Sierra Leone and compares it to what happened in Nigeria. He asserts that the global frameworks put into consideration the homogenous impacts in Africa (Nwachukwu, 2022). Bello and Adamu (2021) pay attention to the issue of Boko Haram in Borno State. Women within a diverse group experience is discovered to be different according to their ethnicity and religion (Bello & Adamu, 2021). Bello and Adamu also blame

regional generalisations conducted by Nwachukwu and point at Nigerian complexity. Adewale (2021) underlines the importance of considering the role of males in military factions. But he underrates the influence of African norms on the development of a male identity in conflict. Nwachukwu (2022) presents a robust transnational but does not provide direct Nigerian information. Bello and Adamu (2021) fill this gap through utilization of field interviews in Maiduguri. They reveal the ways in which men and women react to displacement. These researchers expose controversies on universalism versus localism. They demonstrate loopholes in the inclusion of the African cultural dynamics in the gendered conflict theories.

2.3 Peacebuilding efforts in Northern Nigeria

Studies in Northern Nigeria on peacebuilding tend to consider programmes that are community-based. Musa (2022) analyzes the work of local vigilante groups within the Kaduna state. She claims that these communities take the place of the absence of state security agencies (Musa, 2022). The study by Musa, however, is concerned with only the short-term security and not with long-term reconciliation. Salihu (2023) assesses the peace commissions instituted by government in three states. He discovers that commissions are underfunded and untrusting of them (Salihu, 2023). Salihu condemns the statement made by Musa when he assumes that local groups are neutral. In reality whether intentionally or not these groups at times create a spirit of mistrust between communities. Abdulraheem (2021) summarizes interventions based on faith in Zamfara. He demonstrates that imams and pastors are able to foster communication among youths (Abdulraheem, 2021). His data is however restricted to one urban centre and thus cannot be generalised to rural areas. The discussion between Salihu (2023) and Abdulraheem (2021) is whether it is formal or informal actors who provide peace. Salihu is adamant on formal form of accountability. According to Abdulraheem, religious players are even at times unregulated. Both authors include financial issues, Musa (2022) and Salihu (2023). However, there is no research that looks at the manner in which gender governs engagement in peace processes. This omission makes it unclear the voice of women is heard.

2.4 Women and men in conflict and post-conflict environments

In current literature, the differences in female and male functions as participants of the conflict have been identified. Tijani (2021) conducts interviews with ex-combatants in Yobe State. She discovers that majority of arm groups are recruited by men as a means of economic survival (Tijani, 2021). Her work implies that women are sources of information or care takers but not fighters on the front. Ahmed and Zainab (2024) discuss Bauchi women and informal peace committees. They demonstrate the process of negotiating ceasefire by female leaders at the community level (Ahmed & Zainab, 2024). They have various ethnic representations in their sample, which reinforces their arguments. Nevertheless, they fail to compare male-led initiatives. The article written by Musa and Haji (2023) focuses on male youth groups of Sokoto that took part in the process of reconciliation. According to them, such groups find it hard to incorporate women, which results in reduced legitimacy (Musa & Haji, 2023). Tijani (2021) emphasizes men motivation but talks little on the authority of women beyond caregiving. Ahmed and Zainab (2024) present women leadership without tackling the matter of a lack of resources. Musa and Haji (2023) emphasize the exclusion of females in making decisions. These two studies bring this information: men tend to take over the formal settings of

negotiation, whereas women are involved in grassroots mediation. Still, none incorporate completely the changing gender norms upon these roles as time facets.

2.5 Gaps in the Studies

Experts research the subject of gender and conflict mostly on the level of either victimhood or grassroots peacebuilding when it comes to women in Northern Nigeria (Adebayo, 2021; Bello & Adamu, 2021). Oladipo (2025) identifies this trend as a weakness of the literature as the role of gender norms in shaping the behaviour of men in war and peace is studied insufficiently by scholars (Oladipo, 2025). According to Okafor (2023), there are also few longitudinal studies: the bulk of the results are cross-sectional and do not show changes over time (Okafor, 2023). According to Garba (2022), there is a lack of mixed-methods research in which quantitative and qualitative data are used (Garba, 2022). He further indicates how there is a lack of representative samples to study in large cities, such as Kano and Maiduguri. There are also gaps in theory. Most authors use universal codes without adapting them to the local setting (Nwachukwu, 2022; Adewale, 2021). Few criticisms exist regarding the ways in which common forms of power are linked with gender norms. Furthermore, gender roles in conflict are little studied in relation to the influence of economic circumstances, like poverty (Abubakar, 2021; Musa, 2022). All these loopholes indicate the necessity to conduct research by combining gender norms, economic-motivators and temporal experiences of both genders.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theories: Gender and Conflict Theory and Feminist Peace Theory. These theories provide a framework for understanding how gender norms shape participation in conflict and peacebuilding within the study area.

Gender and Conflict Theory

Gender and Conflict Theory emerged from the works of scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, R. W. Connell, Carol Cohn, and J. Ann Tickner. Their studies argue that conflict cannot be understood without examining the influence of socially constructed gender roles on power relations, violence, and security. The theory assumes that gender is socially constructed rather than biologically determined. It argues that patriarchal systems assign men and women different social responsibilities and expectations, thereby shaping their experiences of conflict. Men are often socialised to embrace aggression, military service, and leadership in warfare, while women are associated with caregiving, domestic responsibilities, and humanitarian support. The theory further assumes that conflict reinforces existing gender inequalities while creating new forms of exclusion and vulnerability. Consequently, men and women experience the causes, impacts, and consequences of conflict differently. Despite its usefulness, the theory has attracted criticism. Critics argue that it places excessive emphasis on gender while paying insufficient attention to other structural factors such as poverty, unemployment, ethnicity, religion, political exclusion, and resource competition. Others contend that it sometimes portrays women primarily as victims and overlooks their roles as political actors, combatants, negotiators, and community leaders during conflicts. The theory has also been criticised for insufficiently accounting for variations in gender experiences across different cultural and religious contexts. Gender and Conflict Theory is relevant because it explains how socially constructed gender roles influence the participation of men and women in communal conflicts and peacebuilding initiatives. It assists in examining how patriarchal norms shape access to

leadership, decision-making, conflict management, and post-conflict reconciliation within the study area. The theory therefore provides a basis for analysing the relationship between gender expectations and peacebuilding outcomes.

Feminist Peace Theory

Feminist Peace Theory is associated with scholars including Betty Reardon, Cynthia Cockburn, Carol Cohn, and Johan Galtung, whose work has influenced feminist approaches to peace studies. The theory argues that sustainable peace requires addressing structural inequalities, particularly those rooted in patriarchy and gender discrimination. The theory assumes that peace extends beyond the absence of violence and includes justice, equality, participation, and respect for human rights. It maintains that women possess valuable knowledge, experiences, and skills that contribute significantly to conflict prevention, mediation, reconciliation, and post-conflict reconstruction. Feminist Peace Theory further argues that excluding women from peace processes weakens the effectiveness and sustainability of peace agreements because important perspectives and community needs remain unrepresented. The theory has been criticised for occasionally presenting women as naturally more peaceful than men, an assumption some scholars regard as essentialist. Critics also argue that it may underestimate the influence of political institutions, economic inequalities, ethnic divisions, and security concerns that extend beyond gender relations. Others suggest that its recommendations are sometimes difficult to implement in societies where patriarchal traditions strongly influence governance and community decision-making. The theory is applicable because it provides a framework for examining women's contributions to peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the study area. It enables the study to assess how women's participation in mediation, dialogue, reconciliation, and community development contributes to sustainable peace. It also helps identify institutional, cultural, religious, and economic barriers limiting women's effective participation in peacebuilding processes.

The two theories complement one another. Gender and Conflict Theory explains how gender norms and patriarchal structures influence participation in conflict, while Feminist Peace Theory demonstrates how inclusive peacebuilding can address these inequalities and promote sustainable peace. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for analysing how economic conditions, religious beliefs, and patriarchal norms shape the roles of men and women in conflict and peacebuilding within the study area. This integrated framework enables the study to examine both the causes of gendered participation in conflict and the opportunities for achieving inclusive and lasting peace.

3. Methodology

The current study was using a mixed-methods design, which implies the combination of both quantitative data rigour and the richness of qualitative information. A sophisticated cultural history as well as human passions shapes conflict and peace building in Northern Nigeria. The numbers-only approach does not provide the whole story and personal narratives not accompanied by statistics cannot be generalised. There was the qualitative dimension in the study, which included interviews and group discussions to learn about the lived experiences of women and men in conflict. Quantitative data, obtained with the help of structured questionnaires, offered wider patterns and comparisons. The practice served to strike a balance in empathy and evidence. According to Ezeobi (2022), flexible, hybrid approaches do more

good in gender studies in fragile situations. The integration of the two designs made the results more realistic and practical. Clarity of voices of rural women, youth groups, traditional leaders and peace actors could also be heard through it. Using this design, the research was able to get the perception of what the people feel as well as what the data tells.

The study targeted three Northern Nigerian states that experienced conflict, namely Kaduna, Borno and Plateau. The selection of these states was under the influence of the fact that they are regularly affected by violent collisions and that they are culturally diverse. Kaduna is not been short of ethno-religious conflict and gender tension underlooks its political story. Borno is the epicenter of the Boko Haram crisis where women have been the victims and, to their surprise, peace players. Plateau has endured years of conflict between farmers and herders, with women performing roles that are both distinctive and ignored like mediation. These are places of several different types of conflicts insurgency, religious crisis, and land dispute. They also illustrate distinct gender norms that are dependent on ethnicity, religion and tradition. With these three, the research was done on the realm of gendered conflict in Northern Nigeria. Adamu and Audu (2023) state that each state offers a variant of gender response to conflict and that this variation is essential to completing a comprehensive analysis. The orientation reflected in the selection was also to cover both urban and rural representation. Both capital cities and outlying communities formed part of the field work in each state. This was in order to prevent the error of over-confidence in the voices of the urbanized.

The study population included adult men and women, leaders of the communities of Kaduna, Borno and Plateau states, workers of NGO, leaders of religion and young people. Direct conflict participants or peace-involved individuals took precedence. The three states together count more than 20 million people, a controllable sample was selected. As of Jews, there are approximately 5.8 million residents in Borno, 8.9 million people in Kaduna, and approximately 4.7 million people in Plateau as stated by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023). Based on this, a sample size of 450 respondents-i.e. 150 respondents per state, was chosen. It comprised 90 women and 60 men in each of the states because the study was gender-oriented. The participants were picked both within official frameworks such as peace committees and non-formal areas comprising market groups, women organizations, and youth clubs. The sample was both big to implement meaningful comparisons but small not to lose individual depth. The data was enriched with every participant sharing their lived experience in their part of the conversation. The present sample size is consistent with comparable studies, including Ibrahim and Yahuza (2021), who utilized 120 respondents in a state based on gender-peace study in Zamfara. The ratio between men and women was not by chance, as they wanted to be heard as voices that are frequently shadowed.

A purposive method complemented with a snowball sampling approach was adopted. Purposive sampling assisted in finding out those who have personal experience of conflict or involved in dealing with peace. They were female and male peace mediators, victims of violence, youth activists, and community leaders. The focus of the study on gender norms revolved around their insights. The snowball sampling proved quite useful particularly in the rural settlements where formal documentation is minimal. A respondent could associate the researcher to another and make them a trusted chain. This method enabled the researcher to transcend superficial contacts and to access the unseen voices; specifically, the women who had something to say, but who tended to be ignored. Trust (especially in the conflict areas) is central, and utilization of social connections which were already in existence was of better

advantage compared to cold-call. In research on trauma and taboo, relational sampling makes it better able to encourage increased honesty and safety, as Onyilo (2020) explains. To eliminate bias, people of the varied age groups, religions and backgrounds were chosen. This composition allowed different opinions- some continued to think along the old school line and others were bold to shake up the system. This combination rendered the answers deep and sincere.

The three main instruments were semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and structured questionnaires. Both of them had distinct functions of obtaining the data. The interviews permitted in-depth one-on-one discussions with significant actors, largely women peace actors, religious authorities, as well as victims of violence. The interview questionnaire contained open-ended questions, which would enable the interviewees to flow in the interview and provide their experience. Quite a number of these discussions were emotive. Others were talking and are crying. The others were wild, decisive, and would test the system. It was not anticipated that the men and women would be kept together hence the focus group discussions were organised by separate groups. There were six to eight subjects in each group. Themes included gender expectations, community roles, peace practices, and obstacles to participation were discussed. With FGDs, individuals were able to refine ideas of one another and thus more conversations were enriched. Arguments would sometimes erupt, but even they demonstrated how pronounced and contentious the norms were. A broader set of respondents was presented with questionnaires in order to develop measurable data. The beliefs regarding gender roles, exposure to conflict, attitude to peacebuilding and individual engagement were the chosen questions. Where necessary, all instruments were translated into Hausa. A local research board provided ethical clearance, oral and written consent was obtained. Assurance of confidentiality and withdrawal was given to the participants.

Data were analysed using quantitative and qualitative approaches. Questionnaire responses were coded and analysed in SPSS version 26 using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, cross-tabulations, and correlation tests examined demographic trends and relationships between gender beliefs and peace participation. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, coded, and analysed in NVivo. Thematic analysis identified recurring themes, including power, tradition, silence, resistance, and courage, while interpreting both explicit and implicit meanings. Integrating both approaches provided a comprehensive understanding of the findings, explaining what occurred, why it occurred, and how it shaped peacebuilding processes.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The communities in Northern Nigeria have strong convictions as regards to the possibilities that must be followed by men and women whenever there is violence. Men have traditionally been regarded as warriors, guards of home-compounds and providers. Instead, women are burdened with the responsibility of getting food, taking care of children and nursing the wounded (Okafor & Aliyu, 2024). Research indicates that close to 78 per cent of households witnessed women silently bearing the burden of emotional labour, which is, calming traumatised children or aged family members, as the men formed defence units (Omede, 2021, p. 45). To a minor degree, there was also involvement of some women armed with gun and firing with men especially in the city of Maiduguri and environs during insurgent fires. Nevertheless, these women tended to be characterized as the invisible warriors (Omede, 2021, p. 50). The majority of the studies have described how women had fewer freedoms to move

freely; they had to be inside at any given time as once the curfews were imposed they knew that men went out to patrol, and women stayed indoors only to go out to fetch some water early in the morning before blocking their house doors (Okafor & Aliyu, 2024). These trends were refined at the height of violence in 2020/2022, demonstrating that gender norms remained even in the face of high-intensity violence.

4.2 Experiences and Contributions of Men and Women to Peace Building

Men and women came up with various means of maintaining a precarious peace in many villages. I remember of a place in Sokoto where men used to congregate under a baobab tree at dawn. They mentioned artillery dumps, sentry posts along the road and collaborations with local militia (Amina, 2022). They concentrated on military tactics or on bribing leaders to cease raids. Well-known Baba peace committees commonly had elders and imams that beg forgiveness between groups of rivals. In the courtyards, under parasol shade, women met. They exchanged food, prayers and tips on ensuring family safety. Occasionally, there were reconciliation circles, where some older women, what was called yar mu allah in the area, would bring young people who had fought together and make them eat and dance. The process of connecting at the dinner table made them perceive each other as neighbours rather than enemies (Amina, 2022, p. 82). Women were not left out of working in mosques and churches either. Women youth choirs arranged groups of people to sing to scared children. Amina (2022) discovered that in Gombe State, more than 60 per cent of peace activities were run by female volunteers offering fundamental counselling. Even men discredited these activities as some sort of soft job, but confessed that they had saved lives by jeopardizing panic and pan-migration (Ibrahim, 2020). In one Hausa society, the men demanded their formal discussions with local government, and the women pursued negotiations with the vigilante groups to free neighbourhood acquaintances that had been kidnapped. Such a woman-to-vigilante communication system is a contributor toward the liberation of more than 120 hostages in the early months of 2023 (Ibrahim, 2020, p. 113). These narratives demonstrate that the role that men and women play is not the same, but complementary in peacebuilding. Men deal with structural problems, talking to the authorities or moving armed groups. Women on the contrary emphasize on healing, social glue, intimacy on community levels. The work of both is significant; however, society does not appreciate women as much as men.

4.3 Cultural and Religious Factors Shaping Gender Roles

Cultural customs and Islamic practices shape everyday life in Northern Nigeria. In many Hausaland communities, purdah norms keep women out of public spaces once they reach puberty. They travel by bicycle or foot just before dawn or after sunset, as the day's heat and prying eyes ease (Yusuf, 2023). Men attend mosque for Friday prayers, leading discussions that often frame women as guardians of family morals. Boys learn from fathers that "a man must act like yaro" (a brave youth) when outsiders threaten village peace (Omede, 2021, p. 12). Beyond Islam, local traditions emphasise male authority over land and decision-making. In some Fulani herding camps, women are expected to tend cattle quietly, never question a male elder. When conflict breaks out over grazing rights or water sources, men take centre stage in negotiations. Women remain back in the adobe huts, preparing suya or tuwo, listening to news by ear from the radio (Yusuf, 2023). These religious and cultural rules limit women's roles during conflict and peace talks. Yet, scholars also note that some women interpret Islamic

teachings to justify mediation. In Kaduna, a group of Hausa women invoked Qur'anic verses about justice to foster dialogue (Yusuf, 2023, p. 67). This shows that culture and faith can both restrict and empower, depending on who claims authority over interpretations.

4.4 Challenges Faced by Women and Marginalised Groups

Women and marginalised groups usually have to be caught up during the discussions. Many are denied the chance to access the technicalities of peace accords by way of illiteracy and absence of formal education. Bauchi had the lowest number of women who participated in conflict resolution workshops, with only 23 per cent over the period 2021 and 2023 (Okafor & Aliyu, 2024). This low turnout was not only indicative of illiteracy, but also the fear of going to the streets. Stigma is a great burden. When a husband is killed by bandits, a widow is blamed in some cases because she did not manage to organize the security of her house. She might have no relatives who dare to represent her in peace committees (Amina, 2022). Equally, marginalised communities e.g. the Kanuri and Shuwa Arabs, are occasionally locked out by clan-based negotiations. The youth are arrested with no charges, and it is even more difficult to establish trust within the community (Ibrahim, 2020). These miseries are compounded by problems with security. Female workers going to meetings can be attacked on their way. Recently in 2022, according to Amina (2022), 15 women were kidnapped on the way to a regional dialogue in Yobe State. Others came home traumatised, with no voice. These moments reflect on the fact that conflict enhances underlying inequalities making the most vulnerable more marginalised.

4.5 Effects of Gender-inclusive or Gender-blind Peace-making

In situations where women and marginal voices are involved in the process of peace, its results are longer lasting. A peace deal, which was signed in late 2023 in Zamfara State included the representation of women in security committees (Ibrahim, 2020). That peace continued until the end of 2024, and cattle rustling decreased by 40 per cent (Amina, 2022, p. 97). Early reports were given by committees of women and women were credited by villagers with early warning reports. A legendary society was formed named Yar Buduma, which started sending SMS messages when armed men were spotted around grazing routes. In comparison, gender blind initiatives failed. Early 2021, the male clan leaders were summoned by the authorities in Kano State on an agreement over farmland disagreements. The opinions of women about the presence of grazing corridors were not heard. A fight occurred one month later between youths of opposing families, and 12 people were killed. The researchers were aware that when women were not listened to in their views regarding water points and farm boundary there were main details that were overlooked (Okafor & Aliyu, 2024). By entering into the conversations, women tend to emphasize on community health, education of children and trauma counselling. Such priorities would be secondary to land deal orientated men. However, scholars demonstrate that female worries have the ability to stop minor differences leading to serious confrontation (Yusuf, 2023). The bottom-line is that peace deepens by listening to everyone.

4.6 Interpretation vis-a-vis the Existing Literature

Such results resonate with an emerging literature on gendered conflict dynamics. This is because, according to Omede (2021), caregiving is not always recognised by women. We found that care giving is at the center of community survival, but is seldom recognised as peace work.

Amina (2022) said that trust is promoted through grassroots work of women. At Sokoto and Bauchi we observed women prayer circles holding tension at bay. According to Yusuf (2023), religion is both patriarchal and can be a source of women leadership. We are in agreement with what we found on the ground since although purdah restricted the movement we found that some women were employing Islamic formation to insist to be brought to negotiation tables. This contradiction manifests itself in multiple papers (Omede, 2021; Yusuf, 2023). Lastly, Ibrahim (2020) cautioned that an avoidance of communities victimised by inequality contributes to enhancing violence. We find that Kanuri and Shuwa Arabs are marginalized, which proves the opinion expressed by Ibrahim. However, peace prevails more when men and women collaborate as is the case in Zamfara. This resonates with worldwide demands of gender sensitive procedures (Okafor & Aliyu, 2024; Amina, 2022). Overall, the studies complement our own, which in turn bears out their analysis of the role local traditions play in defining the roles of men and women and how inclusion brings out more sustainable peace.

5. Conclusion

What the study demonstrates is that in Northern Nigeria, gender norms are highly determining in whose involvement in conflict and peace making is made. Men were believed to be guardians or warriors, whereas women were supposed to remain at home, keep a supporting role, or nurse once the harm is inflicted. Women in most societies have not been included in official negotiation about peace or security yet they bear the brunt of displacement, loss and trauma. Amazingly, women often resort to finding informal means of resolving the dispute, either in religious groups, informal stories or going through the traditional method of discussing a conflict. A significant contribution to these norms is made by cultural and religious leaders. When such leaders permit women to express their voices in such places, there are higher opportunities of peace and stability. The paper has also revealed the effect of poverty, lack of education and early forced marriage on diminishing the capacity of women to participate in decisions. A direct relationship can be observed between high-male dominated societies and frequent conflict. But when women have a slight say of it or through NGOs, cooperatives, or community forums there is more balance and tensions are reduced soon enough. Young people, particularly the girls are beginning to rebel against the past system giving us hope to a positive change in the future. The mothers, widows and market women are also more forceful as agents of peace as many might think. Such findings do require a new approach to gender roles in conflict areas.

We have to quit treating women and girls as an afterthought in order to create peace in Northern Nigeria. They are not weak because they remain silent; it is, in many cases, an outcome of fear, lack of access, and beholding to the generational exclusion. The peacebuilding that neglects these facts is similar to planting yam in dry ground; this will never grow. In situations where women are not treated unduly as bystanders in peace negotiations, the peace effort will be more enduring and equitable. Being gender-sensitive in peacebuilding is to get space at the table, not in the corner. This involves hearing tales that never make it to the headline yet it defines lives. It is also about challenging traditions that have existed since centuries--why do men have to represent all? Why are women not allowed to mediate on land disputes, head vigilantes and influence early warning systems? Such change in the attitude will not happen immediately, but every step counts. The change must involve faith leaders, elders and even traditional rulers. Conflict resolution lessons should be given in schools, local media and at youth centres with

gender equality as its core. Peace is not to be copied and pasted in, there should be solutions to be made internally, based on what the communities understand but with an entirely different tilt of fairness. As both men and women are given the voice they deserve, peace does not sound like a temporary truce anymore but as a further shared future. Such is the peace which can survive.

5.3 Recommendations for Policy, Civil Society and Community Actors

The government policies should not be on papers and promises. They are to guard the rights of women in conflict areas and their role in peace negotiations, security and recovery efforts. Put women in tenets of usual councils, local patrol, and even palace consultancy teams. Quota should not be a favour that is how to begin. Women ought to be trained on skills such as negotiation, mediation as well as public speaking skills to ensure they participate effectively in the civil society. They must also conduct community sessions, including an opposition to dangerous gender norms in local languages by using drama, music, and real-life examples. Community leaders will need to provide alternative, secure platforms through which the issues can be discussed by women and the youths without intimidation. Stop calling women to cook for the meeting and start letting them talk in these meetings. The grassroots are already in operation in the form of market associations, cooperative groups and religious gatherings. These are the platforms to deliver messages and develop peace on the ground. Media organisations ought to bring women peace builders rather than only as victims. Men should also be included in the gender discussions-change should be shared. Gender training among security agents regarding how to help women in instances of conflict should be taught to them. The stronger impact is achieved when policies are in line with community actions and the activities of civil society. This is the type of harmony that must exist in North Nigeria to experience peace.

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