

Advancing Legal and Policy Models for Women in Peacebuilding and Security

Ugoeze Sylvanus-Killian, LLB, BL, MLS

Ugoeze Sylvanus-Killian

International law and Policy, Federal Ministry of Justice, USA

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ABSTRACT

Empowering women in security and peacebuilding is recognised as a global necessity. However, several limitations remain due to firmly entrenched cultural, institutional, and organisational challenges. Women, whether acting as experts, field workers, or policymakers, commonly confront barriers ingrained in patriarchal traditions. This article aims to identify the challenges women face in these fields and to highlight their role within a larger policy and legislative framework. It acknowledges that sustainable progress requires legislative support, institutional backing, and intentional reform. To tackle these problems, the article proposes tailored institutional and judicial reforms to enable women to contribute meaningfully to national peace and development alongside their male counterparts. By establishing structures that transform women's traditional roles from limitations to opportunities, institutions and stakeholders could greatly benefit from their potential as equal partners in security and integrative development.

INTRODUCTION

Methodological Note

This revised version responds to the need for empirical depth by combining doctrinal legal analysis with comparative policy analysis and secondary empirical evidence. It uses documented case studies, institutional reports, gender-disaggregated statistics, and comparative country examples to test the article's central claim: that women's participation in security and peacebuilding is not simply a normative aspiration, but a measurable governance strategy. The evidence is drawn from African experiences in Rwanda, Liberia, South Africa, and Nigeria, as well as from global examples in Colombia and Northern Ireland. This method is appropriate because the Women, Peace and Security Initiative is shaped simultaneously by law, institutional design, political culture, community practice, and assessable results of representation (Council on Foreign Relations [CFR], 2024; UN Women, 2025).

The role of women in security and peacebuilding discourses has long been a topic of discussion, both internationally and domestically, as they are considered vital to achieving durable peace and integrative development. The adoption of **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)** marked an important step in recognising the role of women in preventing conflict, negotiating and defending peace, providing humanitarian aid, and participating in post-conflict reconstruction worldwide.¹ Since then, there have been substantial commitments by stakeholders to incorporate gender perspectives into security governance. However, the presence of these instruments has not substantially changed the reality of women in many countries, including Nigeria. There has been a sustained reflection of limited participation and persistent marginalisation.

Women in security establishments, from policy-making roles to community participation, still contend with male-controlled norms that limit them to established gender roles and often deny them leadership prospects. Even when women enter the security and peace sector, they usually suffer exclusion in several dimensions, and these are not limited to reinforced stereotypes and the absence of gender-sensitive infrastructure. The challenge

to women's participation does more than weaken individual ambitions; it also limits the collective benefits that result when women's perspectives are incorporated into conflict resolution initiatives.

The marginalisation of women from peace and security efforts must be positioned within wider questions of governance, law, and policy. Although the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) (as amended) ensures equality and non-discrimination, in reality, these guarantees are often absent. The combined effects of the lack of enforceable gender allocations in security institutions, weak enforcement strategies, and gender-responsive budgeting have proven harmful to effective inclusion.

The problem is not unique to Nigeria. Across Africa, women are underrepresented in peace negotiations and in organisations that spearhead security policies, despite evidence that, when involved, women have brokered more durable peace agreements. ³Studies prove that when women are involved in peacebuilding procedures, the result is often a more durable and easily implementable agreement. ⁴

With the escalation of transboundary and internal conflict, mere recognition of women as potential role players is insufficient. Genuine advancement entails well-thought-out legislative and policy actions that translate into gender quotas, institutional modifications, supportive structures such as childcare and mentorship, and meaningful representation in administrative matters. Building on international standards, Nigerian legal policies, and comparative African experiences, this article argues that gender inclusion in peace and security is not simply a matter of human rights but one of national effectiveness: societies that leverage women's potential are more likely to achieve sustainable peace and integrative development.

Section 2: Analytical Layout

The term *empowerment of women in security and peacebuilding* is misleading unless its associated concepts, theories, and global frameworks are carefully unpacked. In the absence of a sound theoretical base, reform efforts risk addressing symptoms rather than the structures of exclusion.

Defining Key Concepts

Empowerment requires much more than getting women to contribute to decision-making; it demands establishing an enduring strategy that creates processes and systems granting women the authority and resources to steer outcomes and exercise leadership. As far as security and peacebuilding are concerned, empowerment here must be upscaled to policy formulation, concrete outcomes, and ensuring that women's involvement actually influences decisions.

Peacebuilding refers to actions intended to avert the eruption, recurrence, or escalation of violence. It includes institution-building, resolution, and taking on the root causes of conflict. Given their community roles and lived experiences in conflict, women's participation in peace efforts is increasingly recognised globally as essential to social stability. ⁵

Security has advanced from a narrow, state-centred concern with territorial defence to a broader concept of human security that promotes freedom from fear and want and protects human dignity. ⁶ In this expanded understanding, women, who are essentially the primary victims of conflict, displacement, and gender-based violence, should rightly occupy the centre of security discourse.

Fundamental Theories

Numerous theoretical perspectives have shed more light on the relationship between women, peace, and security.

Liberal Feminism emphasises equality of opportunity and participation within current political and security institutions, arguing that discriminatory laws and biased enrolment policies, not lack of capacity, hinder women's development. ⁷

Radical Feminism critiques the patriarchal and military-styled traditional security structures, arguing that true inclusion demands transformation of the institutions specifically, rather than aesthetic reforms.⁸

Legitimacy Theory suggests that organisations derive authority not only from legitimacy but also from public confidence and moral acceptance. The participation of women, who make up more than half of the population, improves the ethical legitimacy of peacebuilding methods.⁹

Intersectionality reminds us that women's experiences differ by class, ethnicity, religion, and geography. Any empowerment model must be centred on these overlapping realities to ensure that inclusion is practical rather than tokenistic.¹⁰

Global Policy Foundations

Women's inclusion in security and peacebuilding rests on a body of international and regional frameworks:

- The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)** obliges states to eliminate gender discrimination in all spheres of life, including political and public service.¹¹
- The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)** reaffirmed the necessity of women's involvement in conflict prevention and peace processes.¹²
- The **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003)** calls for women's participation in decision-making and protection of women in armed conflict.¹³
- The **ECOWAS Gender Policy (2005)** and **ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (2008)** urge member states, including Nigeria, to mainstream gender in peace and security structures.¹⁴
- Nigeria has domesticated these legal instruments through its **National Gender Policy (2006)** and successive **National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325**, which operationalise the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda at the national level.¹⁵

Comparative Perspectives

Empirical Comparative Examination: African Experiences

A comparative African approach shows that barriers to women's participation do not operate equally across contexts. In Rwanda, women's participation has been advanced through constitutional design and quota enforcement. Rwanda's lower chamber has recorded 63.75 per cent women's representation, making it one of the clearest examples of how constitutional quotas can convert post-conflict reconstruction into institutional gender inclusion (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2026; Parliament of Rwanda, n.d.). The lesson for Nigeria is not that quotas alone resolve all political problems. Still, that legally entrenched threshold creates a measurable entry point for women's participation that voluntary policies rarely achieve.

Liberia presents a different model: women's influence was driven less by formal quotas and more by mass civic mobilisation. The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace helped pressure armed factions toward the 2003 Accra peace process and later supported post-conflict reconstruction under Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. This case is particularly relevant to Nigeria because it shows the value of organised grassroots women's networks in societies where formal security institutions remain male-dominated. It also demonstrates that peacebuilding capacity may exist outside formal state structures and should be connected to official peace architecture rather than treated as informal or auxiliary.

South Africa offers a third lesson. Its post-apartheid constitutional framework entrenched equality and created opportunities for gender mainstreaming within democratic institutions. Unlike Rwanda's quota-driven model

and Liberia's movement-driven model, South Africa shows how constitutional equality, party-level commitments, and institutional reform can gradually reshape participation in security, policing, and transitional justice. The comparison demonstrates that Nigeria's challenge is not the lack of legal language alone, but the absence of enforceable institutional mechanisms, public reporting, and sanctions for non-compliance.

These three African cases reveal that the barriers identified in Nigeria operate differently at different levels of governance. At the federal level, the problem is weak statutory compulsion and inconsistent reporting. At the state level, women's inclusion depends heavily on political will and donor-supported projects. At the community level, women may be active in mediation and early warning but remain excluded from formal recognition and budgeted peace structures. Therefore, reform must be multi-level: constitutional or statutory guarantees for federal institutions, gender-responsive implementation plans for states, and funded channels for rural and community women to enter local peace committees.

Experiences from African states have shown that deliberate legal and institutional reforms fast-track women's inclusion. Rwanda's post-genocide constitution created gender quotas that today stand as one of the world's highest female parliamentary representations.¹⁶ Liberia's post-conflict administration under Ellen Johnson Sirleaf institutionalised women's participation in reconstruction and peacebuilding.¹⁷ South Africa's transition from apartheid engineered deep-rooted gender equality strategies within its constitutional and defence frameworks.¹⁸

These examples are proof that the combined effect of political will and legislative backing assures that gender inclusion shifts from rhetoric to reality.

CONCLUSION TO THE FRAMEWORK

The conceptual and scholarly foundation shows that the central theme of women's empowerment in peace is rooted in institutional legitimacy and effectiveness, extending beyond equity and equality alone. Without the lens of feminist theory, global standards, and comparative insights, reforms may end up symbolic rather than genuinely transformative. For Nigeria, the challenge is to translate commitments into legislation, policies, and practices that eliminate exclusion and endorse women as equal partners in national security and peacebuilding.

Section 3: Historical and Institutional Context

To understand women's involvement in security and peacebuilding in Nigeria, it is necessary to trace the historical path of this involvement. Women have long played protective roles in their communities. However, the perceptibility and formal acknowledgement of those roles have remained very unstable from pre-colonial times through colonialism to the present. This historical perspective shows both the indigenous strengths that once empowered women and the institutional barriers later imposed by foreign governance structures and ideas.

Women's Traditional Roles in Peacebuilding

Before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria, women were active mediators, counsellors, and community emissaries in times of conflict. Among the Igbo, *Umuada*, the daughters of the lineage exercised ethical authority to mediate in family and communal clashes.¹⁹ Yoruba women managed markets and mobilised communities. At the same time, in northern Nigeria, figures such as **Queen Amina of Zazzau** symbolised women's leadership in both politics and warfare.²⁰ These roles demonstrate that Nigerian traditions were not homogeneously patriarchal; they usually provided a culturally sanctioned environment for women to contribute to peace and order, albeit informally.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Marginalisation

The British colonial government interrupted these indigenous systems. The strategy of indirect rule privileged male chiefs and weakened women's traditional councils and systems.²¹ Colonial administrations entrenched

patriarchal governance, excluding women from formal power structures and restricting their participation to domestic or supportive tasks. As a matter of fact, even landmark resistance movements such as the **Aba Women's War (1929)** were treated by the colonial government as civil disobedience rather than legitimate political action.²²

Post-independence Nigeria retained several colonial legacies. Security and governance remained androcentric, and women's roles were largely confined to the "private sphere." The inclusion of women into the police and armed forces occurred slowly and was plagued by persistent discrimination, particularly in recruitment standards, maternity leave, and promotion.²³

Modern Nigerian Security Institutions

Today, Nigerian women continue to encounter structural barriers in the security and law enforcement sectors. Although the number of female personnel has increased, their representation in command positions is still minimal.²⁴ Policies are often indifferent to motherhood and work-life balance: pregnancy and maternity leave are often viewed as service interruptions rather than normal aspects of life that require institutional support.²⁵ Cultural stereotypes that depict women as physically weak or unsuited for leadership worsen these hindrances.²⁶

Policy Milestones and Gaps

Nigeria has made attempts to address gender inequality in peace and security through the **National Action Plan (2013, revised 2017–2020)** on UNSCR 1325 and the **National Gender Policy (2006)**, both of which aim to ensure that women hold at least 35 per cent of decision-making positions. However, the implementation of this policy has been slow. Enforcement systems are weak, funding is inconsistent, and gender-responsive budgeting is limited. This difference between policy and implementation continues to obstruct progress.

Urban Bias and Grassroots Exclusion

A significant weakness in Nigeria's institutional framework is its urban bias. Policy negotiations are usually held in major cities such as Abuja and Lagos, as well as in state capitals. As a result, rural women, who are most affected by insecurity, including banditry and conflicts between farmers and herders, are often overlooked.²⁹ Real empowerment should, of necessity, ensure the participation of all stakeholders, such as rural farmers, market women, and community leaders, whose daily realities symbolise the link between security and survival.³⁰

Conclusion to the Context

When viewed through the lens of history, Nigerian women have oscillated between prominence and marginalisation in matters of peace and security. Pre-colonial traditions allowed meaningful participation, whereas colonial and post-colonial systems institutionalised exclusion. Although modern policies lean towards inclusion, gaps between rhetoric and reality remain evident. Sustainable empowerment, therefore, requires culturally tailored measures that connect national policy with grassroots practice, enabling women to assume the role of full partners, not symbolic participants, in building peace and security.

Section 4: Barriers to Women's Participation

Despite numerous international conventions, national policies, and growing awareness, which jointly emphasise the importance of women's participation in peace and security, several barriers persist in Nigeria. These problems are fully entrenched in the culture, institutions, economy, and even the psychology of the people.

Cultural and Male-Dominated Norms

However, patriarchy remains the most entrenched obstacle. Nigerian societies are mainly patrilineal, with

women perceived primarily as dependents and caregivers. The idea of women exercising authority within the military, police, or peace negotiations runs counter to traditional expectations of femininity.³¹ Some religious and cultural doctrines strengthen early marriage and domestic confinement, restraining women's education and career progression.³² This sequence perpetuates inter-generational inequalities in leadership and participation.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional discrimination keeps thriving through enrollment policies, promotion ceilings, and insufficient maternity provisions in security agencies.³³ Height, age, and marital-status requirements commonly exclude otherwise qualified women.³⁴ Pregnant officers are said to be forced to resign sometimes, or restart their careers, discouraging retention.³⁵ Even when accepted, women are arbitrarily assigned to supervisory or welfare units, leaving combat and intelligence posts overwhelmingly male.³⁶

Organisational Challenges in Workplaces

Structural values within security institutions see a culture that frequently marginalises women through harassment, intimidation, and segregation.³⁷ These institutions hardly include childcare facilities, flexible hours, or confidential grievance systems, as a matter of fact. Mentoring opportunities are scarce, and women lack networks to champion their promotion.³⁸ This weak professional support contributes to attrition and under-representation in leadership.

Grassroots Exclusion

Urban bias compounds exclusion. Most women, peace, and security programmes are implemented in major cities, leaving out rural women who face the gravest consequences of insecurity, banditry, communal clashes, and farmer-herder conflicts.³⁹ These women possess rich local knowledge and informal intelligence networks that remain underutilised.⁴⁰

Education and Early Socialisation

Education can empower, but it can also expose inequality. Low female literacy in rural areas severely restricts entry into professional security careers.⁴¹ From childhood, girls are socialised to value obedience and modesty over leadership and assertiveness.⁴² Such early conditioning breeds self-doubt and diminishes ambition to join "male" professions like the military or policing.

Stereotypes and Media Influence

Media and popular culture strengthen stereotypes that confine women to domestic identities.⁴³ In films, adverts, and social media, success is frequently portrayed through marriage rather than professional achievement. This constant messaging discourages young women from visualising themselves as security actors or peace negotiators.⁴⁴

Economic and Structural Impediments

Economic dependence also limits participation. Poverty disproportionately influences Nigerian women, especially in rural regions.⁴⁵ Limited access to finance, education, and mobility prevents them from acquiring the skills and resources necessary for security and peacebuilding work. Furthermore, women farmers affected by herder-farmer conflicts, along with women traders threatened by banditry, seldom have representation in relevant policymaking processes.⁴⁶

Weak Accountability and Follow-up

Nigeria has ratified numerous conventions, including CEDAW and UNSCR 1325, yet domestication and enforcement remain weak.⁴⁷ Action plans lack funding and oversight, and monitoring frameworks are

inconsistent.⁴⁸ Without accountability mechanisms, commitments remain symbolic rather than transformative, eroding trust among women expecting genuine change.

How Barriers Operate Across Levels of Governance

The empirical evidence suggests that institutional and cultural barriers are not experienced in the same way by all women. In federal security agencies, exclusion often takes the form of recruitment rules, deployment patterns, promotion ceilings, male-dominated command structures, and weak grievance mechanisms. Amnesty International's report on pregnancy discrimination against women in the Nigerian Police Force illustrates how formal employment can exist alongside discriminatory service rules and institutional culture (Amnesty International, 2020).

At the state and local government levels, the barriers become more political and fiscal in nature. Women's participation in peacebuilding frequently depends on ad hoc donor-funded projects rather than permanent public institutions. This means that women may be trained in peacebuilding, early warning, or mediation. However, the skills they gain are not necessarily incorporated into state security councils, local government peace committees, or budgetary planning. The result is a cycle of project-based visibility without durable authority.

At the grassroots level, the barriers are more socio-cultural and economic. Rural women affected by farmer-herder violence, banditry, displacement, and food insecurity may possess community intelligence and mediation capacity. However, they usually lack transport, literacy support, digital access, and formal invitations to security meetings. This explains why urban women's organisations may appear more visible in national WPS programming, whereas rural women bear much of the consequences of the conflict, without proportional institutional representation.

This differentiated analysis strengthens the article's central claim. The solution cannot be a single national policy statement. Nigeria requires federal legal reform, state-level implementation benchmarks, institutional gender audits, and community-level financing mechanisms that specifically include rural women, displaced women, market women, women farmers, traditional women leaders, and faith-based women's networks.

The obstacles confronting Nigerian women in peace and security are varied and mutually reinforcing. Cultural norms restrict ambition; institutional practices block advancement; grassroots and rural women remain invisible; and ineffective enforcement perpetuates stagnation. Surmounting these barriers demands culturally sensitive, home-grown reforms that integrate community realities with organisational accountability.

Section 5: Policy and Legislative Structures

Laws and policies form the foundation for empowering women in peace and security. Nigeria is party to many international and regional instruments that guarantee women's rights, yet implementation within the country remains uneven.

Legal and Policy Instruments at the International Level

The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)** serves as the international bill of rights for women, requiring states to eliminate discrimination across all fields, including participation in public life. Nigeria ratified CEDAW in 1985 but has not yet domesticated it under s 12 of the Constitution, rendering it unenforceable in domestic courts.⁴⁹

The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)** reaffirmed the need for women's participation in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and reconstruction.⁵⁰

The **Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda**, inaugurated by **UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)** and reinforced by Resolutions 1820, 1889, 2122 and 2242, urges member states to include women at all

levels of decision-making and to protect them from gender-based violence in conflict.⁵¹ Nigeria, as a UN member, bears responsibility for domesticating these commitments through national policy and legislation.

Regional Obligations: African Union and ECOWAS

At the regional level, the **Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa** (*Maputo Protocol*, 2003) requires states to ensure women's participation in conflict prevention and management.⁵² Nigeria signed the Protocol in 2004 and ratified it soon after.

The **ECOWAS Gender Policy (2005)** and the **ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (2008)** offer additional guidance on integrating gender into security governance, urging member states to promote women's participation in early warning and peacebuilding mechanisms.⁵³

National Constitutional Safeguards

The **Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)** prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex under s 42. It requires a national character principle in s 14(3) to ensure proportionate representation.⁵⁴ Yet the Constitution contains no provision for affirmative action or gender quotas similar to those in Rwanda or South Africa, leaving participation largely voluntary.⁵⁵

The National Gender Policy (2006)

Adopted by the Federal Government in 2006, the **National Gender Policy (NGP)** aims to achieve at least 35 per cent representation of women in decision-making and to mainstream gender in all sectors.⁵⁶ However, because it is a policy and not a statute, compliance remains discretionary, and enforcement is weak.

Nigeria's National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325

Nigeria launched its first **National Action Plan (NAP)** on UNSCR 1325 in 2013 and revised it for 2017–2020, focusing on four pillars: prevention, participation, protection, and relief/recovery.⁵⁷ While the NAP articulates sound strategies, independent assessments show under-funding, low awareness within security agencies, and a bias towards urban programmes.⁵⁸

Legislative Lacunae, Neglects and Omissions

The repeated failure of the **Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill**, first introduced in 2010 and most recently rejected by the Senate in 2021, highlights Nigeria's legislative stagnation toward gender equality.⁵⁹ Without statutory backing, gender commitments remain aspirational.

Comparative Lessons

Rwanda's 2003 Constitution requires that at least 30 per cent of all decision-making posts be occupied by women, a measure that has produced one of the world's highest rates of female representation.⁶⁰ In Liberia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf adopted policies integrating women into post-conflict governance and community peace structures.⁶¹ South Africa's post-apartheid framework constitutionally entrenched gender equality across the security and justice sectors.⁶² These examples show how legislative guarantees and political will transform participation.

The Accountability Gap

Nigeria suffers from a record of weak accountability. Gender reports are irregular, supervisory bodies are under-resourced, and civil society recommendations are often disregarded.⁶³ Without compulsory reporting, sanctions, and independent monitoring, government pledges risk relapsing into "paper commitments." A solid accountability mechanism, parliamentary oversight, civil society audits, and measurable benchmarks are necessary for transformation.

CONCLUSION TO FRAMEWORKS

Nigeria has assented to several international and regional instruments. It has also developed domestic policies, such as the NGP and NAPs on UNSCR 1325, yet implementation is limited. The absence of legislative quotas, weak enforcement, and limited financing delays progress. Empowerment must evolve from elite rhetoric to enforceable law anchored in Nigeria's cultural and social realities if gender inclusion in security and peacebuilding is to be genuine.

Section 6: Women, Peace and Security

Empirical Case Studies and Documented Outcomes

The argument for women's inclusion is supported by quantitative and case-study evidence. Cross-national studies frequently cited by UN Women and the Council on Foreign Relations indicate that women's participation in peace processes is associated with a 20 per cent increase in the probability that a peace agreement will last at least two years and a 35 per cent increase in the probability that it will last at least fifteen years (CFR, 2024; UN Women, 2015). Although the results should not be taken to prove that women's participation alone causes peace, they provide credible empirical support for the proposition that inclusion improves the durability and legitimacy of peace processes.

In Nigeria, the empirical picture is mixed. The country has adopted successive National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325, including the 2017-2020 plan and the more recent 2024-2027/2028 plan, but implementation has been uneven. Available reporting indicates recurring problems, including weak financing, limited coordination, inadequate gender-disaggregated data, and insufficient awareness within security-sector institutions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2024; Peace Women, n.d.). This difference between policy design and implementation explains why women may be visible in advocacy spheres, yet remain underrepresented in formal policy-making institutions.

Northern Nigeria provides a practical example of the value of women's community participation. Women's associations, faith-based groups, market associations, and civil society networks have supported early warning, victim support, interfaith dialogue, and reintegration efforts in communities affected by insurgency and communal violence. The lesson is that women's local knowledge often operates as a form of community security intelligence. However, without formal recognition, budget lines, and reporting pathways to security agencies, this awareness remains underutilised.

The Niger Delta also provides an important sectoral case. Women's environmental justice mobilisation linked oil pollution, livelihood loss, community insecurity, and corporate accountability. This example widens the meaning of security beyond policing and armed conflict. It shows that women's peacebuilding work may occur through environmental protection, resource governance, livelihood defence, and social mobilisation. In situations where ecological harm produces grievance, displacement, and youth militancy, women's participation in environmental justice also adds to peace and human security.

Global Case Studies: Colombia and Northern Ireland

Colombia is a useful global example because the 2016 peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was among the most gender-sensitive in modern history. Women's organisations and gender advocates influenced the inclusion of provisions on victims' rights, sexual violence, land, political participation, and rural reform. The Colombian example demonstrates that women's participation can change the substance of peace agreements, not simply the composition of negotiation rooms.

Northern Ireland provides another persuasive example. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition secured participation in the negotiations that led to the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Case-study evidence shows that the Coalition advocated provisions on equal opportunity, reconciliation, victims' needs, integrated education, mixed housing, women's political participation, and civic consultation (Inclusive Peace, 2018). This

is relevant to Nigeria because it shows that women's groups can expand peace agendas beyond elite power-sharing to include social repair and community-level reconciliation.

The comparative lesson from Colombia and Northern Ireland is that women's inclusion works best when it is substantive rather than symbolic. Women must be present not simply as observers or beneficiaries, but as agenda-setters, negotiators, drafters, monitors, and implementers. For Nigeria, this means that women should be included in security councils, disarmament and reintegration committees, state peacebuilding agencies, local government peace committees, transitional justice initiatives, and monitoring bodies for the National Action Plan.

Although conversations on women in peace and security often centre on the barriers, it is equally important to recognise the contributions women already make, officially and informally, across Nigeria. From decision-makers to grassroots intermediaries, Nigerian women demonstrate fortitude and leadership in building peace and community security.

Women functioning as Policymakers and Experts

At the national policy level, several Nigerian women have formed governance and accountability frameworks. Figures such as **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, **Oby Ezekwesili**, and **Aisha Mohammed-Oyebode** have influenced reforms in economic management, transparency, and human rights protection, which indirectly strengthen peace and stability.⁶⁴ Women's networks, including the **Women in Peace and Security Network (WPSN)** and **Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC)**, provide advocacy, training, and policy recommendations that mainstream gender perspectives.⁶⁵

Nigerian women have also participated in UN and African Union peacekeeping missions, demonstrating operational competence in traditionally male-dominated spheres.⁶⁶ Their engagement demonstrates that inclusion in security institutions is not only symbolic but improves credibility and community trust.

Women in Grassroots Peacebuilding

Grass-roots women are often the first responders to conflict. Through market associations, church and mosque groups, and women's cooperatives, they resolve disputes and mobilise relief during crises. In Jos and Kaduna, women's interreligious groups have successfully negotiated ceasefires and fostered reconciliation among Christian and Muslim populations.⁶⁷

Women in agriculture and business, particularly in the Middle Belt and northern Nigeria, act as stabilisers in local economies and informal security providers through quasi-security networks.⁶⁸ Their addition to local peace committees strengthens early-warning mechanisms and communal resilience.

Women in Community Vigilantes and Security Networks

As banditry and kidnapping continue to create major challenges, the emergence of community vigilante groups has grown progressively common. Although women's inclusion in these groups has traditionally been limited, their roles in intelligence gathering and mediation have proven highly effective. In the states of Zamfara, Katsina, and Borno, women's organisations collaborate with formal security agencies to identify threats and provide support to victims of violence. This coalition not only intensifies responses to security issues but also fosters greater cooperation between communities and law enforcement agencies.

Women and Sectoral Security (Agriculture, Oil, Banking, etc.)

Women also hold critical roles in sectors which underpin economic and environmental security.

- **Agriculture:** Women farmers constitute over 60 per cent of Nigeria's agricultural workforce. Their involvement in policy discussions on land rights and resource management helps mitigate farmer–herder conflicts.⁷⁰

- **Oil and extractives: Women in the Niger Delta have mobilised for environmental justice and corporate accountability, connecting ecological security with peacebuilding.**⁷¹
- **Finance and banking:** Female leadership in banking and micro-credit institutions, such as the Central Bank's *Gender Financial Inclusion Framework*, supports household involvement and economic security.⁷²

These instances reveal that “security” has a broader meaning, extending beyond armed conflict to encompass economic, environmental, and social dimensions, in which women are already firmly positioned as key actors.

Harnessing Women’s Peculiar Strengths

Women contribute distinctive skills such as negotiation, empathy, multitasking, and community orientation that improve peace processes. Research confirms that when women take part in negotiations, peace agreements are more enduring.⁷³ When placed in charge of negotiations, they tend to expand agendas to include education, health, and social welfare, generating holistic stability.

Symbolic versus Substantive Participation

A continual challenge, however, is distinguishing symbolic from substantive participation. Women are often included in delegations or committees to satisfy quotas, without decision-making authority. Real empowerment means access to core leadership roles, resources, and opportunities for competence development. This shift from tokenism to leadership will ultimately guarantee genuine transformation.⁷⁴

Conclusion to Women’s Roles

Nigerian women are not strangers to peace and security; they already contribute at multiple levels. Whether in political settings or on farms, from the Centre to the grassroots, women demonstrate that security is not exclusively men's domain. Harnessing their strengths requires institutional reform, mentorship, and recognition that their participation is not a favour but a key necessity for national stability.

Section 7: Reform Proposals and Future Perspective

Addressing gender inequality in peace and security requires deliberate reform across legal, institutional, socio-cultural, and educational levels. Nigeria’s advancement in this regard depends mainly on transforming political will into actionable frameworks that promote women’s fundamental, not symbolic, participation.

Legal and Institutional Reform

It is trite that every meaningful reform must begin with legislation. The immediate passage of the **Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill** is essential to domesticate CEDAW and anchor gender equality within enforceable Nigerian law.⁷⁵ Parliament should also enact **affirmative-action provisions** guaranteeing a minimum of 35 per cent representation of women in decision-making positions across the security and defence sectors.

Institutionally, security agencies should be mandated to establish **Gender Desks and Ombudsman Units** to monitor harassment, discrimination, and maternity-related violations. Yearly gender audits should be publicly reported; accountability and transparency should also be strengthened.⁷⁶

Budgetary and Operational Mechanisms

Without adequate funding, reforms are unachievable. Budgetary procedures should mainstream gender across ministries, departments, and agencies. Dedicated budget lines for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) programmes would guarantee consistent funding for training, mentoring, and community peacebuilding.⁷⁷

It may be expedient for security agencies to introduce **Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)** tools, as

ECOWAS and UN Women already recommend, which link allocations to quantifiable impacts, such as recruitment, retention, and women's leadership.⁷⁸

Capacity Building and Education

Educational reform is essential for empowering women. Both the government and civil society must expand scholarship and vocational training for girls in STEM and security studies. It should also be mandatory for all security personnel to undergo gender-sensitivity training.⁷⁹

Curricula in tertiary institutions and military academies must incorporate gender perspectives, peace education, and human-rights law to reshape institutional culture.⁸⁰

Cultural and Community Re-orientation

Cultural transformation cannot be mandated through legislation; instead, it can be nurtured and developed over time. It is essential to engage faith-based organisations, traditional leaders, and community stakeholders as collaborative partners in promoting gender equality. Positive illustrations from Nigerian culture, such as the established roles of the Umuada and Iyaloja, should be revitalised and presented as culturally relevant models of leadership. Furthermore, media campaigns can also help dismantle persistent stereotypes by representing women as capable participants in domains such as defence. Furthermore, media campaigns can play a significant role in dismantling persistent stereotypes by effectively representing women as capable participants in domains such as defence, law enforcement, and peace negotiations.

Partnership and Networking

Strategic alliances among government agencies, civil society organisations, academia, and international partners are essential. Collaboration with the **African Union**, **ECOWAS**, and **UN Women** should be deepened through regional peer-learning and shared accountability mechanisms.⁸³

Technology and Data for Gender Security

Significant innovations in the digital space have created new opportunities. Women's groups can utilise mobile technology for early warning systems, conflict reporting, and community mobilisation. The government should establish gender-disaggregated data collection on recruitment, training, and promotions within security agencies. Reliable data will greatly improve evidence-based policymaking and support regular gender audits.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A National Council on Women, Peace, and Security could be established to coordinate regular reviews of the National Action Policy and related frameworks. Involving civil society organisations in the monitoring process will promote transparency. It is essential to create benchmarks, such as the number of women in leadership positions, the percentage of gender-sensitive budgets, and the inclusion of rural women in decision-making roles. These benchmarks should be publicly reported.

A Vision for the Future

Nigeria's demographic advantage, half its population being women, makes it strategic to lead Africa in gender-responsive security governance. Future policy must move from *inclusion by invitation* to *inclusion by design*. When women's participation becomes an automatic expectation rather than an exception, peacebuilding will be more lasting, and national institutions will be more legitimate.

CONCLUSION

Coherence of Findings

The evidence added in this revised analysis strengthens the article's progression from theory to practice. The

conceptual framework explains why women's inclusion matters; the historical section shows that women's peacebuilding roles have indigenous and contemporary roots; the barriers section explains why exclusion persists; and the comparative case studies prove that institutional design, civic mobilisation, and enforceable accountability can produce measurable improvements. The central finding is therefore clear: women's participation is both a rights-based obligation and a strategy for governance effectiveness.

The comparative cases also prevent overgeneralisation. Rwanda shows the effect of constitutional quotas; Liberia shows the effect of grassroots mobilisation; South Africa shows the role of constitutional equality and transitional reform; Colombia shows how gender provisions can shape peace-agreement content; and Northern Ireland shows how women's coalitions can broaden peace negotiations to include victims, education, reconciliation, and civic participation. Nigeria can draw on each model, but it needs to adapt them to its federal framework, religious and cultural diversity, security-sector realities, and rural-conflict contexts.

Including women in peace and security discussions should not be viewed as merely doing them a favour; it is a constitutional, moral, and national necessity. Around the world, evidence shows that peace processes and institutions that include women are more sustainable, more legitimate, and better at meeting citizens' needs. In Nigeria, despite commendable commitments like the ratification of CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), the adoption of UNSCR 1325 (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325), the creation of the National Gender Policy, and successive National Action Plans, implementation has fallen short. Factors such as patriarchy, a lack of political will, weak enforcement, insufficient funding, and cultural inertia have undermined otherwise strong frameworks aimed at increasing female participation.

The challenge for Nigeria is to convert the set of commitments into enforceable rights and institutional practices. This requires political will, legislative reform, resource allocation, and cultural change. Community-based women, with all their potential, must not be confined to a position of spectatorship in national security dialogues; they must be recognised as indispensable agents of stability. The sustainability of Nigeria's democracy and peace architecture depends on recognising women as co-architects of security, not passive beneficiaries.

The ability for transformation in Nigeria is significant if the recommendations outlined in this paper are adopted. By endorsing the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, promoting affirmative action, and incorporating gender-responsive budgeting, Nigeria can establish itself as a leader in gender-responsive security governance. As the UN Secretary-General aptly stated, "Peace is not sustainable without women." We must integrate this understanding into our policies and practices, opening the path for a safer and safer Nigeria

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