

Gender Mainstreaming in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: North East in Focus

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Abstract. Peace building is a bulwark against the occurrence of conflicts in the first place. It is the sine qua non for growth and development in any human habitat. Man is intrinsically hedonistic and hence, his unending search for a blissful environment that is free from threat and insecurity. It is against this background that states around the globe earnestly embark on peace building project. Every state owes its citizens a social responsibility to avert crisis and insecurity. This paper espouses women mainstreaming in the peace building project with focus on the North Eastern Nigeria. It observes that they are more vulnerable, compare to men, in situation of conflict as being widowed, internally displayed, sexually abused and more prone to HIV/AIDS. It avers that women are stakeholders in both conflict and post conflict situations as actors who disrupt and work toward peace and security. Their roles are therefore put on the map. This paper utilizes 'Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory' as its analytical framework and heavily relies on secondary sources of data collection. It finds that turning a blind eye to the roles of women who constitute half of world population leaves much to be desired in the process of peace building and conflict resolution. Thus, it concludes that women know better how to handle gender (female) related issues as they bear on insecurity and peace. It recommends that the participation of women in peace building invigorates the possibility of a long-lasting peace.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Gender Mainstreaming, Peace Building, Victimizers, Victims etc.

1. Introduction

Human beings are social animals who cannot live in isolation. If they do, they lose the basic natural characteristic that makes them humans. As they lived together through the ages, they developed some patterns of relationships which sequentially engendered situation of peace and conflict. Humans have from time to time oscillated between peace and conflict. As humans are intrinsically hedonistic, they cannot survive in a crisis prone atmospheric condition because it is not congenial to their very nature; they unceasingly continue to search for peace in the period of conflicts, insecurity, and wars. In recognition of the quintessential of peace (absence of conflicts) for human progress on the one hand, and the preponderance of conflicts and wars on the other hands, states are intensifying efforts to promote peace through the duo concepts of peace building and conflict resolution.

It is important to note that the shrinking distance among states living within the global circumferences as well as advancement made in science and technology has some telling effects on the ways of doing things in the 21st century.

Crises, political/religious violence, terroristic acts, along with there accompanying thunderous threats and sophisticated dimensions - especially in the modern time - cannot be any longer ignored nor tolerated. This in turn makes peace building and conflict resolution a herculean task. Conflicts in the world, and particularly in Nigeria, which were hitherto considered the domain of men due to their strength and aggressiveness have come to be identified with women as both actors and victims. In the Boko Haram crisis that engulfed the North East Nigeria which ranks and files is acclaimed to be “technically defeated”, women engage in acts of terrorism as volunteers convinced of the ideology. Others are forcefully co-opted or hypnotized to commit suicide. This implies that women are victims as well as victimizers in the ugly security challenge that Nigeria’s state has been battling with. Thus, a need for mainstreaming them in peace building and conflict resolution process. Women’s roles in addressing conflict, violence and extremism have been highlighted in a number of studies. Women are not only victims of violence and conflict; they also play important roles in international peace and security efforts, including conflict resolution and peace-building. They are also targeted as audience and potential partners in countering violent extremism and de-radicalization (Fink & Barakaat, 2013: 4).

2. Definition of Concepts

2.1 Peace Building

Peacebuilding is difficult to define and even more difficult to achieve in practice. But there is a need for some definitions which will guide stakeholders in achieving peace in practical terms. Lambourne (2004:3) defines peacebuilding as “strategies designed to promote a secure and stable lasting peace in which the basic human needs of the population are met and violent conflicts do not recur. This definition, explains Lambourne, takes a long-term focus and incorporates the goals of both ‘negative peace’ and ‘positive peace’. Galtung distinguished between negative peace as the outcome of efforts to stop physical or personal violence (direct violence), and positive peace as

the goal of efforts to end indirect structural and cultural violence (indirect violence) that threaten the economic, social and cultural well-being and identity of individual human beings and groups. Porter (2007) further elucidates that the understandings of *peace* have expanded from negative peace as merely the absence of war, armed conflict or violence, to positive peace, which requires the resolution of root causes of conflicts and the maintenance of sustainable peace.

Peacebuilding is, in the words of Boutros-Ghali (1992: 8), ‘rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war and strife; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit among nations formally at war’. Brahimi (2000: 2-3) defines peacebuilding as ‘activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war’. It should be understood that peacebuilding is objectively focused on the prevention of conflicts to the bearest minimum to the extent of ensuring *stable peace* which Boulding (1978: 13) describes as ‘a situation in which the probability of war is so small that it does not really enter into the calculations of any of the people involved’. Building a culture of peace implies trying to put in place the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity , human right, and equality between men and women.

2.2 Conflict Resolution

This concept has a direct link to the concept of peacebuilding. It is a truism that peace cannot be appreciated until the devastating consequences of conflict are witnessed in an erstwhile peaceful society. Conflict is one of the consequent features of human interaction and cannot be eliminated but can be minimised when properly managed. Its proper management and transformation are essential for peace and progress in human society (Omilusi, 2003). When conflict does occur, the state, along with other stakeholders, swings into action to get to its root cause with the intent of resolving it. Conflict should not be confused with dispute. Illuminating on the subtle difference between

the two concepts, Burton posits that though the terms are used interchangeably, as are settlement and resolution. In the emerging literature on conflict resolution these terms have distinctive meanings. ‘disputes’, he explained, involve negotiable interest, while ‘conflicts’ are concerned with issues that are not negotiable, issues that are related to ontological human needs that cannot be compromised. Accordingly, settlement refers to negotiated outcomes of disputes, while resolution refers to outcomes of conflict situation that must satisfy the inherent needs of all. In view of this, we have dispute settlement and conflict resolution.

2.3 Gender mainstreaming

According to the European Community (1995–2005), gender mainstreaming involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilizing all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situation of men and women (gender perspective). In her 1996 submission, the Commission re-defines it as the systematic integration of the respective situations, priorities and needs of women and men in all policies and with a view to promoting equality between women and men and mobilizing all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account, at the planning stage, their effects on the respective situation of women and men in implementation, monitoring and evaluation. (Commission of the European Communities 1996: 2) The concept of gender mainstreaming has been defined by the United Nations as

The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women

and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality (United Nations, 1997).

The concept of gender mainstreaming calls for the systematic incorporation of gender issues throughout all governmental institutions and policies. It effectively entered the mainstream of international public policy in September 1995, when it featured in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which defined the term broadly and committed the institutions of the UN system to the systematic incorporation of a gender perspective into policy-making. Before then it featured in the EC parlance in 1991, when it appeared as a relatively small but innovative element in the Third Action Programme on Equal Opportunities, though the concept remained unrealized during the Third Programme itself (1991–6). As Pollack & Hafner-Burton (2000: 434) rightly put it;

Gender mainstreaming is a potentially revolutionary concept, which promises to bring a gender dimension into all EU policies. Yet, gender mainstreaming is also an extraordinarily demanding concept, which requires the adoption of a gender perspective by all the central actors in the policy process – some of whom may have little experience or interest in gender issues.

Braunmühl (2014: 7) posits that gender mainstreaming is explicitly a top-down strategy which in principle obliges the management of an organisation to do whatever is required to fully accommodate gender equality – over time renamed ‘gender justice’ – in its activities. From the above elaboration of the concept, it can be argued that gender mainstreaming is the interweaving of gender perspectives in all walks of life as this enhances efficient management of diversity in every aspect of policy-making.

3. Theoretical Framework

Gender mainstreaming is indeed a new and evolving concept in the literature on peace building and conflict resolution. Most literature

in this area are basically androcentric. With the changes in the dimensions and complexity of the causes, nature and management of conflicts in the rapidly complicating world which has seen women becoming more visible in the arena of conflicts both as victims and victimizers, researchers are turning attention to gender perspectives. Toeing this line of thought, 'Feminist Peace and Conflict Theory' (FPCT) is adopted as the analytical lens to bring to the fore the under-utilized women utility in the process of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This theory presupposes the need of visibility of women in conflicts and a broader understanding of security issues. FPCT introduced the interconnectedness of all forms of violence: domestic, societal, state based and inter-state and its gendered dimension. It critically discussed the collaboration of the 'Beautiful Soul', as Jean Bethke Elshtain (1987) choose to label women, in the machinery of violence (Weber, 2006). The moral argument of men as makers of war and women as victims of war was the dominant analysis in FPCT until the late nineteen-eighties. 'Her-story', a feminist coinage from the early nineteen-seventies stressed the absence of women from 'His-story' in conventional historiography. It is also argued on the basis of their inherent peacefulness enacted by motherhood and caring that women are embodiment of peace. Hence war is not only affecting women disproportionately, it is the ultimate attack on 'feminine' non-violent ideals (ibid).

However, Weber elucidates that the experience of female fighters in Nicaragua (Margaret Randall 1994), Vietnam (Olivia Bennett 1995) and elsewhere made a deep impact in the feminist peace discourse. In the wake of acknowledging women's experiences in war, both as active fighters as well as victims, the question of inherent peacefulness and maternal thinking were shattered. Aggression and submission as gendered adjectives conditioning men and women were reflected anew (Weber, 2006). Similarly, the unfolding scenarios of wars across the globe, crises and conflict situations in the North East's experience of Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis espouses the changing notion and roles of women. They are becoming historical figures to be reckon with. Now they make

history as active bomb carriers and peace builders and makers; this essentially makes them victims, victimizers and peace ambassadors. Be that as it may, women make a vital contribution to maintaining peace because they are mostly affected by crises. The non-violent potential of 'feminine virtues' can be utilized to create a peaceful world.

4. Legal Framework in Support of Women in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

Advocacy for women mainstreaming in the topic under discussion is not without legal basis. Chapter 14 (2) (b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that 'The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government'. It also states in Chapter 17 (2) (a) that 'In furtherance of the social order, every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law'. These are the constitutional basis for women's and girls' equal participation in public life, including in matters that have to do with peace and security. It is also a universal principle that the primary responsibility for providing security and ensuring human rights lies with national governments. In addition to the universal principles of non-discrimination and that the state bears primary responsibility for the security and human rights of its citizens; Nigeria is a state party to major human rights instruments. These include both the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and its Protocol on the Rights of the African Woman, although neither has yet been domesticated. (Nwadinobi & Maguire, 2013: 13).

International recognition and acceptance of women's inclusion in peacebuilding activities has increased globally, bolstered by the development of a policy framework on women, peace and security that began with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, followed by a further six resolutions on women and peacebuilding. This was the first resolution to recognize the gendered impact of war and conflict on communities. It highlights the importance of

including women in peace processes and stabilization efforts. It was followed by six additional resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106 and 2122) that call for the full and equal participation of women at all levels of peacebuilding, from early conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction (International IDEA, 2015: 12)

5. Women and Peace Building in North Eastern Nigeria

The impacts of women in peace building and conflict resolution have not been well felt in Nigeria and particularly in the North East. This accounts for their perpetual marginalization in all stages of decision making on far reaching issues with have direct bearing on them. In her findings on the role of women in building community resilience in the North East, Hamman-Obels (2017: 59-60) submits that women are disadvantaged and marginalized in comparison to men across many socio-developmental indices, such as family and domestic matters, inheritance, education, ownership rights, business, labour market and earnings, etc. The socio-economic development indicators for women in the North East are among the lowest in the country. There has been a decline in the educational index between 2010 and 2013, from 0.6 to .55, in comparison to other zones, in addition to having the lowest life expectancy index for the same period (NBS, 2013).

From the above depiction of the status of women in the North East, not much will be expected of them because of their marginalized status. However, despite being pushed to the lower rung of the societal ladder, there are few women who broke the marble ceiling and pushed their ways to the public domain. They have in no small measure contributed to the peace building process aimed at bringing an end to a decade long crises in the North East. A foremost youth-centered vigilante group called Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has been very instrumental in curtailing the advances of Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East. The CJTF, which originated in Maiduguri was later to spread her operations to other states of the North-East. They work with various security agencies to clip

the terrorists' wings. Conversely, what is seldomly mentioned about the CJTF operations is the roles of women who make up its rank and file members. The success of CJTF has been highly gendered in favour of male members of the group while the contributions of women have been negligently overlooked. Hamman-Obels (2017: 74-75) gives an instance of the crucial roles played by women members of the group in providing protection to IDP camps by carrying out body searches on women. This exposes them to direct attacks of suicide bombers; risking their lives in a bid to enthrone peace and dethrone violence. These young female CJTF members similarly provide security and protection in many LGAs that the CJTF covers, including protection to LGA offices besides the community.

Let us now mention some brave women whose adventures in installing peace in the face of violent terrorism deserve commendation. Most notable is Barr. Aisha Wakili (also known as mama Boko Haram) who in 2016 was declared wanted by the military over her relationship with Boko Haram. She is a resident of Maiduguri and an erstwhile member of the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North set up by Jonathan's Administration (Nwosu & Ukaegbu, 2016). Interestingly, a 67 year old woman by the name Hajiya Zara is among the first women in Borno State dedicated to fighting against the Boko Haram insurgency. She was pushed to take up arms against the terrorists (daring the societal assigned gender role) after the killing of her husband and children by the insurgents. Her bravery accorded her the rear privillage to achieve many feats, the most stunning of all was her ability to apprehend a female bomb carrier on a *Sallah* (festival) day and handed her over to the military JTF. Her dogged determination to ensure that outlaws are apprehended and peace reigned in her crisis-torn-apart community earned her the popular name 'Zara JTF' (Chinade & Bivan, 2015).

6. Impediments to Women's Mainstreaming in Peace Building Process

While a consensus among international actors has been built around the need to involve women in peace processes more proactively, it is remarkable that after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, women's agency and their contributions to peace and democratization processes have been severely restricted (Nwadinobi & Maguire, 2013: 13). Where women have taken part in peace negotiations and peace agreements including gender-sensitive provisions, their experiences in both peace and conflict remain largely unnoticed. This consequently denies them the opportunity to put to valuable use their experiences and knowledge of conflict on the one hand and participation in the process of peace building on the other hand. A research conducted by Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) in 2013 found gender-based discrimination to be institutional across the security sector- a most prominent sectorial stakeholder in installing peace in conflict situations. Some of the impediments to women visibility in peace building are adumbrated below:

7. Discriminatory Social Norms

While the specifics of social norms (expressed as cultural, traditional or religious) vary across Nigeria, the marginalisation of women and girls is the single common factor and it influences all other obstacles. North-East is not an exemption.

7.1 Colonialism

This has been identified as one of the historical contradictions that denigrated the status of women in Nigeria during the colonial era. Some of the changes brought by European rule, argues Falola, affected gender relations in a way that favored men at the expense of women. Colonial institutions were male dominated. Europeans brought with them the idea that men were more important than women, the Victorian belief that the place of women was in the home to cook and look after their children, the idea that economic and political changes were shaped and controlled by men. (Falola, 2002: 291).

7.2 Representation in the media

Print and electronic media either under-report, black out or relegate women-led initiatives to back pages, small print or fashion inserts. Peace initiatives are not generally reported except where there is a sensationalist element for example 'women in a peace march half naked'. Women have generally had less capacity to cultivate media relations. Added to these are the general shortcomings in news reporting such as lack of community radio.

7.3 Tokenism

Generally, women are not engaged in high level peace initiatives. However, when they are invited to such initiatives they are often assigned auxiliary and subsidiary roles. Thus, with the exception of cases where women are called upon to address 'women, peace and security' issues, women's involvement in mainstream peace and security events is still often relegated to domestic, logistical or nurturing roles, rather than as mediators, panellists or negotiators.

7.4 Gender-Based Violence

Violent conflict often involves or results in the use or threat of gender-based violence against women and girls. This comes in form of sexual violence by armed forces or groups; and for this and similar reasons, women and girls are prevented from going outside their homes for fear of violence. This accordingly militates against women playing any meaningful role in conflict resolution. Thus, they hardly speak out nor stand against the violence.

7.5 Religion

Religious interpretations are often used to justify women's secondary position and their exclusion from public life. Both Christian and Muslim conservatives are ideologically against women visibility in the public realm. This notional conception of women creates an environment where women are expected to behave in certain ways which do not include adopting leadership roles.

7.6 The Nature of Conflict

When conflict takes a violent turn, it constitutes an obstacle to women's participation. In the North East, women's civil society organisations that have worked on sectoral development issues are finding it increasingly difficult to meet, let alone form strategies for peace-building. At the same time, women who speak out about violent conflict risk being targeted either personally or through their families.

8. Conclusion

This paper argues that mainstreaming women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution is a positive step in the right direction. Women's participation in peace processes strengthens the possibility of long-lasting peace agreements, offers new insights and provides important lessons for promoting peace and averting conflict. This in part is due to their peculiar experiences in conflict and post conflict situation and because they are more vulnerable than men. Similarly, at the heart of peacebuilding is the idea of meeting needs for security and order, reasonable standard of living, and recognition of identity and worth. Gender mainstreaming is tantamount to recognizing women identity and worth. It concludes that women know better how to handle gender (female) related issues as they bear on insecurity and peace. While it is true that men sympathize with female victims of violent terrorism experienced in the North East, they cannot empathize as women do.

9. Recommendations

- Women should be engaged in peace building process as this invigorates the possibility of a long-lasting peace.
- Women's roles in peace building should be applauded and given proper reportage in order to encourage other active fellows in aspiring to be ambassador of peace.
- Religious scholars should be incorporated in orienting womenfolk to appreciate their relevance in promoting peace and assisting, especially, female victims of conflict. This is paramount because religion has been used

interpretively to bar women from the public realm.

- The Women's Peace and Security Agenda of the UN Resolution 1325 should be adopted and perhaps adapted to improve protection of girls and women.
- Government should invest massively in girl's child and women education. This is hinged on the firm belief that education by its very nature helps in jettisoning some of the cultural beliefs that stand in the way of actualizing women potentials in virtual endeavours such as paece building.

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