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Women Empowerment and Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Contexts: The Role of UN Women in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, 2014-2020

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Abstract

Women's exclusion from formal peacebuilding processes remains a critical challenge in conflict-affected communities, despite their longstanding contributions to conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery. This study examines the role of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in advancing women's empowerment and participation in peacebuilding in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria, from 2014 to 2020. Specifically, it investigates the nature of UN Women's empowerment programmes, assesses their influence on women's empowerment and peacebuilding participation, and identifies the challenges affecting their effectiveness. Grounded in empowerment theory, the study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, including an examination of UN Women reports and relevant policy frameworks. The findings indicate that women in Jos North had served as first responders, informal mediators, and interfaith peacebuilders before the introduction of formal interventions. UN Women reinforced these roles through the Women Peace Mentors programme, capacity-building activities,

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community dialogue platforms, advocacy, and political inclusion initiatives. Although these interventions enhanced women's visibility and participation in peacebuilding, persistent structural and sociocultural barriers constrained their sustainable empowerment. The study concludes that strengthening community-based empowerment programmes, expanding the Women Peace Mentors initiative, improving collaboration between UN Women and local stakeholders, and addressing barriers to women's participation are essential for more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding. By providing localized empirical evidence from Northern Nigeria, the study extends gender and peacebuilding scholarship and offers practical insights for developing context-sensitive interventions under the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment; Peacebuilding; UN Women; Women, Peace, and Security; Northern Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State has experienced recurrent ethno-religious conflict since 2001, resulting in loss of lives, displacement, and socio-economic disruption (Bulus et al., 2020, p. 192). Women have been disproportionately affected due to structural inequalities and patriarchal norms, yet they have also played significant roles in sustaining community cohesion and informal peace processes (UN Women, 2015).

In response to global commitments under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, UN Women implemented targeted interventions in Plateau State from 2014 to 2020 (United Nations, 2019). UN Women's intervention in Plateau State began in 2014, driven by the need to address both the ongoing insecurity and the structural inequalities that marginalized women in the region (UN Women, 2016).

Through the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and complementary empowerment programs, UN Women launched targeted initiatives in conflict-prone Local Government Areas, including Jos North, Mangu, Riyom, and Wase Local Government Areas (UN Women, 2016), to enhance women's leadership, promoting economic self-reliance, supporting community mediation efforts, and strengthening early warning and prevent gender-based violence (UN Women, 2016). This study examines both grassroots

women's contributions and institutional interventions, assessing their impact on peacebuilding processes in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

UNSCR 1325 (2000) marked a global shift in recognizing women as central actors in peace and security. Scholars such as Cohn, et al. (2004) and Shepherd (2021) identify its three pillars: participation, protection, and prevention. However, implementation gaps persist globally, particularly at local levels in conflict-affected regions. Studies by Coomaraswamy (2015) and UN Security Council reports (2023) highlight limited translation of policy into practice. In Nigeria, these gaps are evident in communities such as Jos North, where institutional frameworks exist but women's inclusion remains inconsistent.

Women and Peacebuilding

Feminist scholars such as Galtung (1996) and McKay and Mazurana (2007) emphasize women's grassroots peacebuilding roles, including mediation, humanitarian response, and social cohesion. Sorensen (1998) and Krause (2019) further demonstrate women's agency in informal peace networks. However, essentialist interpretations of women as "naturally peaceful" are critiqued for limiting recognition of strategic political agency. In Northern Nigeria, studies by Bulus et al. (2020) and El-Bushra et al. (2014) show women's active engagement in reconciliation, though often without institutional recognition.

Cultural and Institutional Barriers

Women's participation in peacebuilding is constrained by patriarchy, religious norms, illiteracy, and economic exclusion. The UN Women Baseline Report (2016) highlights structural barriers such as restricted mobility, low political representation, and gender-based violence. Osori (2017) and Women for Women International (2024) further emphasize backlash against women's public engagement. These constraints underscore the importance of institutional support mechanisms such as UN Women's interventions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Kabeer's Empowerment Theory, which emphasizes increasing women's agency, resources, and participation in decision-making processes. It is complemented by Feminist Theory, which critiques patriarchal structures, and Positive

Peace Theory, which focuses on building sustainable institutions and relationships that reduce structural violence. These frameworks collectively guide analysis of how UN Women's interventions influenced women's empowerment and peacebuilding outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study design was adopted. Data were collected through 10 key informant interviews, including UN Women officials, women leaders, Women Peace Mentors, civil society actors, and community leaders. Two focus group discussions (7–10 participants each) were conducted with women in conflict-affected communities. Secondary data included UN Women reports, policy documents, and academic literature. Data were analyzed thematically.

RESULTS

Grassroots Women's Roles in Peacebuilding

The study finds that women in Jos North LGA acted as first responders, mediators, and community mobilizers during periods of violent conflict. They organized peace marches, provided humanitarian support, and facilitated dialogue across religious and ethnic divides. Key actors included: Esther Ibanga, Khadijat Hawaja, Ladi Madaki, Mairo M. K. Sani and Tabitha Dayuru. These women played critical roles in sustaining peace at the community level.

Reinforcing the foregoing assertion, one respondent, in a Focus Group Discussion A 2025 states that:

*"Whenever violence starts, women are the first to move across communities to check on families and calm tensions before it escalates" (*Focus Group Discussion A, seven participants, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, October 10, 2025). Similarly, in another interview a community woman in Angwan Rogo observed: *"We used our market groups and prayer meetings to talk to each other and stop revenge attacks" (*Interview with a community woman, Angwan Rogo, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, October 11, 2025). In a similar Interview, the Women leader of Farin Gada stated: *"Even during crisis, women were the ones feeding displaced families and convincing youths not to fight" (*Interview with Saratu Micah, Women Leader, Farin Gada, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, age 45, October 11, 2025).

The foregoing demonstrate that women function as immediate responders and informal mediators, often intervening before formal security structures are activated. These responses highlight themes of caregiving, trust-building, and social legitimacy in grassroots peacebuilding.

UN Women Interventions In Jos North LGA From 2014 To 2020

a. Women Peace Mentors (WPM) Programme

The WPM programme trained over 120 women across Plateau, Adamawa, and Gombe States in conflict analysis, mediation, advocacy, and leadership. These mentors served as links between grassroots communities and formal governance structures.

In her assessment of the benefit of WPM Programme, the Women Peace Mentor, Jos North L.G.A (2020) declared that:

"*The training helped me understand how to mediate conflicts without taking sides. Before, we only talked, but now we use proper dialogue methods"* (UN Women, 2017). Similarly, in an earlier interview in 2019, the Women Leader, Jos North L.G.A affirmed that: "*UN Women gave us a platform to be recognized. Before, we were working, but nobody noticed our efforts" (Women for Women International, 2020).*

Equally highlighting the benefits of the WPM Programme, a UN Women Peace Mentor stated: *"We were trained to detect early conflict signs and intervene before violence starts" (Women for Women International, 2020).* Similarly, another UN Women Peace Mentor Justina Ngwobia, stated: *"We have trained over 35 women in peacebuilding and conflict reporting in Jos North LGA, Plateau State" (*UN Women, 2017). Also highlighting the benefit of the program, Justina Ngwobia's Mentee, Helen Bako, stated that: *"I learned that I am not just a housewife but a decision maker in my community" (UN Women, 2017).*

Mentors facilitated interfaith dialogue, coached emerging leaders, and institutionalized local peace practices.

b. **UN Women Capacity Building and Leadership Training**

UN Women trained women in conflict analysis, leadership, and advocacy. Beneficiaries reported increased confidence, participation in community leadership, and emergence of Women Peace Mentors. Some participants transitioned into political and advisory roles. A UN Women official confirmed that trained women increasingly participated in peace committees and public decision-making platforms.

In an Interview with an official with the Jos North Local Government Area on the importance of the WPM, the official stated that: *"After the training, women started speaking boldly in meetings and even contesting leadership positions" (*Interview with a Jos North LGA official, Plateau State, age 50, October 10, 2025). In a similar Interview with Antonia Timothy John in Jenta Adamu, she emphasized that: *"Before, I felt I had no voice. After the training, I now attend community meetings and speak for other women" (*Interview with Antonia John, Jenta Adamu, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, self-employed, age 47, October 12, 2025). Similarly, in an Interview with Helen Paul, a Civil society partner, she stated that: *"The training transformed women into active peace actors, not just observers" (*Interview with Helen Paul, civil society partner, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, age 49, October 12, 2025).

c. **Community Dialogue and Mediation Support**

UN Women established dialogue platforms involving women, youth, and traditional leaders. The platforms reduced tensions and strengthened interfaith trust. Women-led peace networks in Farin Gada and Angwan Rogo became key structures for conflict early warning and resolution.

Enumerating the benefits of the community dialogue, the Women leader of Farin Gada stated: *"For the first time, Christian and Muslim women sat together to solve problems" (*Interview with the Women Leader of Farin Gada, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, university lecturer, age 49, October 11, 2025). In similar vein, another UN Women Women Peace Mentor, Agnes Wanpe, observed: *"Our monthly peace meetings have reduced fear between communities" (*UN Women, 2017). The same was the response of a Community leader of Jenta Adamu who stated: *"Women helped restore trust where men had failed" (*Interview with a community leader, Jenta Adamu, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, marketer at Jos Electricity Distribution, age 37, October 12, 2025).

d. Advocacy and Policy Engagement

Women supported by UN Women contributed to the development of local action plans on UNSCR 1325. Advocacy efforts increased women's representation in peace committees and governance structures. Media and ICT programs also expanded women's visibility in peace discourse. This was confirmed during a Focus Group Discussion where a Women rights activist in Jos North LGA stressed that: *"We went to the council and demanded inclusion in peace committees" (*Interview with a women's rights activist, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, age 42, October 10, 2025).

The outcome of women's request was reveal by a Civil society actor who stated: *"Women's voices are now part of local peace planning" (*Interview with a civil society actor, Tudun Wada, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, age 48, October 11, 2025).

This was reiterated by a UN Women official who stressed: *"The LAP on WPS was a major milestone for Jos North LGA, Plateau State" (*UN Women, 2017).

e. Political and Civic Participation

UN Women supported women's political participation through training, mentorship, and civic education. Despite barriers such as illiteracy, cultural norms, and financial constraints, women increasingly engaged in elections, advocacy, and leadership roles. The Women's Situation Room contributed to peaceful elections and gender-sensitive monitoring.

Interview with some women confirmed the foregoing positive political development. For instance, a female aspirant in Dogon Dutse, Fatima Dauda, stated: *"I contested for councilor after UN Women training" (*Interview with Fatima Dauda, female aspirant, Dogon Dutse, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, dentist, age 49, October 13, 2025). Similar interaction with eight (8) participants in Focus Group Discussion B, even though lamented that: *"Financial and cultural barriers still limit us" (*Focus Group Discussion B, eight participants, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, October 15, 2025). Focus Group Discussion A, comprising seven (7) participants, testified that: *"Women are now more visible in civic life than before" (*Focus Group Discussion A, seven participants, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, October 13, 2025).

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that women in Jos North Local Government Area, Plateau State, are not passive victims of conflict but active peacebuilders whose contributions are embedded in social, religious, and economic structures. UN Women's interventions significantly strengthened these roles by providing institutional support, training, and policy engagement platforms. However, empowerment remains constrained by persistent patriarchal norms, economic inequality, and limited institutional enforcement of gender policies.

The study reveals a dual dynamic: while grassroots women possess strong informal peace capacities, institutional actors such as UN Women are critical in transforming these capacities into recognized leadership roles. Nevertheless, the sustainability of these gains is uncertain without structural reforms addressing education, political inclusion, and cultural resistance. The findings align with empowerment theory, which emphasizes that agency must be supported by access to resources and institutional structures.

Economic and Social Empowerment Outcomes

Beyond peacebuilding, UN Women's programmes improved women's economic resilience through skills acquisition and financial empowerment initiatives. Many respondents reported increased financial independence and enhanced capacity to contribute to household and community stability.

As one participant explained:

"When women have something doing, they don't depend too much, and they can even help settle disputes in their families" (Focus Group Discussion A, seven participants, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, October 13, 2025).

This underscores the link between economic empowerment and peacebuilding, as financially independent women are better positioned to influence decision-making and promote stability.

Socially, awareness campaigns and interfaith dialogue contributed to changing perceptions of women's roles. A respondent observed:

"*People now see that women can speak and contribute to community decisions" (Interview with a community member, Tudun Wada, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, age 35, October 10, 2025).*

Challenges of Interventions

Despite these gains, several constraints affected the effectiveness of interventions, including patriarchal norms, funding limitations, and insecurity. Cultural resistance emerged strongly in the data, as one respondent stated:

"Some men still believe women should not speak in meetings" (Interview with a women leader, Jos North, 2020; Women for Women International, 2020).

Additionally, sustainability challenges were noted by a female participant, Talatu Jonah, who lamented that:

"After the programme ends, it becomes difficult to continue because there is no support" (Interview with Talatu Jonah, female participant, Jos North LGA, Plateau State, age 39, October 14, 2025).

Conclusively, the foregoing responses highlight structural barriers that limit the long-term impact of empowerment initiatives, in addition to security constraints such recurrent crises.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that UN Women played a significant role in strengthening women's participation in peacebuilding in Jos North LGA, Plateau state, from 2014 to 2020. However, sustainable empowerment requires deeper structural transformation beyond training and advocacy. Grassroots women remain central to peace processes, but their contributions must be institutionally recognized and protected to ensure lasting peace and gender equality.

Recommendations

i. Institutionalize Women Peace Mentors in local governance structures.

ii. Sustain funding for grassroots women peace networks.

iii. Strengthen women's political pathways.

iv. Engage traditional and religious leaders in gender inclusion.

v. Integrate economic empowerment into peacebuilding.

Strengthen media visibility of women peace actors.

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