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Women's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Study of Selected Areas in Taraba State, 1991-2023

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Abstract

Violent conflicts arising from ethnic, religious, political, land-related, citizenship, and resource-based disputes have shaped peacebuilding needs in Taraba State, Nigeria. This study examined women's participation in conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peacebuilding in Jalingo, Wukari, and Sardauna Local Government Areas from 1991 to 2023. Using a qualitative approach grounded in documentary and historical evidence, the study analyzed the nature and consequences of violent conflicts and women's contributions to peacebuilding in the selected areas. The findings indicate that women and children were among the groups most severely affected, experiencing the loss of family members, displacement, property destruction, livelihood losses, economic hardship, and disruption of social relations. Women also played important roles in promoting peace through religious mobilization, including prayer and fasting; community mobilization; women's associations; peace marches and protests; interfaith engagement; advocacy; dialogue; and informal reconciliation initiatives. Despite these contributions, patriarchal norms, institutional bias, and limited access to decision-making constrained their participation in formal peace and security structures. The study demonstrates the importance of women's community-based and informal peacebuilding contributions while identifying persistent barriers to institutional participation. These findings emphasize the need for meaningful recognition, institutional support, and women's inclusion in peace and security decision-making to advance sustainable peacebuilding in Taraba State.

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Keywords: Women's Participation; Peacebuilding; Conflict Resolution; Gender Inclusion; Taraba State

Introduction

Conflict is a ubiquitous phenomenon in every human society. It has been in existence time immemorial and forms part of the core characteristics of societies across the globe (Galtung, 1996; Coser, 1956). Suffice it to say, there is no human society, whether developed or undeveloped, that does not experience one form of conflict or the other (Deutsch, Coleman, and Marcus 2014; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2016). It is against this backdrop that conflict, as a subject matter, attracts the attention of scholars from diverse academic backgrounds, especially in the arts and social sciences. In other words, there are diverse extant studies that have examined the concept of conflict and peacebuilding from different academic fields such as history, sociology, communication studies, amongst others (Lederach 1997; Barash and Webel 2014; Galtung 1996).

At both the global and local scenes, conflict as a phenomenon is catalysed by several factors such as struggle over political power, ethnic identity, religion, natural resources and land ownership, amongst others (Coser 1956; Galtung 1996; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall 2016). Historical evidence from extant literature reveals that conflicts, when not properly managed, extend beyond deaths and displacement of individuals but also cause economic hardship, psychological trauma and breakdown (Barash and Webel 2014; United Nations 2015). From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that violent conflict has an adverse consequence on human society as a whole; however, these consequences in most cases take a gendered dimension where women and children are mostly and enormously affected (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; United Nations Women 2015). Agbu, Zhema, and Agbu (2020) observed that during conflict, women are mostly vulnerable, as they may lose spouses, lose their sources of income and also assume increased responsibility for household survival and childcare. Due to the vulnerable nature of women in conflict-related situations, extant literature has, over the years, portrayed women as victims of conflict who needed to be protected (Cockburn 2007; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). However, recent literature has established that women have the potential to promote peacebuilding in conflict situations (Paffenholz 2018; O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin,

and Paffenholz 2015). In other words, women are integral actors in conflict prevention, mediation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding (United Nations 2000; Paffenholz 2018). This perspective has taken more of a spotlight at the international level with the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which underlines women's role in peace and security processes (United Nations 2000). In the same vein, studies have shown that women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding is a determinant of more inclusive and sustainable peace processes (O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz 2015; Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018). For instance, the research by Krause, Krause, and Bränfors (2018) revealed that the inclusion of women in peace negotiations can have a positive impact on the quality and length of peace.

In Nigeria, in many communities, women's role in peace-building is not fully recognised, especially in societies with deep-rooted patriarchy that restricts women's participation in formal decision-making. In such communities, women are often involved in informal peace processes via family, religious, community, humanitarian, dialogue, and reconciliation processes. These interventions can thus play an important role in the re-establishment of relations and peaceful coexistence, even in the absence of formal negotiation and security frameworks.

In an environment like Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, communal, political and resource-based conflicts have been a bane to peaceful coexistence for decades. The case study of Taraba State is an important context for understanding the relationship between women, violent conflict and peacebuilding. Taraba State has a history of violent ethnic and religious conflicts, property rights issues, citizenship rights, political representation and resource competition since it was founded in 1991. Therefore, this study adopted a qualitative case study approach based on documentary and historical evidence to examine the nature and consequences of violent conflicts in the selected areas and also analyse the roles played by women in peacebuilding

Selected Cases of Violent Conflicts in Taraba State

Taraba State has suffered from persistent cases of violent conflict since it was carved out of Gongola State in 1991 (Momodu, Matudi, & Momodu, 2013; Daudu, Momodu, & Owonikoko, 2025). One of the core factors that may be responsible for catalysing this violent conflict in Taraba State is associated with the fact that Taraba is one

of the most ethnically diverse states in Nigeria, with the relationships of some of its ethnic and religious groups being adversely impacted by disputes associated with land, political representation, traditional authority, religion, citizenship and access to economic resources amongst others (Momodu, Matudi, & Momodu, 2013; 2025; Suleiman, Wunti, Adamu, & Yahaya, 2025). Additionally, changes in political and administrative borders, such as the establishment of new Local Government Areas, have also played a role in identity, belonging, and territorial conflicts. Another core factor is responsible for violent conflict in Taraba State is the competition between farming and pastoral communities, which has also been exacerbated by environmental pressures, such as the shrinking of grazing land and the scarcity of water, as well as land degradation (Garba, Dabo, Abdullahi, Yusha'u, Mohammed, Babaji, & Bala, 2025; Urutsi, 2026).

The history of violent conflict in Taraba State shows that conflict has manifested itself in various forms in different communities in the State. In Jalingo, there was religious conflict in 1992 after some conflict between Muslim and Christian students (Haruna, 2025). The crisis then spiralled out of control of the school, leading to loss of life and the demolition of churches, mosques, homes, shops and markets (Haruna, 2025). In addition to its destructive impact, the conflict has disrupted economic activities and family life.

The Jukun-Tiv clash in Wukari and environs is one of the most notable incidents of inter-group clashes in Taraba State history (Odigbo, 2018). During the Jukun-Tiv crisis from 1990-1992, numerous residential buildings were destroyed, people lost their lives, and large numbers of people were displaced (Agbu, Zhema, & Agbu, 2020; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1996). The 1990-1992 crisis recorded widespread devastation, including the burning of towns and villages and the displacement of large numbers of people from affected communities (Agbu, Zhema, & Agbu, 2020). The conflict was soon overshadowed by the 2001-2002 conflict involving deep-rooted disputes over traditional authority, land rights, indigene-settler relations, political representation and citizenship claims (Alubo, 2006; Agbu, Zhema, & Agbu, 2020). Women and children were especially impacted due to the death of their loved ones, homelessness, displacement, and the loss of livelihoods (Agbu, Zhema, & Agbu, 2020).

Wukari has also had to deal with several ethno-religious crises that occurred between 2013 and 2015 between Hausa/Fulani Muslims and predominantly non-Muslim communities, mainly Jukun communities (Momodu, Matudi, & Momodu, 2013). This

period of violence led to the loss of life, destruction of property, displacement and disruption of socio-economic activities (Abuh, Amayll, & Ogwuche, 2017). Women bore the brunt of the effects of bereavement, loss of livelihood, such as farms, and a heightened burden of ensuring the life and livelihood of displaced households. These crises collectively thus affected not just the physical violence against women and children, but also their social and economic status.

Likewise, there have been frequent violent incidents in Sardauna Local Government Area, especially in the Mambilla Plateau where the Mambilla, Fulani, Kambu, Panso, Kaka and other groups have been involved in violent conflicts (Lenshie, 2012; Lenshie, 2021). Conflicts in the area have been associated with land disputes, ethnicity, citizenship, political competition, religion, and competition over natural resources (Lenshie, 2012). The literature consulted in this study showed that violent confrontation has taken place in various periods, such as 1979-1980, 1982, 2001-2002 and 2016-2017 (Lenshie, 2012; Lenshie, 2021). These conflicts led to casualties and the displacement of people, as well as the relocation of affected people to internally displaced persons' camps and other places of safety (Lenshie, 2021). Women were negatively impacted as they were restricted in movement, and their farming, firewood gathering, household, and livelihood activities were affected by insecurity.

The general trend of violent conflict in Taraba State indicates a relationship between historical grievances, identity politics, resource rivalry, and institutional difficulties. While the immediate cause is not the same in Jalingo, Wukari and Sardauna, the impact has always been on the women and children. They have suffered the loss of loved ones, displacement, homelessness, loss of livelihoods, disruption of their education and more social and economic responsibilities. These impacts offer valuable context in analysing women as victims of violent conflict and the way they are engaged in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes afterwards.

Activities of Women in Resolving Conflicts and Building Peace in Taraba State

Women in Taraba State were among the groups worst hit by violent conflicts; however, they were not just victims of crisis. In all the communities experiencing conflict, women responded to violence through informal and community-based peacebuilding activities that sought to ease tensions, heal relationships, and foster peaceful coexistence.

They typically entered through religious institutions, women's groups, family networks, community groups or collective action. But such contributions were often not part of formal peace negotiations or decision-making processes, especially in patriarchal communities where peace was traditionally considered a man's domain.

The participation of women in peacebuilding was more pronounced in Wukari during the various ethno-religious conflicts that occurred from 2013 to 2015. Women mobilised themselves to play a role in the search for peace despite losing their husbands, children, parents, property and livelihood. The various women's organisations and associations that participated in peace and social stability promotion were the Amfani Multi-Purpose Association, Women in Da'awa Forum, Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria, Christian Women Fellowship, Tsokundi Fadama Association, National Council of Women Society, Ichondi Byepyi Women Association, and Hyuku Widows Multi-Purpose Cooperative. These organisations hosted forums where women could engage in community development and peacebuilding (Suleimuri, Agbu, & Ngati, 2021).

One of the earliest responses by women was through religious mobilisation. Women prayed individually, in groups and organised prayer and fasting in religious places, including churches. These activities were informal aspects of peacebuilding, but they were also expressions by women of mobilisation of communities to promote reconciliation and restore social order. (Ezeh, Opara, & Obi, 2016; Suleimuri, Agbu, & Ngati, 2021).

Women also became more public in their peace efforts in Wukari. Jukun women reportedly formed groups in large numbers and started their march, chanting songs for peace in Wukari on 3 August 2013, as they dressed in black and carried placards. Christian and Muslim women once again went out together on 15th April 2014 to call the conflicting factions to "put down their arms and go to peace. These interventions showed that women could transcend religious lines and unite in making appeals for peace in the midst of religious conflict. (Agbu et al., 2020).

The actions of women were more noticeable on the 6th and 7th November 2015. In Wukari, women in different communities staged a peaceful protest, demonstrating at key places in the town such as Aku-Uka's Palace, the Police station, Police Area Command and the Guest house of the Army Commander. (Suleimuri, Agbu & Ngati, 2021). The women denounced security operatives for exacerbating the crisis in Wukari and called for the

withdrawal of military forces, the lifting of roadblocks and the lifting of the curfew in the town. This demonstration turned out to be a milestone in the quest for peace, and led to involvement from governments, security bodies, human rights groups and supporters from within and outside of Wukari. ((Suleimuri, Agbu & Ngati, 2021).

The Wukari experience reflects the general thesis of this study that women have considerable capacities to resolve conflict and to build peace. Their role was not restricted to a formal negotiation process, however, but extended to community mobilisation, religious engagement, community-based advocacy, dialogue and collective pressure for peace restoration. The evidence of women's peacebuilding activities in Wukari, however, is detailed enough in the source material to allow for a much fuller documentation of activities in Wukari than in Jalingo and Sardauna. Hence, although the study is on selected areas of conflict in the three Local Government Areas, the incidences of direct women's interventions are most developed in the case of Wukari.

However, the experiences of violent conflicts in the three areas of Jalingo, Wukari and Sardauna highlight the need to recognise women as victims and agents of peace. They are close to families and communities, engaged in social and economic life, and active in religious and community life, which gives them the chances to be active in the processes of reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. More recognition and institutional support for women's effective participation in peacebuilding is thus needed, including in formal processes for conflict prevention, mediation, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction.

The literature available on conflicts in Jalingo is not as detailed as that for Wukari in terms of women's peacebuilding interventions. However, the types of social relationships and peace-making processes in the region indicate that women had significant roles within families, religious organisations, and social networks to foster reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Women, including market women, other community members and religious/community leaders, were identified as key players in the impact of the ethno-religious conflicts in Jalingo and in helping to manage the conflict and build social cohesion. Women's role in peacebuilding can be seen broadly in their engagement in informal local and religious peacebuilding networks, where they could facilitate communication, create cross-sectoral relationships and promote the return to normal community life (Babatunde, Garba & Hashimu, 2024; Sunday & Kpana, 2025). Interfaith

dialogue and cooperation are also crucial in Jalingo, as religious institutions create environments for individuals to engage in reconciliation and peacebuilding activities, even if they are not formally represented in official peace talks.

Likewise, the stories of conflict in Sardauna Local Government Area, especially on the Mambilla Plateau, highlight the need to acknowledge the role of women as targets of violence and as agents of recovery and peacebuilding in their communities. Displacement, insecurity and disruption of normal community life have been experienced due to recurrent conflicts involving the Mambilla, Fulani, Kambu and other groups; women and children were among those that had social consequences. Historical experiences on the Mambilla Plateau indicate that violent crises generate IDPs and refugees; and more contemporary crises continue to call for dialogue and community-based mechanisms to restore peaceful coexistence (Kingsley, Mansor, and Enoh, 2023). The regularity of conflict has led to a greater focus on dialogue and representation from various ethnic groups on the Plateau in the peace talks in Sardauna. This community-based work presents valuable opportunities for women, who play a key role in family, farming, trading, religious activities and community relations, to participate in reconciliation and re-establishing relationships following violence. In Mambilla, sustainable peace is reliant on the restoration of relationships between communities that have been impacted by frequent conflicts over issues of identity, belonging and access to resources, particularly about how they have been distributed (The Guardian, 2017)

Conclusion

Violent conflicts have been a major problem in achieving peaceful co-existence and development in Taraba State. The cases selected for analysis in the three Local Government Areas of Jalingo, Wukari and Sardauna have shown that ethnic, religious, land ownership, citizenship, political representation and resource competition are some of the many complex and interrelated causes of conflict. While the causes and dynamics of the violence varied between areas, the effects generally were the same: deaths, property damage, displacement, disruption of livelihoods and the breakdown of social relations.

Women and children were particularly hard hit by the effects of these conflicts. Women not only lost their husbands, children, parents and other relatives, but many were displaced and had their livelihoods taken away. In certain cases, women had to take on the

role of family breadwinners and take care of their families in times of economic hardship and insecurity. However, when women are seen in the conflicts they have chosen to be involved in, it is clear that they were not only victims of violence. Women were also seen playing an important role in peacebuilding, through prayer, fasting, mobilisation of communities, public protests, dialogue and other non-formal peacebuilding processes. Women's involvement in the peace and security process is, however, still largely informal and underutilised in the formal peace and security processes in Taraba State. Even in recent times, women are under-represented in formal decision-making processes due to the "Patriarchal culture", institutional bias and limited opportunities for participation. This marginalisation contributes to the non-engagement of women's experience, knowledge, networks and capacities in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Therefore, the participation of women in peacebuilding in the conflict-affected communities of Jalingo, Wukari, Sardauna and the other communities of Taraba State needs to be regular and meaningful in order for sustainable peace to come about. Support and strengthen government institutions, traditional institutions, security institutions, religious institutions, civil society and private institutions in strengthening women's roles in conflict prevention, mediation, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction. In addition, women are acknowledged as peacemakers, and inclusion of women in the peacebuilding processes in Taraba State can be more inclusive and sustainable.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the study recommends that:

1. Women from diverse ethnic and religious groups should be meaningfully incorporated into formal peace committees, mediation, reconciliation, and other conflict resolution processes.
2. Women's organisations and community-based peacebuilding groups should receive greater institutional, financial, and technical support from government, traditional institutions, civil society organisations, and the private sector.
3. Inclusive peacebuilding structures involving women, traditional and religious leaders, community representatives, and security agencies should be established in conflict-prone communities.

4. Regular interfaith and interethnic dialogue, peace seminars, workshops, and sensitisation programmes should be organised to promote tolerance, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence.

5. Government should expand economic and employment opportunities, particularly for young people, while documenting and integrating women's peacebuilding contributions into policies and programmes for sustainable peace and security in Taraba State.

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