WOMEN AND PEACE BUILDING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of Nigerian women in peace building processes in the country from the colonial era to date; using library research and interview methods. The paper argues that despite economic, political, religious and cultural restrictions, Nigerian women have contributed significantly to peace building in the country. However, their contributions have not been recognized and encouraged by both federal and state governments as women are poorly represented at all levels of decision-making, especially in post-conflict resolution commissions of Inquiries. The near absence of women from these commissions of Inquiry missed out on the contributions of women, which are different from those of men. Women are central to conflict resolution in its entirety. This explains why the United Nations insist that member nations should involve women in all processes of peace. With the present consciousness of women’s involvement in post-conflict resolution, the paper concludes by urging federal and state governments to adopt equitable gender representation in future commissions of Inquiry.

Keywords: Peace building, Post-conflict Resolution, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Violent conflicts and wars have become a reality and a way of life for many West Africans, as every State is experiencing or has had its fair share of it. These conflicts characteristically produce large numbers of victims and refugees, and present the daunting threat of further instability in a sub region already plagued by poverty, disease, corruption and poor governance. The last two decades have taken Nigeria through a plethora of conflicts and increased the level of insecurity which has claimed many lives and property. While the entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflicts and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in the society and their gender. Conflict and crisis are highly gendered activities because women and men not only have different access to power structures and material resources before, during and after the escalation of conflict; they also experience the pre conflict phase, the open conflict, and the post-conflict situation in rather different ways. At the same time, violent conflicts and wars are patriarchal activities which illuminate what is masculine and feminine in society. Men
are given the stereotypical roles of planning warfare, being on the Frontlines and defending communities, while women are described as the passive victims who need to be protected. These descriptions of men and women’s role during violent conflict and war re-enforce patriarchal structures that are not found resonance in today’s contemporary war. While it is true that it is men who predominantly fight; and women stay behind to fend for families and communities, both genders are victims of violence. Women and girls are deliberately and systematically targeted for rape, sexual assault, genital mutilation and forced prostitution and so on; while men and boys are mostly recruited to fight in armies, and perpetuate violence. The contributions of men during wars are clearly articulated, but there have always been incoherence in stating what women’s contributions are.

There are several examples of ways which women individually and collectively contribute to peace building, but these contributions are always overlooked because they take unconventional forms, occur outside formal peace processes, and are considered to be extensions of women’s existing gender roles. At the informal level, women themselves do not recognize their activities as part of peace building effort or initiatives because these are in areas where women are already responsible for the safety of themselves and their families, and providing social services (International Alert 1999).

At the formal level, women are absent from peace processes such as mediations and negotiations, as these mostly involve high –level personalities in decision making spheres where women are absent. It was this issue that the UN landmark Resolution 1325 (2000) attempted to address in paragraph 5 inter alia:

“Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution”.

Though the role of women in peace building has gained prominence in the last few years as a result of concerted efforts by NGOs and International agencies to address the issues of gender and peace building, reaching the ideal of ensuring that women have “equal and full participation” remains a challenge. The recent conflicts and bombings of both private and public places in Nigeria is an indication that peace is inevitable and concrete efforts at building peace must be brought to the front burners. However, such must be inclusive of all interest in the country. Without peace there can be no meaningful development and without women’s involvement in the design and implementation of policies and programmes of conflict resolution and peace building, such activities will fail to achieve its purpose. This paper therefore seeks to examine women’s participation in the peace building process in Nigeria, as well as analyze their roles and contribution to peace in Nigeria.

2. DISCUSSIONS

2.1 PEACE BUILDING AND WOMEN

The relative newness of the term “peace building” is something of popular characterization; while its actual newness in relation to women’s issues, specifically, is even more so. This is reflected in the fact that the term is not used within the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), and the consensus statement adopted by representatives of 181 nations at the 1995 United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. This is in spite of the reality that women’s participation in governance, peace building, human rights
and violence against women are topical issues in contemporary international discourse. Nonetheless, the BPFA serves as a blueprint for women’s global leadership to advance the women’s position. It is a peace building related documents in its own right based on the fact that it focuses on women’s issues in both war and peace times.

However, due to how ubiquitous the term peace building has become within the vocabulary of the UN, national governments, and even nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); after the Beijing conference, feminist peace researchers are evidently curious about meanings attributed to peacbuilding, especially as it relates to women. Proceeding from the basic premise that senior policy-making men’s usage of the term, like that of Boutrous Ghali in 1992, differed from that of women, Mazurana and McKay conducted a gender analysis of the meaning of peace building at the UN, NGO, and grassroots levels. Based upon that understanding and the contextualized and process-oriented nature of women’s grassroots peace building efforts they developed this broad concept concerning peace building:

Peace building includes gender-aware and woman –empowering political, social, economic, and human rights. It involves personal and group accountability and reconciliation processes that contribute to the reduction or prevention of violence. It fosters the ability of women, men, girls, and boys in their own culture(s) to promote conditions of nonviolence, equality, justice, and human rights of all people, to build democratic institutions, and to sustain the environment. (Mazurana & McKay, 1999:9)

Indeed, this conceptualization exercise undertaken by Mackay and Mazurana broadens the focuses of peace building to include the needs of women and girls in very clear and general terms, instead of only the needs of society as interpreted by men. However, it opens our eyes to the reality that peace building, like all other social concepts, is exposed to the same conceptual weakness of gender bias—a limitation that often nullifies the strength or appropriateness of concepts, usually drawn upon to explain concrete social phenomena. Viewing from that ‘gendered tilt’, several researchers made up of feminists and non-feminists, have argued that gender is relevant to questions of conflict resolution and peace.

As gender biases are gradually being deconstructed in contemporary times, it should be noted clearly that there are many different ways through which women have lived in times of war, namely: as fighters, community leaders, social organizers, workers, farmers, traders, welfare workers, and entertainers. Perhaps most notably, some women have been seen to use these different roles to try to minimize the effects of violence, if not actively try to end the violence themselves, by acting as peacemakers (Ferris, 1993, Ekiyor, 2004). Historically, the incidence of such “role play” by women, have often bequeathed them with hopes and opportunities for liberation from older, often oppressive, social orders: as the need arose for them to take on men’s roles in their absence. For this reason, they had to shake off the restrictions of their cultures and live in a new way. Usually, as a fall-out of the very vital role which these women play, some political movements even come to take the demands of women for improved rights seriously, and accept women’s political representation and other forms of rights in the post conflict situation. The allocation of places for women usually stops with the establishment of Ministries of women's affairs. This is where the women’s experiences of war ends, because in post war, peace, women have often suffered a backlash from the government and society against new found freedoms—a situation that has been called a ‘gendered peace’ (Pankhurst & Pearce, 1997). Measures to enhance women’s personal security and support them in calling to account, men who commit sexual violence like rape, forced prostitution and sex slavery should form part of peace building. Perhaps there should be training and promotion of women as investigators of such charges. Violent acts against girls are even more hidden than those against adult women, and urgently require investigation along with support services for these victims in post war situations (United Nations, 1997: p 7-8).
However, the participation of women in post conflict peace building holds great promises for enriching the entire process. Moreover, it is only fair that women participate actively in these processes given the scale of suffering they usually have to endure during conflict. After conflict, women rarely receive recognition for their contributions as providers and carers, let alone rewards for their role as social and political organizers. Their contributions are undervalued and underutilized. They usually receive much less support than male fighters in post conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation projects (Goldblatt & Meintjes, 1998). Although peace building initiatives, to assist ex-combatants are important, especially with respect to minimizing the use of violence in peacetimes, the role of women must not be trivialized. It is also important that an overview of the use of resources should include the consideration of women needs, not least because the majority of caring and providing for the whole population is often provided by women after war. Also, addressing women’s basic needs, benefits the whole society (EL Bushra, 1998).

There is also the need for peace building to incorporate policies which address women’s specific health and economic needs. This is because women take on many different roles in conflict, experience it differently from men and share common vulnerabilities equally. Often exposed to a high risk of rape and associated violence during and after conflict, their health and other basic needs are often neglected in peace processes, and they tend to bear the main burden for the care of survivors.

To address the issues concerning these women, in October of 2000, the United Nations took the first step in identifying the important position women held in preventing and resolving Conflict with the passage of the resolution (S/RES/1325). This position stressed the importance of women’s equal participation and full involvement in all efforts of the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. It stressed that women’s exclusion from peace processes contravene their rights. It also emphasized the need to increase the role of women in decision making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution as this can strengthen the process for sustainable peace. The impact of this resolution was further solidified by the establishment of national action plans by 24 nations including Nigeria. This confirms governmental support for the involvement of women in issues concerning conflict and Gender Based Violence (GBV). Furthermore, Resolution 1325 has also been strengthened by four supporting resolutions, which were adopted by the Security Council in 2008 and 2009; they all focus on three key goals:

- Resolution 1325 (2000) Strengthening women’s participation in decision making
- Resolution 1889 (2009) Complements 1325, by “calling for the establishment of global indicators to measure progress on its implementations.
- Resolution 1820 (2008) calls for an end to sexual violence and impunity.
- Resolution 1888 (2009) focuses on strengthening leadership, expertise and other institutional capacities within the United Nations and in member states to help put an end to conflict related sexual violence.
- Resolution 1960 empowers the Secretary General to identify and take action against countries suspected of committing patterns of sexual violence and calls for the establishment of monitoring, analysis, and reporting arrangements specifically to conflict-related sexual violence.

The five goals are meant to drive women’s work on peace and security issues. It was noted that men do not seem to understand or come to terms with the impact which women have made not only in diplomacy, but in providing holistic solutions to resolving conflict. Thus, the argument has been that women's views and perspectives play an integral part in influencing the processes of peace. However, despite recent efforts to improve the representation of women in international operations and peace processes, in Nigeria,
women’s voices are absent from high level discussions on peace and security. Furthermore, women’s contributions to peace building, which are culturally specific and often grass-roots-based continue to be overlooked in mainstream literature (De la Rey and McKay, 2006; Mazurana and McKay 1999).

Nonetheless, there are many compelling examples of women’s peace activism in all parts of Nigeria. One of them is the Escravos women non-violent protest in Escravos in 2002, when women occupied the tank farm that is the nerve centre of Chevron Nigeria Ltd. They held Chevron captive for ten days. One of those interviewed said that the angry women who were half naked, stripped some Chevron men naked. All operations had to be put off while the negotiation was going on, and the company was forced to declare *force majeure*. The resolution entailed a signing of an MOU with the women. The Ogbakiri Women, Peace Forum, Niger Delta Women for Justice, Women Without Walls Initiative (WOWWI), Christian Women for Excellence and Empowerment in Nigeria (CWEENs), Total Woman Foundation (TWOF) among many others, have actively opposed conflicts and mobilized against it in creative ways. Women peacebuilders challenge structural and cultural violence and take on marginalized issues such as access to decision-making structures, gender equality, sexual and gender-based violence, poverty and militarism (Wokoma, 2005; Best, 2007; Cockburn, 2007).

2.2 MASCULINIZATION OF THE PEACE PROCESS

Globally, women are marginalized, particularly with regards to the peace process. The social structures in African societies are male dominated. Men are naturally more aggressive than women. They are at the helm of affairs. Therefore, they are the leaders. Generally, the African public space is masculinized. It is male dominated. Women have been socialized to be the followers, obedient to men’s instructions. Her femininity is defined to be soft spoken, wise, calm and respectful. It is said that a good woman is silent; submissive and passive. She is supposed to be loyal and a role model. A peaceful nature is ingrained in her mind right from childhood. When she is bold and speaks up at occasions, she is deemed to be wayward and lacks respect for her husband. Therefore, she is not a worthy woman. There are some assumptions that have also facilitated the natural exclusion of women. One of them is the stereotypical belief that women cannot keep secrets, and may let out some at the peace negotiation table. Also, women are believed to be too emotional and can easily betray their emotions.

As female children grow, they are told folk tales about what disaster wars can bring to the whole community. The need for children to be upright and just are inculcated in them right from childhood. The traditional African society had various methods of conflict resolution. Conflicts were categorized and assessed to determine the most appropriate solution to them. When assessed, the community decided on what steps to take afterwards. In some cases, they could decide to go to war, depending on the severity of the mêlée. In other cases, to avoid further conflicts, a bride is given to pacify the aggrieved party. This is well demonstrated in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1957), when a maiden is given to a neighboring village to broker peace. It is dramatized in Irene Salami-Agunloye’s *Queen Idia* (2008) when Queen Idia presents a bride to Chief Oliha to pacify him and forestall his intention of inviting the Attah of Igala to fight the Binis. Societies also give out women as wives to prevent conflict. In *Queen Sisters* by Irene Salami-Agunloye, the king offered his eldest daughter to his greatest contender to forestall conflict. When the daughter is summoned by her father, and he tells her of his intention, she simply says “your wish is my command, father” (56) and allows herself to be married to a man she is neither familiar nor in love with. Similarly, in the Niger Delta region, women leave their matrimonial home when they are not happy with their husbands’ decisions. This is well illustrated in J.P Clark’s play the *Wives Revolt* where the women feeling deceived and oppressed, due the
men’s decision to keep all the oil proceeds from an Oil company, vacate their matrimonial homes. Since drama is said to be a mirror of life, aspects of these fictions are obviously a reflection of our everyday life. Sometimes too, girls are given out in marriage to offset family debts.

Apparently, traditional women played major roles in conflict resolution, though in most cases, as the subjects. These traditional beliefs, stereotypes, violence and poverty all weave a web that keeps women out of the peace building process. They neither exhibit agency, nor dare to challenge the system or the men that enforce the system. These women are socialized to act as “victims only” in conflict situations, (Isike: 2009). As a result, they are excluded from the peace process. This therefore presents a picture of women whelmed with male dominance at the negotiating table. They are not recognized as relevant actors, (Nicolai: 2012 et al). Even in recent years, experience shows that women still encounter obstacles participating in the peace process. A typical example of gender representation of selected conflicts in the 1990s and early 2000s is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Community Representatives in Post-Conflict Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict situation</th>
<th>Community Representative</th>
<th>Gender Composition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Youths</td>
<td>2. Mainly males (only one female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Professionals/Artisans</td>
<td>3. Mainly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Ife-Modakeke Advocacy Committee, mainly male</td>
<td>4. Mainly males (only one female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Mainly males (only one female)</td>
<td>5. Mainly males (only one female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba Fulani (Oke-Ogun)</td>
<td>1. Community leaders from both groups</td>
<td>1. Mainly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Community Development officers</td>
<td>2. Mainly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Representatives of Peace and Security committee in the local government.</td>
<td>3. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Peace monitoring group formed during the meeting.</td>
<td>4. All males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arogboljawa/Ugbolaje</td>
<td>First Leg</td>
<td>1. Mostly Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Community Leaders</td>
<td>2. All Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Women Leaders</td>
<td>3. Mostly Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Professional group, (Representative) Second Leg</td>
<td>4. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Youth Leader</td>
<td>5. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Local Government representative</td>
<td>6. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Other Professional groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos Abbatoire</td>
<td>1. Cattle dealers</td>
<td>1. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Cattle dealer</td>
<td>2. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Local Government Representative</td>
<td>4. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Cattle Utilities limited</td>
<td>5. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Oke Oba community association</td>
<td>6. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. State House of Assembly</td>
<td>7. Mostly males</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Also, after the various crises that took place in Plateau State, from 1994, the State Governor always sets up high level Commissions of inquiry to look into the remote and immediate causes ostensibly with a view to finding workable conflict resolution strategies.
The 1994 Jos metropolis riots of April 12th had a membership of seven men and no woman. The 2001 crisis also had a Commission of Inquiry set up on the 18th of October, 2001. Popularly known as the Nikki Tobi Commission, it had 10 members with just 1(one) woman. The 2008 crisis had a Commission of Inquiry set up on the 15th of January 2009. It was popularly called the Justice Bola Ajibola Commission of inquiry. It consisted of 6 members, with only (1) one woman, (Maduagu: 2012). This makes a total of 23 members and only two women members of the three commissions of inquiry. The near absence of women from these Commissions of inquiry missed out on the contributions of women, which are different from those of men. Women are central to conflict resolution in its entirety. The United Nations have pressed that member nations should involve women in all processes of peace. With the present consciousness of women’s involvement in the post-conflict resolution, it is hoped that future commissions of inquiries will adopt equitable gender representation.

2.3 WHY WOMEN?

From the conflicts in Plateau State and North Eastern Nigeria, we have seen that peace is difficult to build and sustain. The World Bank Report of 2011 shows that globally, majority of peace accords failed and conflict erupted afresh after a few years. With this development, it has become obvious that the world needs to look for an alternative approach to peace building. Studies like, Oruware: 2000, True: 2013, Isike: 2009, and Stewart; 2004, have shown that peace is easier to achieve and negotiations are easily acceptable when women participate in the peace process. Studies have also shown that equal participation of men and women on the negotiation table engenders durable peace, as women bring a different perspective. Moreover, when conflicts erupt, 80% of the civilian casualties are women. Women also constitute 80% of the refugees and internally displaced persons in conflict situations. As a result of this, the UN Secretary General observed that “women are caught in a vicious paradox: while they are the main civilian victims of conflicts, they are often powerless to prevent them…” (UN Sec. Gen., 2012). This is apart from the consequences suffered by the communities as women’s status in the society and their sex predisposes them to the worst form of violence. For peace to be fully understood in its entire ramifications there is need to understand the impact of armed conflict on women.

The West African Network for Peace building (WANEP) has grouped women in peace building under two distinct headings. They are: (i) women as victims of the most inhumane forms of engendered violence; representing a population that is severely and distinctively victimized by conflict, and (ii) women as perpetrators and combatants, capable of perpetuating the same violence as men. This review proves that prior classifications of women as passive victims are inaccurate and contributes to denying them a voice in decision making. It highlights that conflicts affect women and men differently and as a result, a gender lens needs to be applied in the design of measures which address the effects of conflicts. The finding of this review equally evaluated the status of women in peacetime and reveal that women are not living in peaceable states if the definition of peace building (particularly the one given by senior policy –making men) is to be adhered to. West African societies are patriarchal in nature and as a result have structures, which are dominated by men to the exclusion of women. The idea of exclusionary decision making processes is structural violence against women, which continues to impede women’s participation and full benefit from peace building. According to Ekiyor, there is a disconnect between traditional roles of women as key agents in the socialization process and peace building initiatives (Ekiyor, 2004). If conflict and peace, which are human dynamics, lack the participation of women, outcomes of initiatives would therefore favour one sector of the society and completely skew the human socialization.
The International Alert and Women Waging Peace body, presenting the challenges and opportunities of peace building from the point of view of women, peace activists, give two reasons why women should be involved and supported in peace building processes. First, women’s profiles in peace building, as in many other areas of life, have been unrealistically low and undervalued. Yet, in conflicts and war-torn countries around the world, women are often at the forefront of peacemaking and peace building efforts. They are leading households, caring for the sick and the old and sustaining and ensuring the survival of their families and communities. Despite their own traumas or victimization, women shoulder the responsibilities of others even in refugee camps. In many instances (as mentioned earlier), women initiate peacemaking efforts. Often, it is women who are the mobilizers and voices of non-combatants and non-insurgents silenced by violence and atrocities. Long after international aid and support have ended, women are left to handle the trauma and violence that come with men whose lives have been devastated by war, and provide the continuity that enables families and communities to heal and move forward. This notwithstanding, time and again, women are depicted simply as silent passive victims.

Secondly, women, peace activists and organizations lack access to information and resources while they have the skill and ability to work at grass root level, develop distinct and context-specific approaches and network effectively with other women's groups. Women's organizations are often distant and disconnected from developments and processes under way at regional and international levels. There is a dire need to bridge the gap and provide information and tools needed to enable their systematic inclusion in peace processes. In doing so, it also seeks to strengthen women’s capacities to draw on their own experience and expertise and advocate for changes and improvements in existing international efforts.

The common association of women in peace suggests that policies formulated to engage women ought to be fundamental to peacebuilding, (United Nations, 1995; and 1986). As we have seen above, it is not uncommon to assume that women have special qualities which, when compared to men equip them better for peace rather than war. Alluding to this, the International Alert draft Code of Conduct states that:

We explicitly recognize the particular and distinctive peacemaking roles played by women in conflict afflicted communities. Women and women’s organizations are often reservoirs of local important capacities which can be used in peace building activities…” (International Alert, July 1998)

There are many examples where women have courageously intervened in battles to enforce peace in Nigeria (as seen in the cases discussed below). Women have also taken up opportunities for peacemaking between warring groups (Berhane-Selassie, 1994; and El Bushra 1998). Under such circumstances, they sometimes call on and express values, behaviors and codes which are explicitly associated with their gender, as one peace activist comments:

Both men and women have the potential for peacemaking and the responsibility to build and keep peace. The women, however, seem more creative and effective in waging peace… It is the women’s emotional strength to transcend pain and suffering, and their predisposition to peace that provide them with greater potentials for peace building (Garcia (Ed), 1994:45)

It is therefore often the case that ideas about women’s distinctive qualities (whether these are thought to be biologically or socially determined), which become identified with the way forward in peace building and strategies therefore focus on ways to enhance, support and extend the work that they are thought to be well-equipped to undertake. Avenues for women’s participation in peace building are manifold. These include the participation of certain women in the individual capacities in peace building and the formation of organizations specifically targeted towards peace building.
2.4 NIGERIAN WOMEN AND PEACE BUILDING

There are several documented evidence in extant literature on the contribution of Nigerian women in peace building processes in the country. However, our discussion here dwells on the colonial and post-colonial eras. During the colonial era, women played remarkable roles in resolving crises between the citizenry and the colonialists. Remarkable examples include the popular Aba women Riot of 1929 and the Egba Women’s Movement for the abdication of the Alake of Egbaland from his throne between the 1930s and 1950s (for details see Mba, 1982; Turner and Oshare, 1980). Other examples abound, but the most significant point is that in the colonial era, women used both peaceful and violent methods to push for peace within and across communal boundaries on issues that affect everyone in the society. They did not discriminate against their male counterparts.

In the post-colonial era, Nigerian women’s involvement in peace building processes has endured with increasing focus and sophistication. This has culminated in the first summit of Africa’s First Ladies on Peace and Humanitarian Issues held in Abuja in May 1997. Its major concern was the grave political situation in most African countries that is still being characterized by inter and intra-state conflicts and wars that only lead to an increasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons. These conflicts not only cause destruction of lives, property and infrastructure, but also bring about untold misery and suffering to women and children. The summit was also concerned that women were marginalized in the decision making process in general, and in matters related to peace, in particular. It showed determination to promote the economic, political, and social empowerment of women with due recognition being given to the importance of integrating a gender perspective into the mainstream of development, and enhance women’s effective participation in the process, of conflict prevention, management and resolution, as well as post-conflict peace building.

Nevertheless, the passage of resolution (S/RES/1325) in October 31, 2000 was the watershed for women peace building participation all over the world. The resolution stresses the importance of women’s equal participation and full involvement in all efforts of the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. It also emphasized the need to increase their role in decision making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. The impact of this resolution was further concretized by the establishment of national action plans by 24 nations, including Nigeria, confirming government support for the involvement of women in matters concerning conflict and gender based violence. It was noted that men do not seem to understand or come to terms with the impact which women have, not only in diplomacy, but in presenting holistic solutions to resolving conflicts. This has led to an increase in the participation of women in peace building activities in Nigeria, especially at the beginning of the 4th Republic when the nation witnessed an explosion of conflicts in several parts of the country, such as the Umulere/Agulere crises, Ife/Modakeke crises, Ijaw/Ilaje crises, Zaki/Ibiam crises and the Sagbama and Olusari crises. Others are the conflict in Burutu Local government area of Delta state as well as the religious and political crises in Kano, Kaduna, Plateau and other northern states. Most recently, the Niger Delta crises and the infamous Boko Haram insurgency have added a new and complicated dimension to the crises of nation building in the country. These crises have increased the agitations and call for peace, and the involvement of women in peace building processes by women’s organizations. Some of the leading women’s organizations that are still participating actively in peace building processes across the country include Women in Peace building Network (WIPNET), Women in Niger Delta and the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS).

The Niger Delta, the Jos crises and a few others of the same dimension, have created immense opportunities for the growing consciousness of the role of women in peace building. The International organizations’ support in creating this awareness cannot be
underestimated. Women are now making their voices heard and insisting that perpetrators of conflicts be brought to book. The government is now gradually responding to women cry for inclusion though it is still not adequate. With all the limitations and limited access to the negotiating table, women have not given up. In the areas of conflict management and peace building NGOs are becoming popular. Their strategies vary from Prayer Meetings, Rallies, Peace walks and advocacy for peace and education amongst others. Since 2009, there have been changes in the way women demand for peace. Women are beginning to move from nude protest to initiating dialogue with government officials, using written and oral appeals, persuasion, mediation, as well as “intimidating” Government is using a large crowd of women. This can be seen in what was done recently at the Eagle Square, Abuja in August 2013, when the NCWS organized a peace rally. This rally had about 30,000 women in attendance drawn from the 36 states of the federation. The women used the forum to task the President on the need to broker peace in the country, help protect citizens and facilitate measures that will help prevent conflicts.

Through their organization, women are doing a lot to sustain peace, but such women peace building platforms lack support. There are many types of women organizations, with overlapping and changing agendas which have contributed (or have the potentials to contribute) to peace building. Amongst them are Women For Peace in Nigeria (WOPIN) and Women Without Walls Initiative (WOWWI), the latter being a leading voice in Plateau state on the issue of peace building and conflict prevention. They were one of the organizers of the 2010 peace rally in Jos. They run several training programmes amongst which are the one of managing rumor. Some have developed the capacity of women to work during conflict situations and on negotiation tables. WOPIN is dedicated to building a world of peace by networking with others in providing humanitarian services, peace building, good health, and happiness which will ultimately bring about progress in the society. WOPIN advocates religious tolerance.

Their strategies are advocacy, networking and community service. WINET is also a leader in peace building in Nigeria. In August, 2013, they trained women in Lagos State in peace building. The strategies they use include creating “women only” spaces. In the past few years of its existence, Christian Women of Excellence & Empowerment in Nigeria (CWEENS) have imparted a lot in the lives of women in Plateau State. In 2011, they blew the whistle bringing into the open the killing and sexual exploitation of vulnerable young women by the Military Task Force (STF) in the city of Jos. They also offer capacity building, counseling and other post-conflict services including empowering members on issues of conflict and peace. After the famous Dogo N’Hauwa conflict, they were on the ground to organize a training of trainers’ workshop on trauma counseling.

Women’s Center for Peace and Development (WOPED), the first women’s peace organization “by women and for women” began the establishment of a peace building summit in the Niger Delta. WOPED has come a long way since its establishment in 2001. It has made a lot of impact, particularly in the area of peace education, inculcating the culture of peace in youths, both in primary and secondary schools. They have also established Peace and Anti-Violence Education (PAVE) clubs in secondary schools, therefore paving the way for peaceful coexistence in primary and secondary schools. Despite the subordinate status of women, they have become aspects of the peace process in the Niger Delta. Women’s organizations are at the forefront seeking non-violent solutions to the problems of the region. Niger Delta Women for Social Justice have also been in the forefront of conflict resolution in the Niger Delta area. Their activities are globally acknowledged and recognized. They are actively addressing issues of conflict against women and seek ways for sustainable peace in the Niger Delta.

Significantly, Nigeria has launched her National Action Plan for the full implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace
and security. The event was held on the 27th of August 2013. This was supported by DFID. This will go a long way to help with the implementation of Resolution 1325 and the institutionalization of women’s participation in the peace process. The UN Resolution 1325 urges member states to increase the representation of women at all levels of decision making. The representation of women at this level in Nigeria still leaves much to be desired. The absence of actual quotas, benchmarks and timelines for the number of women in high-level positions is of concern.

Nigeria is a signatory to Resolution 1325 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and has equally ratified both resolutions. Nevertheless, many of her citizens are unaware of the existence of this involvement. As a result, they are not protected by the articles within them. There is a lot of lip service to the idea of giving women functional roles in peace building. A real fear exists in many sectors that empowering women would mean disempowering men. Therefore, in theory women in peace building is a welcome idea, but one that is very difficult to practicalize due to political, economic and cultural reasons. However, Nigerian women would not allow these factors to overwhelm them as they have continued to surmount all obstacles on their way toward contributing to peace building processes in the country. The sums of their contributions include, but are not limited to the following:

- Promoting non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduction in the incidence of human and women’s rights abuses.
- Ensuring that women play a key role in the design and implementation of peace building and post-conflict resolution.
- Support and strengthen women's organizations in their peace building efforts, by collaborating with International non-state actors and development partners.
- Pushing for increased participation of women in peace building and conflict resolution at all levels of decision making in the country.

In précis, for too long, women’s peace building initiatives have been taken for granted by communities and policy makers, yet, women’s focus on issues of human and women’s rights, economic and social justice, as well as humanitarian issues, enable them to deal with the root causes of conflict. If these initiatives are encouraged, they have the potential of leading the way towards the attainment of sustainable peace in the country.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper has established that women are critical to the peace building process. It has also shown that from the colonial era to date, despite the challenges of poverty, cultural, religious and political restrictions Nigerian women have been contributing significantly to peace building processes in the country. To ensure women’s participation in crisis situations at all levels and their continued involvement in reconstruction and social development during times of peace, key reforms are needed at the national and state levels of decision making.

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