

# THE IMPACT OF WOMEN ASSOCIATION ON PEACE BUILDING IN PLATEAU STATE

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## ABSTRACT

*Peace-building has become increasingly important as a means of preventing continuing hostilities among previously warring factions. However, peace-building strategies or designs have not fully recognised the particular needs of women and have not acknowledged the significance of women's contributions to peace-building in war torn communities. Despite women's collective contribution to building peace at home and at community level, they are most often victims of male's subordination to their essentialisation, thereby frequently under-utilized when it comes to contributing their perspective of peace-building. Where they are allowed to make inputs, further actions are not taken to implement those inputs thereby constituting a deficit to peace-building initiative. Hence the study examines the role of women associations in Plateau State as they impact on peace-building. It argues that, Despite, growing awareness of the role of women in conflict prevention and peace-building, resistance to their inclusion is still widespread. Using both primary and secondary data, the secondary data were drawn from published and unpublished materials relevant to the study- in books, Journals, magazines, conference papers, seminar papers and dailies. While the primary data was generated using key informants' interviews with focus group discussions. The interviews and the focus group discussions were conducted in Jos-North, and Jos-south, L.G.As of Plateau State. The study uses content analysis in analyzing the data. Thereafter, recommend that women's groups need to identify their common priorities and develop a strong, unified agenda. This can only be achieved through coalition building that extends beyond ethnic, political and religious alliances.*

Keywords: Women Association, Peace building and Gender

## INTRODUCTION

Few global efforts of women in peace building initiative possess such

significant promise for their inclusion. Peace building is rooted in peacekeeping, the process whereby the international

community, namely the United Nations, sought to keep warring parties at bay. While peacekeeping initially involved only maintaining the peace between warring states, it evolved to also include civil conflicts (Keating & Abiew, 1999). However, as the complexities and social repercussions of civil conflicts became apparent, peacekeeping took on a wider range of tasks. These more comprehensive missions to install peace and forestall a return to violence became commonly referred to as 'peace-building' (Keating & Abiew, 1999).

In the post-cold war period of the 1990s peace-building missions gained prevalence as numerous civil wars raged around the globe accounting for 94 per cent of all-armed conflicts during this period (Paris, 2004). Regarding the civilian loss of lives during this period, Roland Paris notes "...an estimated 90 percent of those killed in armed conflicts were civilians" (Paris, 2004). During this period fourteen peace-building missions were deployed by the United Nations to a variety of war-shattered countries, including three in Latin America: Nicaragua in 1989, El Salvador in 1991, and Guatemala in 1997 (Paris, 2004).

The peace-building field experienced extensive growth and development with these early trial missions with the establishment of implementation frameworks, peace-building centres, and the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Despite the fact that it has been almost two decades since peace-building missions were first inaugurated, current missions are still considered experimental

because they are prone to breakdowns and seldom proceed as planned.

Paris offers a discussion of the origins of peace-building at "War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict" where he states that, prior to the end of the Cold War the United Nations had opted for a lesser role in the domestic politics of countries (Paris, 2004). However, as conditions changed with the end of the Cold War, the United Nations became more inclined to respond to the "demand" for new multilateral peace operations." While some operations still resembled traditional peacekeeping missions (with tasks that included verifying cease-fires and troop movements), other missions were "more complex" and comprised of "less familiar tasks." For example, the United Nations' first post-conflict peace building mission in Namibia (1989) consisted of monitoring the conduct of local police, disarming former fighters, and preparing the country for its first democratic election - tasks not traditionally performed by the United Nations.

New to the United Nations included supervising democratic elections, assisting in the preparation of new national constitutions, providing human rights training and in one case (Cambodia) temporarily taking over the administration of an entire country (Paris, 1999). Paris further notes that the complexities of these peace-building missions required that the United Nations partner with other international actors to help countries rebuild reconciliation strategies. These organizations include, but are not limited to, the North Atlantic

Treaty Organization, the United Nations Development Program, the Organization of American States, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and various international nongovernmental organizations.

Generally, the United Nation's peace-building missions to date were deployed after the signing of formal peace accords or agreements that have warring factions laying down their arms and agreeing to some form of a truce and a strategy for future power sharing, usually the formation of political parties and the contesting of elections. These peace agreements typically mark the formal end of an armed struggle and symbolize the participation of belligerents in a political process.

In a world marred by conflict and violence, peace-building is becoming increasingly important as a means of preventing continuing hostilities among conflicting groups. Peace-building missions have focused on such factors as security and governance to prevent potentially volatile situations from erupting into full fledged violent conflicts. This approach, however, has neglected the gendered dimensions of peace-building. That is, it does not recognize the particular needs of women during the peace-building phase, nor does it acknowledge their role in contributing to effective peace building.

Yet, women and men experience conflict differently and women are the most vulnerable to its implications or negative impacts in different ways

determined by the gender roles and identities of masculinity and femininity in each particular society. While Men are more often combatants, women bear the burden of multiple form of violence, and bear the responsibility of ensuring the survival of the family, therefore suffer the majority of fatalities and injuries (UNIFEM, 2005). It further supports the above statement that 'the current nature of warfare in Africa is testament to the fact that women remain targets of engendered form of violence such as rape, forced prostitution and sexual slavery' (UNIFEM, 2005).

The violence in Plateau State began after two decades of increasing collective violence in other parts of Northern Nigeria, the worst of which occurred in Kano, Kaduna and Bauchi States. Infact, the first episode of mass violence in Jos occurred in 2001 (Danfulani and Fwatshak 2002; Higazi, 2007).

For over a decade now, the once uniquely serene and peaceful Plateau State has continued to witness seemingly unabated spates of violent conflicts. For instance, the conflicts have taken the form of attacks on the villages of Rasat, Zot, Rim, Ndin, Maza, Dorowa Tsoho, Dorowa Babuje, Dogo na Hauwa, Tanchol, Kuru and of recent Gwol, popularly known as Barkin Ladi, Bachit (where the late Senator Gyang Dantong and late Hon. Gyang Fulani) were killed in one of the several attacks that were being launched in a guerilla tactics upon the indigenes of Plateau state, killing innocent people including children and women.

Government efforts over the years to put an end to this senseless act of killings in the state have hitherto remained futile and enshrouded in political "rhetorics". Although several means of resolving this violence were adopted by the government such as constituting panel of inquiries, but with no political will to implement their recommendations, thereby raising doubts over the commitment of the government to genuine peace-building initiative.

Therefore, the paper explores the need for women to be included in peace-building initiative with evidence from the role some women associations are playing in Jos North and South for an enduring peace. For the sake of organization, the paper is structured thus: Introduction, Method, conceptual frame work, conclusion and recommendations.

## **METHOD**

The study adopted two methods of data collection. First, it relied on the use of secondary data drawn from published and unpublished materials relevant to the study- in books, Journals, magazines, conference papers, seminar papers, dailies and the internet. Second, primary data was generated using participatory method, which combined key informants' interviews with focus group discussions. The interviews and the focus group discussions were conducted in Jos-North, and Jos-South L.G.A.s of Plateau State (See appendix 1 for details).

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The study here employed the use of descriptive analysis of the data that is

borrowed from Catherine Hakim's conception of re-analysis as cited by Adetula (1996) which states the analysis of existing data, presents interpretation, acknowledgement, and conclusion that is additional to or different from those presented in the first instance.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Women Association**

Women association are Organizations that seek to enhance women's participation in development in all sectors: economic, social, and political from the grassroots to the national level. In Nigeria, women's organizations are either registered or not registered, but they operate under the laws stipulated by the constitution. The organizations have their own constitutions, mission and objectives.

The activities of the associations provide for the individual and collective needs of their members. They also serve, to an increasing degree, the municipality in sharing its functions of administration and the allocation of social services (Niang, 2000). Victor Adetula explains the material and psychological basis for welfare associations (Adetula, 2002). These associations in urban centres exist in varied forms. Some are pan-ethnic umbrella organizations, while some are "development unions" concerned with members' home origin. Others engage in mutual support for members. Some associations seek to project the culture of origin and, in some cases, the political interests of their home of origin (Adetula, 2002).

However women associations are also borne out of such needs mentioned above to protect or defend the dignity of woman-hood in all spheres be it economic, political or social e.t.c.

### Peace-Building

There has been widespread adoption of the term "peace building" since it was introduced by the United Nations Secretary-General in an Agenda for Peace (U.N., 2002). Although, historically, peace building originated in the field of peace studies more than thirty years ago, in 1975 Johan Galtung coined the term in his pioneering work "three approaches to peace: peace keeping, peacemaking, and peace building". In his article, he posited that "peace has a structure different from perhaps over and above, peace keeping and ad-hoc peacemaking... The mechanisms that peace is based on should be built into the structure and be presented as a reservoir for the system itself to draw up... More specifically, structures must be found that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur (Galtung, 1976). It is obvious from the above understanding of peacebuilding that the role of women was completely out of the question, yet an emphasis was made on structures that aid the removal of causes of war.

Interestingly Lederach (1997) has called for the expansion of our understanding of peace building. Peace building, according to him, is more than post-accord reconstruction "and" is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and

sustains the fall away of process, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships (Lederach, 1997). The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition, it is a dynamic social construct that should not be seen as an interventionary mechanism, but a way of life (Lederach, 1997).

According to Charles and Elizabeth (2007), Peace building is generally defined as limitatives that are designed to prevent the eruption or return of armed conflict. It consists of actions undertaken by national actors, with the support of international actors, "to institutionalize peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict and a medium of participatory politics. Post conflict peace building is the sub-set of such actions undertaken after the termination of armed hostilities. "Peace refers to a process that relies heavily/ on insiders to break away from conflict and create a state and society in which peace can be sustained. Outsiders support them by providing financial, technical and human resources (Charles & Elizabeth, 2007).

On the other hand, Ball (2001), defined peace-building as consisting of three main, interrelated objectives: creating and strengthening democratic political institutions, encouraging sustainable, poverty reducing development; and fostering the political, economic and social processes related to these objectives. The normative framework in which they are situated must



be viewed through a gender lens in order for peace building to recognize and include women as full and equal partners with men in post-conflict societies.

Finally, it is important to note that peace-building should include both tangible ("visible, quantifiable") and intangible ("invisible, qualitative") dimensions. The tangible dimension consists of such things as the number of weapons destroyed, soldiers demobilized, jobs created, or dialogues held. The intangible dimension includes such phenomenon as reconciliation between former antagonists of dispute resolution. It is fair to say that most international peace building initiatives have focused primarily on visible, tangible, and quantifiable outputs rather than on qualitative processes of change, which, admittedly are much more difficult to induce and assess; and many scholars have underestimated the role of gender perspective to the peace building enterprise itself and the actors and organizations.

### **Women Association and Peace Initiative: A Theoretical Framework**

This part aims at examining the relationship of women with peace, drawing on the prevailing theoretical assumptions that link them, and to subject the literature to a critical analysis from the perspective of challenging the often narrow parameters within which women are relegated.

In the international context, examples such as the international Alert programme of 'Gender and Peace building' and the United Nations

Development Fund for Women emphasise the essential role of women in projects of peace. Significantly, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 in 2000 to increase the participation of women in all UN field operations and ensure a gender element in all peace building initiatives'. Clearly, the association of women with peace is considered strong and is internationally recognised.

However, it is not clear whether Resolution 1325 is a product of an acknowledgement of the particular role of women in peace building initiatives or simply an extension of a general policy of gender mainstreaming in UN activities. While it is accepted that international efforts to include women in official peace building processes is addressing an absence, there appears a wider tendency to associate peace movements with women.

One explanation of the relationship between women and peace is that women are naturally more peaceful. Women, writes Johann Galtung, have innate qualities that make them more peace-loving. High in empathy, their characters are horizontal and centripetal, making them more prone to peaceful relationships, combined with the chemical programming of the cyclical and complex oestrogen and high levels of mono amino-oxide, the chemical responsible for controlling violence (Galtung, 1996). Young girls, writes Brock-Utne, tend to share and co-operate, whereas young boys compete (Brock-Utne, 1989). Alonso affirms this notion, insisting that "almost every group has portrayed women as

more sensitive, more caring, more thoughtful and more committed to producing a more humanistic and compassionate world than men as a whole" (Alonso, 1993). In contrast, men are portrayed as makers of war and perpetrators of violence. Galtung cites the low empathy, vertical, centrifugal, expansionist character of man, pointing out that 95% of direct violence is committed by men (Galtung, 1996).

Something in the nature of men makes them fight, as Skjelsback and Smith point out: Some of the violent acts perpetrated by men in armed conflicts are perpetrated precisely because the men have become convinced that, that is the way to show their masculinity (Skjelsback and Smith, 2001). It is the male value system that creates war, and it is women who suffer, as Brock-Utne notes: "Women pay for the male priorities of this world" (Skjelsback, 2001; Brock-Utne, 1989). Military thinking, adds Ruddick, is imbued with male values (Ruddick, 1990).

These views move from the innate qualities of 'warlike men' and 'peaceful women' to acknowledgements that a degree of social conditioning drives men to fight. Indeed, if war is masculine, then areas of conflict are masculinised, as Monica McWilliams has referred to Northern Ireland as an 'armed patriarchy' (Miller et al, 1996).

But Moser and Clark are not satisfied with this explanation: Stereotypical essentialising of women as 'victims' and men as perpetrators of political violence and armed conflict, assumes universal, simplified definitions

of each phenomenon (Moser & Clark, 2001).

Karam is equally critical, suggesting the literature of women and conflict "tends to view women as victims rather than as active actors, largely as a result of patriarchal structures" (Karam, 2001). Other voices of dissent accord with a view that women are not as peaceful as they are portrayed nor men as warlike, as Reardon explains, women "are not predisposed by their hormonal balance to pacifism any more than men are predisposed to warmongering" (Ruddick, 1990; Reardon, 1993).

Women, by this view, are being squeezed into a pervasive model that portrays them as peaceful and men into one of violence through a process of socialisation that accords with prevailing gender roles. As Clonan explains, there are ample examples of women taking a full and active part in combat, from terrorist groups, such as Baader-Meinhoff, to military participation in national struggles, such as the case of 40% of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) being women (Clonan, 2002).

Therefore, it can be deduced that the absence of women from the process of any peaceful initiatives cast aspersions to the credibility of these processes and that the often varying roles played by women in conflict even in a single context, throwing doubt on universal assumptions regarding women and peace or war is still vague with claims to dismiss the fact that sees women as peace ambassadors.

## **The Impact of Women in Peacebuilding in Plateau**

### **Role of Women in Peace-Building**

In Plateau State, quite a number of women associations advocating for peace were established at the wake of the intermittent crisis that have ravaged the city in the past and recent times. These associations cut across the spectrum of the society, that they comprise of the business, cultural, religious, professionals, political and social groupings. For instance, under the business class, we have market women association; under the cultural associations- we the "Bi konwonen Berom association", Igbo women association, Yoruba women association etc. under religious associations we have the various Matan Zumuntar E.C.W.A, COCIN, Baptist, Catholic, Assemblies, Muslim women association, Pentacostal women association etc. The professional associations include Women lawyers, Journalists, Doctors, Engineers, Teachers; Political association include the PDP women association, NCWS, COWAN, Women-without-walls, Women in Development; the social associations includes, Senior Staff Police wives association, Army Wives association.

### **Voices from Women Associations in Plateau State**

It will be incorrect to assert that all women are "natural peace builders", however women have found themselves in a most disadvantaged position at every occurrence of conflicts. In times of violent conflict, men and women face new roles and changing gender expectations

(Shirch & Sewak, 2005). The relevance of women associations in peace building initiatives in Jos, Plateau State has been increasingly apparent in recent years. Haven experienced the agony of violent conflicts in the state, women unanimously poured their grief when they said:

*"of truth women in plateau state are in difficult condition economically, because of the violent conflicts that had befallen the state. As a result, many women lost their businesses, houses, in some cases children and husbands. The city is now divided along religious lines, making social interactions difficult, there by affecting the economic and social lives of women" (Interview of Muslim Women in Nassarawa Gwom Jos, 6<sup>th</sup> February, 2013).*

Esther Ibanga a Jos based pastor also supports the above statement when she aver that we note with deep dismay that despite concerted efforts of the state authorities to curb violence and bloodshed, the trend of killings have continued, with women and children being the major casualties of this regime of violence and wanton killing." Mrs Ibanga also said we; condemned emergent sociological patterns in Jos following the crisis despite the apparent desire by the different groups to live together in Plateau. Environs have become largely, and increasingly polarised along ethno-religious lines amidst a climate of fear and mutual suspicion," she said. "Voices of peace, forgiveness, tolerance, and love continue to sound out above the under-currents of



hatred, reprisals, and instigating words and actions." (Ibanga, 2013). In a similar interview held in Turu, South L.G.A; women also complaint of economic difficulties. The leader of the Bi Konwenen Association" lamented thus: *"As a matter of truth we have found ourselves in a situation that only God can deliver us. We used to go to the farm freely, but now we cannot, because we are attacked by the Fulani nomads at every angle. Life is no longer sacred but cheap in Jos, Plateau State because of the conflicts. We are forced to stay indoors for fear of losing our lives to the fire power of the Fulani nomads while our economic conditions suffer"* (Interview of Bi Konwenen Berom Association Turu-Vom, Jos, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2013).

From the above interviews it is crystal clear that women in Plateau state have lost their economic grip because of the violent conflicts that have bedevilled the state in a decade. Yet they maintain their position as "the backbone of the economy. In the agricultural sector, women are in the fore front, in the mining sector women are in the majority, labour sector in the state can boast of more women, even in the civil service we are competing favourably. It is only the technical works you see men more and not because we cannot do it, but because they men have dominated and are segregating against women" (Interview of DU Women Association, 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2013). Therefore making it difficult for them to participate reasonably in any peace building initiative. This is also observed by Schirch and Sewak (2005) when they say: Many women are already

empowered and are playing important roles as decision makers at the UN regional, national and local structures. Still many women are not yet able to contribute because they are refused the opportunity to participate and/or do not see themselves as able to participate in peace building. Women empowerment come through training, networking, and opportunities where women can participate fully in planning, implementing, and evaluating peace building programs... (2005). Although it is a widely held belief that once there is a "critical mass" of women in position of decision making, the discourse on peace and security will undergo significant change. Many insist that it is important that a discussion on women and peace-building not be limited to a preoccupation with numbers or has been termed as "add women and stir". In other word, while the goal of getting a critical mass of women into decision making position in peace-building organization is vital, this can only be a starting point. Simply adding women to existing programmes or structures is unlikely to bring about lasting change. The challenge lies in building a discourse on peace and security that include the perspectives of both women and men and holds as central the value of coexistence, nonviolence and inclusivity. This supports what the coordinator of the Women without walls initiative, a non-governmental organization based in Jos, pastor, Mrs Esther Ibanga said, "that women in Plateau state are united with a vision "to develop a non-violent, creative and inclusive approach for conflict resolution and transformation in Nigeria,

through women." Real structural, economic, political, and social change in the ways all people relate to each other must be the ultimate goal. Thus, as a strategy in entrenching peace in Plateau state, women also challenged how government and other civil society actors are defining peace and security. They assert that the values of empathy and building community contribute significantly to the discourse of peace and security that is based on coexistence and cooperation. They advocated for the broadening of the definition of security from one confined to military security to one that considers issues of individual dignity- like addressing injustice, poverty, unemployment, corruption, institutional decay etc. which are considered "soft issues".

In the words of a woman leader in Jos, where she outrightly condemned military operation in Plateau state said:

*"No military can bring peace to Plateau state. Rather they connive with our enemies to kill us the indigenes for blood money, yet our monthly federal allocations maintain them in the state to continue their evil of spoiling our young girls, infecting them with HIV/AIDS, intimidating civilians, and shooting us at any slightest provocation..."*

She added,

*If you hire a security man to guard over your house from thieves, yet thieves constantly break in. would you not sack him? Take them away we don't need*

*them... (Interview of Women leader in Jos, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2013).*

### **Women Protest as Peace building Initiative in Plateau State**

Grassroot women's groups or associations in Plateau state have also shown ingenuity in advocating their desire for peace and inclusion in peace processes. Women in Plateau state have used songs in protests, wearing black dresses to symbolize mourning and carrying leaves to demonstrate for inclusion and to cry for an end to the senseless killings and destructions of property. In the past women have threatened to go naked in protest to attract urgent attention from the government or an end to any anomaly in the society, which cannot be possible without the coordination and organisation of gifted women associations.

At the wake of the crisis in Plateau State from 2001, different women groups have come out to advocate for peace through peaceful protests, the first women protest in plateau state was in 2001 which was a collective protest of women that cut across ethno-religious lines. But the subsequent protest of 2009, 2010 and 2011 were characterized by ethno-religious factors where the Muslim women coming out on separate occasions to protest. In line with this a focus group discussion was held with a cross section of Muslim Women Association (Makarantan Islamiya) at Febuna Jos North L.G.A. of Plateau State in order to find out the causes, challenges and results of their protest in January

2010: some of the reason for their protest are:

*"We the Muslim women wanted to show our dissatisfaction with the crisis situation as we were not happy that the state that was known to be peaceful suddenly turned violent" "to also show to the world our women whose husbands were killed (widows) and those women that lost their children and property in the crisis. You know that Christian women have been going out to protest any time there is an attack on their community, but we have been silent so that it was as if we were not affected, this is another reason why we went out"( Focus Group Discussion with Muslim women at Febuna Jos North 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2013).*

In a similar Focus Group Discussion with a cross section of Christian women in Vwang district of Jos south L.G.A; also give reasons for their protest as:

*"we are not violent people we have been living in peace with Hausa-Fulani Muslim neighbours for decades and they have enjoyed a lot of benefits from our community, all of a sudden we started experiencing series of attacks from these the same neighbours and we were not pleased with the situation that have left many of our women widows our children fatherless and motherless, our farm lands destroyed, our homes razed down by fire, so we had to go on a peaceful protest to show our dissatisfaction. Secondly, at the wake of the crisis we have soldiers posted to our communities to maintain law and order but we later discovered that, these*

*the same soldiers were used by our enemies to attack our community as we usually find some traces of their belonging at the scene of the attack. Therefore we demanded that soldier be withdrawn from our communities as they have failed in their responsibilities of maintain peace and security in Plateau state" (Focus Group Discussion with Vwang women group in Jos south L.G.A).*

The various women protests were not without constraints as the women rightly state in separate group discussions held in Vwang on the 24<sup>th</sup> January and on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2013 some of these challenges include lack of support from some of their husbands and community leaders. Harassment from security personnel who attempt to prevent the women from staging the protests, also economic factor has posed great constraint on women thereby reducing the impact of the protest.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite growing awareness of the role of women in conflict prevention and peace-building, resistance to the intentional inclusion of women is still widespread. Many activists on behalf of women's inclusion spend a great deal of their time simply explaining to others why it is important for women to be involved in this processes. It is also discovered that the discrimination of women in the peace-building process is attributed to the stereotypical roles assigned to women in our societies as home keepers who need not to medley in economic and political matters mainly due to patriarchal/paternal

view of the society concerning women. Their contributions are often overlooked because they take unconventional forms, occur outside formal peace processes, or are considered extensions of women's existing gender roles. These have seriously placed women at the disadvantaged position which have belittled their contributions towards peace-building in the State.

For women to participate more effectively in peace processes, women's

groups need to identify their common priorities and from these, develop a strong, unified agenda. This can only be achieved through coalition building that extends beyond ethnic, political and regional alliances. Skills training in negotiation, mediation and post-conflict transformation were identified as important for developing the inclusion of women and their ability to influence political processes of peace negotiations (UNIFEM, 2005).

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