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The Roles of Women and Family in Engendering Peace in the North-Eastern, Nigeria

¹Yousoph Rilwan Olabisi, PhD.

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the north eastern part of Nigeria has been battling with the seemingly unstoppable problem of Boko haram insurgency. During this period, over 20,000 lives have been lost and property worth millions of Naira destroyed, while the majority of the victims were harmless women and children. The havoc wrecked by this insurgency has alerted the international global community on the deadly nature of the group, which consequently made the group to be named an international terrorist group in 2015. Nationally and internationally, several efforts have been targeted towards solving the problem such as the incorporation of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States as well as the multinational task force situated in Chad Basin. While these efforts have yielded significant result, one cannot out rightly say that an end has come to the activities of the insurgents group in the North eastern part of the country. The group has however turned to targeting soft spots and vulnerable groups such as the children and women. Despite all strategies employed to tackle the insurgency, little attention has been paid to the role women play in participating in the management of the insurgency. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this paper examined and amplified the roles women and family play in engendering peace in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. The importance of women in this process cannot be overemphasised as women occupy an integral part within the community, and their efforts would go a long way in guaranteeing peace. The paper noted that the Nigerian government has not been able to annex adequately the place of women in shortening the life span of the insurgency. Conclusively, the paper encouraged the Nigerian government to ensure that women's positions are factored into strategies of fighting the insurgency.

Keywords: Insurgency; Role of women; Boko Haram; Peace; Terrorism.

Introduction

The expanded nature of peace building has left the Nigerian women with a broaden responsibility. They now have a responsibility to rebuild along with a responsibility to prevent and react. The responsibility to rebuild includes a genuine commitment to lasting peace, to the protection of human rights and to the promotion of good governance and sustainable development. Regardless of how we choose to prioritize the issue of human rights in peace building, it must be addressed

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during the peace process if a society will ever be able to heal and reconcile in the aftermath of conflict. In order for justice and reconciliation to be successful, however, half of the population cannot be excluded due to discriminatory traditional gender roles. As women are important actors in peace building and the reconstruction of war-torn societies, the issue of women's rights cannot be neglected. Sustainable peace can help transform discriminatory values, ideologies and institutions and bring about peace. It is important to recognize that Nigerian women are not only victims during conflict and its aftermath (Francis, 2015).

Acknowledging women as actors, crucial for societal change, development and reconciliation can help bring about peace building and development. Nigeria women should ensure that there is a great need to establish a functioning judicial system and to improve respect for the rule of law. Education is the spring board for advancement and empowerment of women in different areas of human endeavour (Francis, 2015). Education is the greatest investment that should be given to women in order to empower them to fulfil their roles and participate effectively in national development.

While many resources have been dedicated to Countering Violent Extremism efforts, little attention has been paid to the role women play in the Boko Haram insurgency and responses to it in Nigeria (Hassan, 2017).

This insurgency and counter-insurgency (COIN) is being waged by three distinct actors: the government of Nigeria, Boko Haram, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). While many resources have been dedicated to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts, little attention has been paid to the role women play in promoting or participating in the insurgency and counterinsurgency.

Of the aforementioned organisations, only Boko Haram and the CJTF have integrated gender into their terrorism and counter-terrorism efforts. Boko Haram has played on the common perception of women as nonviolent to effortlessly mainstream women into their operations, using them to gather intelligence, as recruiters, and promoters of radical ideologies to indoctrinate abductees and other converts in Boko Haram enclaves. In fact, the sects have allegedly preyed on women's grievances relating to marginalisation, inequality, and alienation to recruit more women into its folds. In other cases, women are unwilling perpetrators and are forced into becoming suicide bombers, sex slaves, and forced labourers.

There is a growing awareness on the significance of mainstreaming women into Prevention and Countering of violent extremism. The importance of women in this process cannot be overemphasised as women occupy several twinning roles within the community, and their perception and reaction differs. However, the counter insurgency strategy in Nigeria so far has not seized the opportunity of women's

unique roles and, importantly, their perspectives in the prevention and countering of violent extremism (Hassan, 2017).

Statement of Problem

The Nigerian government has made no discernible efforts to integrate women in counter insurgency operations forgetting the fact that women were reputed enablers of the insurgents' activities and therefore should constitute strong target in the de-radicalisation, disarmament and reintegration processes considering their huge but different power base spanning the socio-economic, cultural and economic bases.

Although the country has developed a National Action Plan to fulfil UN Security Council Resolution 1325, this is not reflected in the ongoing armed conflict between the Nigerian state and Boko Haram. For example, while women and children are most affected by the insurgency, there are few women involved in counter insurgency operations, with government forces estimated to be 98% male. This is largely responsible for the gender based violence ongoing in the IDP camps. For instance, there are rife allegations of women and girls being coerced into sex in return for food or other favours, as well as rape and assault, among other vices.

Experts have described families as the cells that make up the body of society. If these cells are undernourished or become cancerous, the entire body succumbs. Some people believe that the disintegration of a society can often be traced to the breakdown of the family. When members of a family lose their sense of direction and stability, their values may become distorted.

The family is very important in the social development of a child, and it contributes to the stability of the entire society. Children get informal education through their family. They learn more about their culture and the values of their society. Learning about their heritage gives children a sense of identity and belonging. This type of education ensures the values and culture of the society live on.

Family helps to shape a person's character by regulating their social behaviours. It is through family that children learn what is socially acceptable and what is not. The type of guidance the child receives from the family helps him impact the society he lives in. As an agent of socialization, families teach members about sharing, group life and close relationships. Family also introduces people to their first system of beliefs, values, norms and opinions.

In achieving peace and security in the North-Eastern Nigeria, which is a necessary factor for sustainable growth and development in Nigeria, the importance of family and women cannot be overemphasized in engendering peace in North-East, Nigeria.

Therefore, this research will be conducted to bring out the roles women and family play in creating peace in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this research work is to examine and amplify the roles women and family play in engendering peace in the North-Eastern Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the root causes of violence extremism in the North-Eastern Nigeria.
2. Examine the effect of the violence in the North-Eastern Nigeria on family and women.
3. Highlight the roles women and family play in engendering peace in the North-Eastern Nigeria.

Causes of Conflicts in North- Eastern Nigeria

Nigeria is an immensely varied States with different histories, geographical settings, economic development, public policies and patterns of interactions. Conflict occurs because of a clash of interests when parties or countries are relating to each other and pursuing different goals. Although the word 'war' can be used as another name for conflict, it confines the denotation of war to brutal conflicts. Just like war, 'conflict' is another way of settling disputes between wrangling groups in the society (Oyeniyi, 2011). Africa boasts of being diverse: diverse in ethnic groups, religion, and socio-cultural matters.

The Horn of Africa negatively boasts of all the bad things existing in the world's agenda. These challenges include tribal animosity, religious intolerance, civil war, refugees, famine, and the disintegration of states. South Africa's racial biases still occur from time to time, though the country has made a very big stride its eradication. The north part of Africa still faces the challenge of Islamic extremism. The causes of conflicts in North eastern Nigerian are many, but can be summarized in the following ways, Indoctrination, Religious extremism, External Influence, Perceived social injustice, and Poverty:

The main reason for conflicts in Nigeria is the disastrous economic situation of many Nigerian states. Together with the problem of debt, low flow of capital into many countries, and foreign aid assistance can lead to conflict. In early 1990s, a former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali argued that the main causes of conflict include economic misery, social injustice, and political repression. Amidst poverty in Africa, the elite group that has power enriches itself. The political class attracts envy/rivalry from other elite groups. Some groups galvanize armed groups to attack certain people they consider enemies of their people.

Political causes of conflicts assume ideological/political movements, territorial controls, and religious intolerance against other states. Political factors align to regional rivalries, terrorism, compulsion or disrespecting the economies of other countries.

Domestic politics can easily lead to conflicts, and they include agitations for power, hostility, over-population, economic and religious differences, tyranny, and tribal violence connected to economic, religious, cultural, social or ethnic matters.

Persecution signifies abuses of human rights, displacing people, poverty, or instability because of ineffective government, rampant corruption by the government, and other forms of injustices. Military: A country can decide to attack another country or support rebels fighting that country. Inter- state takeover and hostility can lead to many conflicts between and amongst different countries.

Role and Impact of Women and Family in Peace and Conflict Resolutions

Women can help in maintaining order since the effects of conflicts in North east Nigeria are mainly felt by the women and Children. Men are likely to get wounds or murdered because they are the ones who can easily join militia groups. The effects of conflicts on women and children are enormous. Women are easy targets of connected to conflicts (Porter, 2003). Women are susceptible to sexual exploitation and physical insecurity, matters that lead to stigmatization in the society. Women can be vulnerable if they are considered as just bearers of cultural identity and children attendants. In situations where women are also militias, they carry another burden assigned to them by family roles. Family roles dictate that women primary roles are to take care of families during times of conflicts, and not peace building.

Women are now playing such huge role in restoring peace and order in the area seriously affected by Boko Haram. The reality is now dawning, that women play an important role in maintaining peace. Right from the ground, activities such as humanitarian assistance, disarmament, children care, and exchange of hostage are very instrumental in the process of maintaining peace and resolving conflicts (Porter, 2003). Women have managed to extend their roles to be a political agenda, and their grassroots efforts have served as vehicles that motivate people to get involved in the struggle for peace.

Women have shared concerns that they may want to address for the last time. They include getting access to schools, hospitals, health care, clean water, and nutrition. These concerns may become hard to get if there is no peace. Because of the above reasons, women must be involved in confidence-building plans and enhancing reconciliation during and after the occurrence of conflicts (Adebajo, 2002). Women's organizations can mobilize their members across party lines and help to build consensus when making peace agreements. Women networks are some of the strongest proponents of open and accountable governance in Africa. Additionally, women create national groups that help in peace building for future peace and gender equality issues.

Describing women as just victims of war should not be entertained. Different groups of women have done a commendable job in their countries under various circumstances. The efforts of women to ensure that their families survive have affected the number of women who can participate in peace processes. Since there are few women who are courageous enough to participate in peace-making initiatives, they should be protected by getting funding, training and inclusion in offices of power (Adebajo, 2002). When women's movements are properly supported, their peace efforts can affect a large portion of the population. Their efforts can help reduce violence and build democratic institutions in the post-conflict period. These groups must be recognized at the onset of peacemaking initiatives and helped to communicate their points to communities around them.

In order to make the society support and understand women's issues, women must participate in the making and implementation of initiatives such as truth and justice commissions, and ensure there is adequate representation in both courts and parliament. In Rwanda, almost 50% of the seats in the lower house comprises of women while another 35% of women make up the Upper House of parliament (Daley, 2006). A continuous effort by women in the Liberian peace process was instrumental in the appointment of some women as commissioners of the country's Truth Commission. Gender-sensitive initiatives were also implemented, 35% of testimonies given to the Commission came from women.

Peace Building and Women

The term "peace building" does not take the female gender into consideration, no wonder that the term was not even 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 peace building, 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, striped 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).

Overcoming Challenges for Women in the Peace Building Process

There is a greater need to rise above the challenges that prevent women from taking part in the process of maintaining peace before and after the conflict. Women should use the lacuna existing after the conflict because of a weakened patriarchal order and come up with active

women's groups. These groups need to be formed early in time before it is too late when traditions come back and dominate over women. Women's movements must be sustained through the conflicts and post-conflicts. These movements need to help mend fences between different groups, thus boosting the struggle for the rights of women without necessarily waiting for the end of the conflicts. For African women to be successful in the process of maintaining peace they must be well organized, and fight for institutional and political representation. They must also create cohesion through different networks (Pankhurst, 2003).

The international community needs to assist women to actively and effectively participate in processes that will lead to stability in Africa. The international community must help promote gender equity and change laws that promote gender inequality. Some of these laws continue to discriminate women, and constitutional and judicial reforms can play a big part in supporting women's initiatives (Pankhurst, 2003). Women must be given access to economic resources and allowed to participate actively in elections. Although women's groups have made various contributions in their countries, gender parity mechanisms created are still very weak.

Peace initiatives in Africa must support women's organizations and ensure that resources are available for women so that they can do something in peace-building processes (Pankhurst, 2003). There is a need to have discussions with women's groups and identify ways in which they can help to maintain peace in their communities. African governments must ensure that women obtain necessary information that will empower women and ensure that they can participate in the processes of peace building. The UN and various countries must offer enough protection to refugees and internally displaced women by ensuring that their needs are catered for. These women need health care, rehabilitation, education among other issues (Pankhurst, 2003). Governments must ensure that they bring impunity to an end, and prosecute those involved in crimes against humanity. They must also ensure that women's rights are protected by being enshrined in the constitution. Constitutional amendments can help women realize their rights of participating in building their countries.

Women must be trained as advocates of policies to help them draft important policies. Women organizations need to be trained to shift from grassroots activities to developmental work. Women must gain skills that will allow them to work efficiently in different backgrounds. However, capacity training may not be enough for these women. Improvements of basic education, knowledge, and skills of life will help to progress the ability of women to influence policies. Some people believe that when you empower a woman, you have empowered the whole community.

Women need economic empowerment. There is a need to include policies that will give accessibility of markets to both men and women (Daley, 2006). Countries' economic policies must put more investment towards female farmers by providing opportunities to participate in development. The modern society must acknowledge women's leadership and entrepreneurship, not seeing them as just domestic workers. Proper economic policies such as creation of women's funds can go a long way to help women start businesses that will help them.

Coalition building efforts at all levels must be enhanced and merged (Daley, 2006). A main priority is the development of women's alliances at the national level with active involvement of grass-root based women's organizations.

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