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## Socioeconomic Impact of Gender Discrimination in Conflict Management in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Insecurity caused by violent conflicts in Nigeria is a recurring phenomenon that threatens the well-being of its citizens and has become something of grave concern to almost every well-meaning citizen. This study examined the socioeconomic impact of gender discrimination in conflict management in Nigeria. We argued that efforts by the Federal Government and some state governments to tackle violent conflicts have neglected women who are usually the most impacted by the negative effects of conflicts. Intervention strategies at all levels of government in Nigeria have mostly marginalize women and prioritize violent actors (mostly men). Arising from our finding that government at all levels in Nigeria have not done enough to assist and protect women's rights in conflict and post-conflict zones both in terms in of economic recovery and empowerment, as well as protection from gender-based and sexual violence, we recommend that there is need to amend national laws to make effective participation of women and women-based groups in government's conflict and post-conflict intervention efforts mandatory.

**Key Words:** *Conflict management, Gender, Insecurity, Women's right and Nigeria*

### INTRODUCTION

Insecurity caused by violent conflicts in Nigeria is a recurring phenomenon that threatens the well-being of its citizens and has become something of grave concern to almost every well-meaning citizen. Also, victims of insecurity in Nigeria ranges across different economic or income class that many people continue to wonder how the country arrived at such a dastardly situation where no one is safe [1]. Sadly, rather than abate, the problem is escalating and seemingly now out of control. Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed a torrential spate of armed violence and criminality since return to civilian rule in 1999. It has been observed that the country is one of the hotbeds of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa considering the repeated cases farmer and herdsman conflicts, banditry, kidnapping, secessions, insurgency and other cases of organized crimes [2,3]. The six geo-political configurations are associated with specific conflict trajectory. In the South west, violence associated with the Yoruba self-determination movement has been a recurring problem in recent years. The region is also plagued by a surge in kidnapping, ritual and extrajudicial killings [1]. In the South East, violent resurgence of Biafra separatism, coordinated attacks on state facilities by unknown gunmen, kidnapping and armed transhumant pastoral attacks on farming communities are some of the security challenges bedeviling the region in recent years [4]. In the South-South, militant attacks on oil facilities, bunkering and other oil-related crimes still persist despite huge government's financial investment in an amnesty programme [5]. The Northeast is still patently under Boko Haram scourge despite counterinsurgency endeavours of the Nigerian military [6,7]. North central is afflicted by herders' militancy that has created a humanitarian crisis while the Northwest has recently been enmeshed in the rapid upsurge of banditry and kidnapping [6].

One common narrative in most of the studies that have tried to explain the cause(s) and persistence of insecurity in Nigeria is to link insecurity with the kind of political leadership the country inherited at independence. Abada, et al [8], Ogan-Iyam [9], Ibeanu [10], Ake [11] and Ekekwe [12] for instance all agreed that the nature and character of political leadership in Nigeria since independence in 1960 continue to shape how the Nigerian state respond or react to conflict and tackle insecurity. They argued that the Nigerian state at independence lacked both internal cohesion and enduring institutions to form the basis of a stable regime. This was because the indigenous ruling class that took over from Colonial administration was more preoccupied with appropriating the privileges of colonialism than abolishing its injustice and oppression of the Nigerian masses [12]. According to Fadakinte [13], power struggle was prioritized above all other struggles among the indigenous ruling class because whichever faction won power privatized it. As noted by Ake [14] and Collier [15], anything that affects the prospect of power in post-independence Nigeria is contested bitterly,

lawlessly and violently. Thus, rather than being seen as conflict managers, political leadership in Nigeria became in itself a source of conflict [8].

Insecurity in Nigeria has had a negative impact on the nation's economy. Rising violence in the country cost Nigeria 11% of its GDP. Similarly, projects worth N12 trillion were abandoned across Nigeria due to insecurity and other challenges [16]. The Institute for Economics and Peace in its 2021 Global Peace Index report noted that insecurity in Nigeria has affected economic growth by drying out investments, increasing unemployment, and dwindling government revenue, among others. The impact of insecurity is reflected in the performance of macroeconomic indicators, investment inflow as well as economic performance. According to the Global Terrorism Index, over US\$40.6 billion worth of foreign investments were diverted from the Nigerian economy as a result of insecurity as of 2020. This had implications for job creation and economic prosperity as purchasing power declined [1]. Nigeria is now regarded as the world's poverty capital and has an estimated 91 million people living in extreme poverty which is projected to reach 106.6 million by 2030.

The impact of insecurity on human capital development in Nigeria can also not be overstated. Many schools in northeastern and northwestern parts of Nigeria are shut down due to the activities of Boko Haram, ISWAP and bandits. There have been numerous cases of kidnapping of school children, particularly young girls, in the two regions with security agencies unable to provide adequate security. Insecurity in Nigeria has also affected other sectors of the economy as the Federal Government (FG) continues to defund some critical sectors due to continuous increase in its security expenditure. Data from Budget IT shows that in 2020, the FG allotted N1.78 trillion for security expenses which was approximately an 83.7% increase from the N969 billion allocated for the same in 2015. Sadly, security crisis in Nigeria escalated within this period despite the increase in budgetary allocation. Agbulesi [1] observed also that insecurity is forcing migration to cities and towns that are considered safer by citizens and as a result, places like Abuja and Lagos are gradually becoming home to migrants resulting in the overpopulation of these cities and over-burdening of their public infrastructures.

Nigeria is predominantly an agrarian country and agriculture accounts for about 23% of the nation's GDP. According to FAO [17], 70% of Nigerian households practice crop farming and in rural areas, it is as high as 87%. Agriculture provides employment for about 35% of Nigeria's population [18] and the main foundation of the Nigerian economy as it remains the main source of livelihood for most citizens. Women's contribution to agriculture in Nigeria and food production in particular cannot be overemphasized. They are food producers for most of the households in rural areas and their contribution to agriculture in general is estimated to be 65% [19]. Insecurity in Nigeria affects agriculture and by implication, women empowerment, due to the disruption of economic activities like farming that outbreaks of conflict often cause.

Nigeria is facing a lingering food crisis. Between 2008 and 2013, production of staple cereal foods (maize, millet, rice, sorghum, wheat, and other cereals) declined by 11.8% from about 28.8 million tons to about 25.4 million tons. Also, spice (pimento and other spices) and tomato production shrank by 1.7% and 14.1%, respectively over the same period [20]. A recent joint stakeholders' report on the food insecurity situation in 16 states in Northern Nigeria indicated that over 3.7 million people are food insecure. Based on the report, a total of 3.5 million people are currently in food crisis while 999,959 are in an emergency situation in need of urgent assistance. This is more pervasive in the northeastern part of the country where a state (Borno) is said to account for over 50% of the burden [21]. One of the contributing factors to the persisting food crisis in Nigeria is insecurity. The nefarious activities of Boko Haram, ISWAP, bandits, as well as the recurring herders-farmers conflict in northern Nigeria contributed greatly to waning food production in Nigeria. Thousands of civilians have been killed and households displaced in northern Nigeria displaced, with their farmlands and livelihoods completely destroyed. In southern Nigeria, activities of Biafra agitators, unknown gunmen, militants in the Niger Delta and Yoruba-nation agitators have all contributed to the worsening security situation in the region with negative implication for food security as well. Apart from reduced production, insecurity also affects food transportation across regions further creating scarcity and rise in cost of food items.

Efforts by the FG and some subnational governments in Nigeria to tackle insecurity sadly have neglected women who are often the most affected by the socioeconomic impacts of conflicts. Since women are the most engaged in subsistence food production and sale of farm produce for household income, conflicts that interrupt this economic activity most times affects women the most. However, conflict intervention strategies and post-conflict peace building processes in Nigeria have mostly marginalized women with government at all levels mostly prioritizing the compensation of violent actors (mostly men) in both conflict intervention and peace building efforts. A good example is the FG's amnesty deals targeted at ending the conflicts in Niger Delta and northeast Nigeria, as well as the Zamfara state government's amnesty offer to bandits targeted at ending the conflict in the state. In all these deals, monthly stipends were paid only to ex-fighters (predominantly male youths) while other victims of the conflicts, including people that lost their farms, businesses, houses and other properties were totally ignored. Women are the most marginalized in conflict

management and peace building efforts in Nigeria. Since they rarely take up arms and are often constrained by socio-cultural factors from owning properties, they are mostly overlooked. Majority of women in conflict areas where amnesty offers are operational in Nigeria are agrarian by occupation and work on farms that have been destroyed by these conflicts.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the Millennium Development Goals, brought the inclusion of women in the security agenda into the international limelight. Although these global frameworks, and other international resolutions, underscore the importance of women's participation in the politics of peace and security, Nigeria's frameworks have not been inclusive. The resultant effect of this lack of inclusiveness is the further infringement of women's right in Nigeria. Conflicts undermine both their physical and economic security and there is need to adequately involve women in both conflict management and post-conflict peace building efforts. This study examined the socioeconomic impact of gender discrimination in conflict management in Nigeria.

### **CONFLICT-INDUCED HUMAN INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: HOW IT IMPACTS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

Conflict-induced human insecurity is more evident when its impact on food security is examined as armed conflict is one of the leading drivers of global hunger. Over 70% of people in crisis levels of food insecurity live in countries affected by conflict and from 2020 to 2021, the number of people facing acute hunger due to conflict is estimated to have risen by 40 million. To address this, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 2417 and 2573 (passed in 2018 and 2021, respectively) identified the linkages of conflict to hunger and condemned the use of starvation as a method of warfare in violation of international humanitarian law (IHL) [22].

In Nigeria, conflict and violence have been a dominant cause of food insecurity in recent years. A 2018 Relief Web report on food security in Nigeria noted that the major cause of food insufficiency in Nigeria is conflict and violence, which has been largely fuelled by ethnic and religious tensions in the northeast of the country. The displacement of people in Nigeria has increased the concern over food insecurity. In the Borno State for instance, violence and displacement of people has disrupted agricultural production and made people affected dependent on emergency food assistance. Over 650,000 people in the Borno State alone have limited access to agricultural land and labor opportunities, and are thus, heavily dependent on assistance. The unprecedented rise in insecurity has displaced farming communities and hindered cultivation. Agricultural activities have been interrupted in most conflict zones particularly in the largely ungoverned territories in the northwest of the country, with reports that hundreds of farmers were killed and kidnapped 2021 alone [23]. As a result, many farmers have abandoned their farmlands, fled their communities, and relocated to urban areas, or taken shelter in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Many have become unemployed and can no longer care for their families. While some of the men have resorted to criminality, the women have been left helpless and vulnerable to some of the negative effects of conflicts like gender-based violence and loss of livelihood, leading to a vicious cycle of poverty and insecurity.

Conflict-induced disruption of farming has affected food security in Nigeria by undermining agricultural supply and have also led to inflated prices of agricultural produce. At the national level for instance, since July 2020, staples such as beans and tomatoes have seen a 253% and 123% surge in prices, respectively. In July 2020, a measure of beans (called Mudu) sold for 73 cents (N305.48), but by July 2021, it was selling for \$2.16 (N900). The prices of other commodities like bread, onions, and cassava flour, have also risen exponentially [23].

Borno State was previously the largest wheat-producing state in Nigeria, accounting for 30% of Nigeria's wheat, but the activities of insurgents have stalled production. By the end of 2021, Borno State contributed only minimally to the nation's 420,000 tonnes of annual wheat production, leading to an increase in wheat imports to the country, from \$2.4 million in the first quarter of 2020 to \$6.2 million in the corresponding quarter of 2021 [23]. In the northwestern state of Katsina, kidnapping has taken center stage and disrupted agricultural activities. Many farmers have been kidnapped for ransom, and some have been killed on their farmlands. In some instances, bandits have struck deals with farmers, allowing them to pay levies to continue farming on their lands. In cases where bandits have reneged, farmers have experienced attacks and where they have survived, they have been forced to flee their farms. In 2021, eight farmers in Buruku and Udawa villages of Chikun LGA, Kaduna state, were attacked on their farmlands and eventually killed. This forced many farmers to abandon their farms and communities due to fear.

Women are disproportionately affected by violent conflicts in Nigeria due to their predominant participation in agriculture and household income generation, particularly in rural areas. Violent conflicts further threaten women's rights as it makes them vulnerable to some acts of violence. As argued by Oluremi [24], women are severely affected by wars and other violent conflicts as they are most times become vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence including rape, forced conscription, sexual slavery, abduction and forced impregnation among other atrocities. In their assessment of the armed conflict associated with the activities of Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria, Usman and Abubakar [25] detailed

some of the violence perpetuated against women by both the insurgent group and security forces. They noted that many of the displaced women and teenage girls in IDPs camps were raped, impregnated by soldiers, civilian JTF and abandoned. They further noted that Boko Haram committed similar atrocities in their camps. Human Rights Watch reports of 2014 and 2015 revealed similar claim. The reports noted that many young girls and women were raped by Boko Haram fighters and used as symbol of sexual satisfaction after capture. Those who refused the sexual advances of the insurgents were brutalized and threatened and Nigerian security forces were also guilty of using the same technique in IDPs camps. Usman and Abubakar[25] stated that babies were given birth to by girls captured by Boko Haram fighters as well as in IDPs camps and these babies were neglected and abandoned.

Nwangwu and Ezeibe [26] rightly noted that such acts are in violation of the International Humanitarian Law as well as Human Rights Laws that guide armed conflict. Sadly, violence against women in conflict zones is further made worse by their economic marginalization in conflict resolution efforts of government. While women are head of many households particularly in rural communities, government financial compensatory schemes mostly prioritize households headed by men. Agbo [27] and Adibe, et al [28] noted that government’s conflict resolution efforts have done little to protect women’s rights in Nigeria. Government’s rehabilitation and reintegration programmes at both federal and state levels have mostly prioritize violent actors in conflicts (mostly young adult males), while women who are the most impacted by armed conflicts due to loss of farmlands, destruction of markets and disruption of other economic activities are overlooked.

**Table 1: Notable Post-Conflict Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programmes in Nigeria since 1999 and Gender Composition of Beneficiaries**

Programmes	Year	Location	Awarding Government	Number of Beneficiaries	Male	Female
^Amnesty to ex-militants	2009	Niger Delta	Federal Government	20,192	20,049	133
^^Amnesty to low risk repentant Boko Haram fighters	2016	Northeast Nigeria	Federal Government/Nigerian Military	893	893	-
^^^Release of special fund to train repentant bandits in furniture making and other vocational skills	2019-2020	Katsina state	Katsina state government	1,700	1700	-
^^^Release of social intervention fund to repentant bandits and unemployed youths	2019-2021	Zamfara state	Zamfara state government	18,000	18,000	-

**Source:** Authors’ compilation from Pakiri [29]^^, Omenma, et al [7]^ and Agbegbedia [30]^

The above table shows that women’s economic right is also jeopardized in armed conflict management in Nigeria in addition to other human rights violations they are subjected or exposed to in conflict zones. Thus, while armed conflicts in Nigeria has drastically affected food production, accessibility and affordability due to interruption of agricultural activities in conflict areas, the dominance of women in agricultural activities means that they are the most affected by such conflicts. They are the worst affected by food insecurity due to loss of income and further vulnerable to other acts of violence that undermine their rights as humans. Government prioritization of men in conflict resolution efforts further diminish women’s capacity to cope in post-conflict period.

### **WOMEN’S RIGHTS PROTECTION IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT COMMUNITIES: THE ROLE OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

The disproportionate victimization of women, the exploitative and oppressive measures often meted out against to them during conflicts, their near-total exclusion from official circles of security policy processes and the clamor for their empowerment in security governance is rooted in the historical marginalization of women in traditional societies. There is a stereotypical notion in most African states, including Nigeria that the involvement of women in security issues is not only a manifestation of an alien culture but sometimes quite offensive to men [31]. The UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 drew global attention to women’s inclusion in politics, the economy and security. UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000), several other United Nations Security Council resolutions and the Millennium Development Goals, have reflected the international commitment to women, and of women, for peace and

security. Although Nigeria is a signatory to most global and regional treaties that promote women’s inclusion in security framework, the two major documents that delineate the roles of the various stakeholders in combating insecurity, particularly countering violent extremism activities (the National Counter Terrorism Strategy and the National Security Strategy), do not consider women’s civil society organizations as major stakeholders.

In Nigeria, the Civilian Joint Task Force was the first to incorporate women in their counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency” activities [32]. Civilian Joint Task Force operates in gender-binary terms in northeast Nigeria, where Islamic laws define gender roles. Female members of the Civilian Joint Task Force are largely restricted to intelligence gathering and body-searching women and girls for improvised explosive devices at checkpoints and public places. Female members of the Civilian Joint Task Force have been effective in detecting female suicide bombers and preventing Boko Haram attacks [32]. An increase in the number of women in the security sector has also improved the efforts to stop female suicide bombers [26]. As individuals, mothers and wives, the role of women in combating insecurity counter-terrorism has grown exponentially because they are more likely to reduce the occurrence of human rights abuses. For example, Melander [33] notes that an increase in the number of women in politics often results in a reduction in the rate of human rights abuses and collective violence against women and children.

Incremental increases in the participation of women in politics, education, employment and combating insecurity is potentially the easiest pathway to peace and security, at least in the short-term while long-term solutions are being developed. Thus, Nigeria’s peace and security agenda cannot be complete without inclusion of women as equal partners in leadership and conflict management strategies. This is because the involvement of women in leadership improves the gender responsiveness of policies and programmes. In Kenya for example, women-led civil society organizations were at the forefront of the campaign to end the tampon tax in 2004 and similarly to rescind the import duty on sanitary pads in 2011 [34]. The inclusion of women in the security sector helps to present a softer face of security forces and reduce human rights abuses [35]. In Nigeria, women-led civil society organizations are today at the forefront in training of women as the first line of security for their homes, families and communities, making them an invaluable resource hub in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism.

Also, post-conflict rebuilding needs more women participation in planning and execution as the dominant use of amnesty by government at both national and state levels in the rehabilitation and reintegration of people back into society in the post-conflict period also unfairly prioritizes men over women. Violent conflict affects women differently; as victims, accessories or perpetrators. Since 2009, hundreds of women and girls have been abducted, sexually abused and forced into marriages to jihadist fighters. The trauma of losing spouses and children to the conflict further leaves unforgettable memories for some of these women. The travails of women in the Boko Haram conflict both as victims and as perpetrators are uniquely different and must be addressed with women-tailored solutions. Debatably, the efforts of the amnesty programme for repentant Boko Haram insurgents may not have duly considered women in the conflict. According to a study by the Institute for Security Studies, many women released by the military claim they didn’t participate in the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes at Borno State-run Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Centre for women and children. Some also claim they went through the process for a maximum of three months while others maintain that they were released directly to communities or camps for internally displaced people. The amnesty programme must be accompanied by an approach that specifically caters for the needs of women in the programme. The amnesty programme in the northeast tagged ‘Operation Safe Corridor’ must adequately provide for psychosocial support for women that are among the repentant insurgents. The full involvement of women in post-conflict reintegration of women can therefore not be overemphasized. Life is as twice as hard for women due to systemic marginalization, ethno-religious limitations, and social deprivations. The chances of survival for women in societies recovering from conflict are slimmer when compared to men and without adequate psychosocial support and empowerment, they may never fully reintegrate or economically survive in post-conflict communities.

**Table 2: Some Achievements of Women-led Civil Society Organizations to Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria**

1	Advocacy visits to major stakeholders in Plateau State starting with youths in volatile communities
2	Installation of a Peace Borehole at AngwanRukuba
3	Renovation of a dilapidated school at Gangare
4	Distribution of artificial limbs to victims of Boko Haram attacks at Kabong
5	Donation of 13 wheelchairs to the physically challenged in Bukuru
6	Appeal for the corporate social responsibility of Grand Cereals Manufacturing Company Fatigen
7	Job replacement project for women who trade in the production and sale of burkutu
8	Training of some women in poultry farming with a donation of 200 (51-day old) chicks and 12 bags of chicken feeds feeders and drinkers to start poultry business
9	Training of women in bee making workshop
10	Skill acquisition training for women in the area of catering tailoring and hairdressing

11	Distribution of sewing machines and salon equipment to trainees
12	Award of small grants to 13 women to engage in petty trading like the sale of vegetables grains charcoal and kerosene
13	Issuance of communiqués to both the Federal Government of Nigeria and some state governments on the need to tackle insecurity and bring perpetrators to justice

**Source:** Nwangwu and Ezeibe [26]

Table 2 shows some of the achievements of women-led CSOs in catering for women in both conflict and post-conflict situations. It further reinforces the argument that women’s active participation in decision making that borders on how best protect women’s rights during conflict, as well as their involvement the post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration efforts of government will have more positive impact on women and young girls.

## CONCLUSION

Insecurity in Nigeria has had a negative impact on the nation’s economy. The impact of insecurity on human capital development in Nigeria can also not be overstated. Nigeria is predominantly an agrarian country and women’s contribution to agriculture in Nigeria and food production in particular cannot be overemphasized. They are food producers for most of the households in rural areas, thus, insecurity in Nigeria affects not only food security due to disruption of economic activities like farming, it affects women also due to the dominant role they play in the agriculture workforce. Efforts by the Federal Government and some state governments totackle insecurity sadly have neglected women who are usually the most impacted by the negative effects of conflicts. Intervention strategies at all levels of government in Nigeria have mostly marginalize women and prioritize violent actors (mostly men). We presented a data showing the rehabilitation and reintegration efforts of the FG and some state governments in Nigeria since 1999 that proved our argument that conflict and post-conflict intervention efforts of governments at all levels in Nigeria is gender insensitive and have not enough to address the challenges women face in conflict and post-conflict zones. Also, data showing some of the achievements of women-led CSOs in catering for women in both conflict and post-conflict situations in Nigeria was presented. This was used to reiterate the argument that women’s active participation in decision making that borders on how best protect women’s rights during conflict, as well as their involvement the post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration efforts of government will have more positive impact on women and young girls. Arising from our finding that government at all levels in Nigeria have not done enough to assist and protect women’s rights in conflict and post-conflict zones both in terms in of economic recovery and empowerment, as well as protection from gender-based and sexual violence, we recommend that there is need to amend national laws to make effective participation of women and women-based groups in government’s conflict and post-conflict intervention efforts mandatory. That way, factors that make women vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict zones can be effectively addressed.

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