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Women and Local Peacebuilding Initiatives in Nigeria: Everyday Agency, Bridge-Building, and the Politics of Survival

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Abstract. This article examines women's local peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria through a qualitative evidence synthesis of published studies, with particular attention to the insurgency-affected northeast and to broader women-led civic mobilisation in fragile and conflict-affected settings. It argues that women's peacebuilding in Nigeria is best understood not as a peripheral humanitarian supplement to formal peace processes, but as a core form of everyday political agency that sustains communities, repairs fractured social relations, and challenges gendered exclusions embedded in both state security practice and orthodox peacebuilding. Drawing on feminist peacebuilding theory, the local turn in peacebuilding, and the literature on everyday peace, the article analyses how women act as interfaith bridge-builders, livelihood organisers, informal mediators, rescuers, reintegration brokers, and movement leaders. The analysis is anchored on recent interview-based study of women peacebuilders in northeastern Nigeria and is extended through Nigeria-focused scholarship on women-led civil society organisations, displacement, countering violent extremism, women's organising under fragility, and the localisation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The findings are organised around five themes: bridge-building across religious and communal divides; care and livelihoods as material peace infrastructure; informal mediation and reintegration; grassroots-to-public advocacy; and the structural limits imposed by militarisation, securitisation, and weak localisation of gender policy. The study concludes that women's local peacebuilding in Nigeria is transformative but overburdened: it expands women's authority and social influence, yet continues to operate without adequate institutional recognition, resourcing, or protection. Sustainable peace in Nigeria will require moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward an architecture that centers women's local knowledge, redistributes decision-making power, and treats community-based peace labor as a fundamental pillar of national peacebuilding.

Keywords: Women; Local Peacebuilding; Nigeria; Everyday Peace; Feminist Peacebuilding; Women, Peace and Security; Boko Haram; Qualitative Evidence Synthesis.

1. Introduction

Women's peacebuilding in Nigeria sits at the intersection of two enduring blind spots in conflict and governance research. The first is the tendency of mainstream peacebuilding analysis to focus on elite negotiations, formal mediation, and state-led security

processes, even though many of the practices that make everyday coexistence possible occur outside those arenas. The second is the persistence of gendered assumptions that position women primarily as victims of conflict, or at most as beneficiaries of post-conflict recovery, rather than as political actors whose labour and organising materially shape peace. These blind spots are particularly consequential in Nigeria, where violent insurgency, communal conflict, mass displacement, and uneven state responses have created a setting in which local, informal, and community-based forms of peace work are not secondary to peacebuilding; they are often its most durable and socially embedded expression. Recent scholarship shows that in contexts where formal peace efforts are militarised, exclusionary, or ineffective, women frequently sustain peace through interfaith dialogue, rescue work, psychosocial support, economic organising, community mediation, and public advocacy (Tripp et al., 2025; Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019).

Nigeria offers a particularly important setting for studying these dynamics. Conflict in the northeast and northwest, especially in areas affected by Boko Haram and related armed groups, has produced not only extraordinary violence but also profound social reordering. Women have borne the burden of widowhood, displacement, abduction, social stigma, livelihood loss, and care work, yet they have also emerged as organisers of community survival and local order. At the same time, women's peace activism in Nigeria extends beyond the northeast. Women-led civic mobilisations, such as the #BringBackOurGirls movement, show that local peacebuilding in Nigeria also includes protest politics, strategic communication, and network-building to address impunity and state failure. Together, these strands reveal that peacebuilding in Nigeria is not limited to negotiation rooms, donor programs, or military stabilisation. It is also enacted through markets, women's associations, households, religious networks, safe spaces, training groups, protest sites, and community conversations (Atela et al., 2021; Tripp et al., 2025).

This study argues that women's local peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria should be understood as a form of everyday political agency rooted in care, survival, and social repair, but also in contestation over who is recognised as a legitimate peace actor. Women do not merely fill gaps left by failed institutions; they produce forms of peace that are relational, practical, and locally grounded. Yet their work is frequently undervalued or instrumentalised. In securitised policy frameworks, women are often invited into peace and security programming only when they can serve state priorities, especially in preventing and countering violent extremism, rather than on their own terms as community-based agents of peace. This creates a double bind: women's local knowledge is needed, but women themselves are often denied equal authority in defining the agenda, terms, and meaning of peacebuilding (Akintayo, 2024; Durueke, 2025).

The article makes three contributions. First, it recenters local women's peacebuilding in Nigeria within a more rigorous conceptual conversation that links feminist peacebuilding, the local turn, and everyday peace. Second, it synthesises Nigeria-focused qualitative evidence in a way that moves beyond a narrow "women as victims" frame and instead foregrounds women's practices of mediation, livelihood creation, bridge-building, and public accountability. Third, it shows that while women's local initiatives are transformative, they are also structurally overburdened. The same conditions that make women indispensable to local peacebuilding, state weakness, insecurity, displacement, and fractured social trust, also limit how far their initiatives can travel without institutional reform. The paper therefore, treats women's local peacebuilding not as an alternative to structural change, but as a diagnostic lens through which the failures of formal peace architectures become visible.

2. Theoretical Framework

This article is anchored in three complementary bodies of scholarship: feminist peacebuilding, the local turn in peacebuilding, and the literature on everyday peace. Feminist peacebuilding provides the central analytical starting point because it challenges the assumption that peace is made primarily through elite bargains and state institutions. Instead, it directs attention to how war and peace are gendered, how women are excluded from formal peace processes, and how much of women's peace labor is rendered invisible because it occurs in spaces traditionally coded as social, domestic, communal, or informal. In this tradition, women's peacebuilding is not reducible to participation in formal negotiations. It also includes the labor of maintaining social relations, resisting militarised masculinities, fostering inclusion, and building the material and relational conditions under which communities can survive conflict. Comparative feminist research shows that women's peace work often bridges divides long before formal talks begin and can transform not only conflict dynamics but also gender hierarchies themselves (Cárdenas & Olivius, 2021; Blomqvist et al., 2021).

The second pillar is the local turn in peacebuilding. Leonardsson and Rudd (2015) describe the local turn as a shift away from top-down liberal peacebuilding toward attention to local ownership, local knowledge, and the capacities of community actors. This literature emerged partly from dissatisfaction with externally driven peace interventions that were technically sophisticated but socially shallow. By foregrounding the "local," scholars sought to highlight the everyday social relations, vernacular institutions, and forms of agency that are often ignored by state-centric and international approaches. Yet the local turn also comes with analytical risks. Randazzo (2016) cautions that the everyday and the local can be romanticised, as if local spaces are inherently emancipatory, nonviolent, or egalitarian. Such romanticisation obscures the fact that local settings are also shaped by hierarchy, patriarchy, exclusion, and coercion. For this reason, local peacebuilding must be read critically rather than celebratorily. Women's initiatives may be locally rooted, but they unfold within unequal social orders.
This caution is vital for the Nigerian case. Local women's peacebuilding in Nigeria is significant precisely because it emerges within settings marked by patriarchal authority, religious conservatism, security-sector violence, and weak public protection. A feminist reading of the local turn therefore asks not simply whether local peacebuilding exists, but whose labour makes it possible, whose authority is recognised, and who bears the costs. Women's local peace initiatives are not automatically progressive because they are local; they become politically important because they reveal the uneven distribution of burdens and agency in conflict-affected communities. They are also significant because they often work on the relational terrain that formal institutions struggle to access: trust, reciprocity, mutual recognition, household survival, and intercommunal coexistence. In Nigeria, this includes work across Muslim-Christian divides, support for displaced women, community acceptance of returnees, and the creation of new livelihood pathways that reduce social fragmentation and the appeal of armed mobilisation (Tripp et al., 2025; Ajayi, 2020).

The third pillar is the concept of everyday peace. This literature shifts analysis away from peace as a macro-political settlement and toward the micro-practices through which ordinary people navigate insecurity, minimise violence, and sustain coexistence. In gendered versions of everyday peace, practices such as care, silence, social negotiation, informal dialogue, livelihood cooperation, and emotional labour are not treated as apolitical. Rather, they are understood as ways of keeping social life intact under conditions of insecurity. Blomqvist et al. (2021) show that women's practices of care and silence in Myanmar are crucial to sustaining everyday peace, even though such practices are often ignored in mainstream peacebuilding. This insight travels powerfully to Nigeria. Much of what women do in conflict-affected communities—sharing food, counselling survivors, teaching vocational skills, talking young people out of violence, organising interfaith meetings, or helping reintegrate returnees, can be read as everyday peace practices that hold communities together when formal institutions are absent, predatory, or distrusted.

At the same time, this article rejects essentialist notions that women are naturally more peaceful because they are mothers or caregivers. The anchor study by Tripp, Maiga, and Yahi (2025) is especially useful here because it explicitly warns against explaining women's peacebuilding through maternalist tropes alone. Women's prominence in local peacebuilding is better understood through gendered divisions of labour, social location, and the political economy of survival. Women often become central to peacebuilding because they are responsible for sustaining households, have extensive social ties across neighbourhoods and religious communities, and are forced into roles previously monopolised by men. Their peacebuilding is thus not a biological disposition; it is a historically and socially situated response to the burdens and openings produced by war. This distinction matters because it preserves women's agency without collapsing it into gender stereotypes.

Taken together, these three frameworks generate the paper's central proposition: women's local peacebuilding in Nigeria should be interpreted as a gendered, everyday, and locally embedded practice that is both transformative and constrained. It is transformative because it creates social bridges, reshapes gender roles, and produces peace from below. It is constrained because it remains under-resourced, is frequently informal, is vulnerable to securitisation, and is only partially recognised by state and policy frameworks. This double character, i.e., transformative yet overburdened, guides the analysis that follows.

3. Literature Review

The Nigeria-focused literature on women, conflict, and peace has expanded considerably, but it remains uneven. For many years, work on the Boko Haram crisis concentrated on women as victims of abduction, displacement, sexual violence, forced marriage, or recruitment into insurgent violence. That literature was indispensable in exposing gendered harms, but it

also had an unintended effect: it often placed women in the analytic frame primarily as casualties of war rather than as producers of peace. More recent scholarship has begun to broaden the debate. Ajayi (2020), for example, argues that women's experiences of displacement in the Boko Haram conflict are shaped not only by armed violence but also by their unequal status in the Nigerian polity and by policy frameworks that cast them as passive victims even when they are also strategic actors navigating survival and return. This shift in emphasis is important because it makes room for a more complex account of women's peacebuilding.

A related body of work examines women-led civil society organisations in the prevention and countering of violent extremism. Nwangwu and Ezeibe (2019) show that women-led civil society organisations in Nigeria are significant actors in countering violent extremism, not merely because they support state agendas but because they build networks, promote women's inclusion, and expand the political space for gender equality. Their study is important for two reasons. First, it establishes that women's participation in peace and security in Nigeria is organisational and collective, not merely individual. Second, it shows that women's civic action can rework gender hierarchies by connecting peacebuilding to broader struggles for recognition and political voice. This is especially relevant in a context where security discourses often center military, police, and elite policy actors while overlooking the social infrastructures through which peace is actually sustained.

Research on women's organising under fragility strengthens this point. Atela et al.'s (2021) study of the #BringBackOurGirls movement demonstrates that women-led organising in Nigeria can endure beyond a moment of protest and crystallise into a durable program of action. The movement succeeded not only because it protested the Chibok abductions, but because it developed strategies of persistence: transcending religious, political, and class boundaries; using social media and transnational publicity; maintaining safe pressure on elites; and building independent funding mechanisms. This article matters for the present paper because it expands the meaning of local peacebuilding. It shows that local peace work in Nigeria is not confined to neighborhood mediation or aid distribution; it also includes public accountability campaigns that contest state neglect and insist that peace requires truth, visibility, and civic pressure.

Another important cluster of studies examines policy inclusion and the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Nigeria. Gbadeyan et al. (2024) and Aje et al. (2025) argue that, despite decades of international and national advocacy, women in northeastern Nigeria remain on the margins of post-conflict peacebuilding. Their study underscores the continuing gap between the normative promise of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the realities of women's participation in counter-insurgency and recovery processes. Durueke (2025), writing in Women's Studies International Forum, sharpens the critique by arguing that Nigeria's National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 have not sufficiently localised universal norms to women's lived realities in rural areas. These works are crucial because they reveal a persistent disjuncture: women are repeatedly recognised in policy language, yet the institutions supposed to support their inclusion often fail to engage the actual forms of peace work women are already performing.

Qualitative studies of state response expose the same gap from a different angle. Botha's (2021) article on women and girls associated with Boko Haram shows that the Nigerian government has recognised their plight, but that responses remain partial and inadequate. Based on qualitative analysis combining policy documents and interviews, the study argues that support and reintegration mechanisms have been uneven, often leaving affected women insufficiently protected and poorly reintegrated. The significance of this for local peacebuilding is substantial. Where state reintegration is weak, communities, especially women's networks, frequently assume the burden of social acceptance, psychosocial accompaniment, and material support. Local peacebuilding initiatives thus arise partly because institutional reintegration mechanisms are thin or distrusted.

Recent scholarship also complicates simplistic celebrations of participation. Akintayo's (2024) ethnographic study of state-CSO relations in Nigeria's prevention and countering of violent extremism shows that the language of a whole-of-society approach can conceal unequal power relations. Rather than treating civil society organisations as equal partners, the state may recruit them as intelligence producers within a broader securitised architecture, thereby narrowing their autonomy. This insight is critical for any analysis of women's local peacebuilding. It warns that state recognition of community actors is not automatically emancipatory. Women's organisations may be valued because of their local reach, but that same reach can be instrumentalised in ways that subordinate community-based peace work to state security logic.

Beyond Nigeria, comparative literature helps interpret these patterns without flattening them. Cárdenas and

Olivius (2021) demonstrate in Myanmar that women-to-women diplomacy can serve as an alternative peacebuilding practice by transforming conflict narratives and fostering interethnic cooperation outside formal negotiations. Blomqvist et al. (2021) show that women's everyday practices of care and silence are central to sustaining peace in fragile contexts. These comparative studies are relevant not because Nigeria mirrors Myanmar, but because they help conceptualise relational, informal, and gendered forms of peacebuilding. They reinforce the central premise of this article: that women's peacebuilding is often most visible when scholars shift the unit of analysis from elite institutions to everyday social labour.

What the literature still lacks, however, is a sufficiently integrated account of how these strands fit together in Nigeria. Studies of displacement, violent extremism, women's organising, WPS localisation, and community reintegration often operate in separate silos. The result is that women's local peacebuilding appears fragmented across subfields rather than as a connected repertoire of social, political, and economic practices. This article addresses that gap by bringing the literatures into one conversation and synthesising them through a common set of analytical themes.

4. Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative evidence-synthesis design. It does not present new primary interviews; rather, it systematically interprets and synthesises findings from published qualitative and qualitative-dominant studies on women's local peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria. This design is appropriate because the central aim is explanatory and interpretive: to understand how women's local peacebuilding is conceptualised, practiced, and constrained across existing research, and to build a stronger theoretical account from that corpus. A qualitative evidence-synthesis is also well suited to a field like local peacebuilding, where much of the most revealing evidence is embedded in interview material, ethnographic observation, organisational case studies, and community-level narratives that do not lend themselves to simple aggregation.

The empirical anchor of the synthesis is Tripp, Maiga, and Yahi's (2025) recent study, which reports interview-based research with women peacebuilders in Nigeria and Mali and contains detailed Nigeria-specific material from Maiduguri, Mubi, and surrounding conflict-affected areas. The present paper selectively analyses the Nigerian material in that study while triangulating it with other Nigeria-focused research from Taylor and Francis, Routledge, and Elsevier outlets. The anchor study is especially valuable because it identifies three recurring mechanisms in women's local peacebuilding: bridge-building across divisions, livelihood and community initiatives that reshape gender roles, and multiplier effects that spread benefits across households and communities, and grounds them in recent interviews with women engaged in local peace work.

Source selection followed three criteria. First, included studies had to be peer-reviewed and published in recognised academic outlets. Second, they had to focus on Nigeria directly or offer a closely relevant theoretical lens on women's informal or local peacebuilding. Third, priority was given to qualitative or qualitative-dominant studies, including ethnographic work, interview-based research, documentary qualitative analysis, and movement case studies. This yielded a focused corpus centered on Tripp et al. (2025), Nwangwu and Ezeibe (2019), Ajayi (2020), Botha (2021), Atela et al. (2021), Gbadeyan et al. (2024), Durueke (2025), and Akintayo (2024, 2025), supported by key theoretical texts such as Leonardsson and Rudd (2015), Randazzo (2016), Cárdenas and Olivius (2021), and Blomqvist et al. (2021).

The analytical procedure combined thematic coding with theory-led interpretation. In the first stage, the selected studies were read for recurring empirical patterns in women's local peace work: mediation, rescue, interfaith organising, livelihood support, care work, advocacy, reintegration, and state-community interaction. In the second stage, these recurring patterns were clustered into higher-order themes. In the third stage, those themes were interpreted through the feminist peacebuilding, local-turn, and everyday-peace frameworks. This produced five final themes: bridge-building across divides; care and livelihoods as peace infrastructure; informal mediation and reintegration; women's collective organising as public peacebuilding; and the structural limits imposed by securitisation and weak localisation. The approach is qualitative and interpretive, but it is not impressionistic: each theme had to recur across multiple sources or appear in the anchor study in especially developed form before being retained.

This methodology has three strengths. It allows the paper to bring otherwise dispersed Nigeria-focused studies into a coherent analytical conversation; it foregrounds context and meaning rather than abstract indicators alone; and it preserves the richness of the interview-based and community-centred evidence on which the field depends. It also has limitations.

Because the paper synthesises published research, it depends on the scope and framing of existing studies; regions outside the northeast receive less sustained attention because the current qualitative literature is unevenly distributed; and the synthesis cannot substitute for new multi-sited fieldwork across Nigeria's diverse conflict zones. These limits are real, but they do not undermine the value of the exercise. On the contrary, they highlight why a synthesis is needed: the literature is rich enough to identify strong patterns, yet scattered enough that those patterns are often missed.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Bridge-Building Across Religious, Communal, and Political Divides

The first major theme is that women's local peacebuilding in Nigeria is centrally about bridge-building. Across the literature, women appear repeatedly as actors who create and sustain ties across the very social cleavages that violent conflict exploits: Muslim-Christian divisions, neighborhood distrust, family fracture, displacement-induced estrangement, and political polarisation. In the anchor study by Tripp et al. (2025), women in northeastern Nigeria are shown organising interfaith meetings, working through women's religious associations, collaborating in relief distribution, and using community ties to reduce fear between Muslims and Christians. The Nigeria interviews emphasise that women often have dense social connections across households, ceremonies, markets, and faith communities, and that these relationships serve as a practical resource for peacebuilding that many formal actors cannot easily replicate. Women's peace work thus begins not from abstract reconciliation discourse but from socially embedded forms of everyday proximity.

This bridge-building function is also evident outside the immediate conflict zone. Atela et al.'s (2021) study of the #BringBackOurGirls movement shows that women-led organising in Nigeria gained strength by transcending religious, class, and political divides. Although the movement emerged around the abduction of schoolgirls, its significance exceeded a single event. It became a platform for sustained civic pressure, public witnessing, and cross-boundary mobilisation against the normalisation of insecurity. Read alongside the local peacebuilding literature, this suggests that local peace initiatives should not be defined too narrowly as neighbourhood-level mediation. Local peacebuilding in Nigeria also includes civic formations that connect communities to broader publics while preserving grassroots legitimacy. The common thread is not scale alone, but the production of social connection across lines of separation.

The literature on women-led civil society organisations reinforces this interpretation. Nwangwu and Ezeibe (2019) show that women-led organisations involved in countering violent extremism in Nigeria are important network builders. Their significance lies partly in the social spaces they open: they connect women to each other, connect local experience to policy discourse, and connect peace work to broader claims for equality and political participation. These organisations are not simply delivery vehicles for externally designed programs. They often serve as relational infrastructures that enable cooperation in settings where mistrust is high. From a feminist peacebuilding perspective, this is crucial. It shows that peace is not built only through official dialogue tables; it is also built through associational life, civic networks, and routine forms of social connection that reduce the social distance on which violence thrives.

A critical implication follows from this theme. Women's capacity to bridge divides does not arise because women are inherently more peaceful. Rather, it arises from their social location in everyday life: they are often centrally involved in market exchange, household maintenance, social ceremonies, child care, neighbourhood welfare, and religious networking. These gendered roles can be restrictive, but they can also give women access to spaces and relationships that become politically consequential under conditions of conflict. The point, then, is not to romanticise women's bridge-building but to recognise it as a form of situated political competence. Where formal institutions struggle to rebuild trust, women's local peacebuilding frequently begins by reconstructing the social fabric at precisely those points where conflict tears it apart.

5.2 Care, Livelihoods, and the Material Infrastructure of Everyday Peace

The second theme is that women's local peacebuilding in Nigeria is deeply material. It is not limited to dialogue, symbolism, or advocacy. It also involves creating livelihoods, sharing food and resources, providing vocational training, offering psychosocial care, and establishing practical support systems that help households survive war. In the Tripp et al. (2025) study, women peacebuilders in northeastern Nigeria are described organising skills training, relief distribution, borehole installation, educational programs, youth-oriented income-generation activities, and support for widows, displaced persons, and traumatised families. These activities are not

ancillary to peacebuilding. They are peacebuilding, because they address the immediate vulnerabilities and structural frustrations through which conflict reproduces itself. Livelihood support, in particular, matters because it restores dignity, reduces desperation, and can decrease the appeal of armed groups among youth and communities stripped of economic options.

Ajayi's (2020) work on women and internal displacement helps explain why this material dimension is so important. Her analysis argues that women's displacement in the Boko Haram context is shaped by more than physical insecurity. It is also prolonged by humanitarian and policy frameworks that fail to adequately account for women's changing roles, vulnerabilities, and agency. When women become de facto heads of households, community providers, or organisers of survival, peacebuilding cannot be treated as separate from material reproduction. Food, shelter, work, movement, child care, and psychosocial stability become foundational to any meaningful idea of peace. In this sense, women's local peace initiatives are often best understood as efforts to rebuild the social and economic conditions of everyday life in situations where the state and formal humanitarian systems remain inconsistent or insufficient.

This theme is especially well captured by the idea of everyday peace. In conflict settings, care work is frequently depoliticised because it is coded as domestic or feminine. Yet studies of everyday peace show that practices of care sustain social order, reduce exposure to violence, and create micro-foundations for coexistence. Blomqvist et al. (2021) make this point through their analysis of care and silence in Myanmar; the Nigerian evidence points in the same direction. Women who counsel survivors, teach soap-making or sewing, distribute relief materials, create safe spaces for discussion, or support children and elderly dependents are not simply coping. They are stabilising communities under duress. Their work is political because it redistributes security downward, in the absence of reliable formal protection.

The peacebuilding significance of livelihoods also has a gender-transformative dimension. The anchor study shows that conflict pushed many women in northeastern Nigeria into entrepreneurial and community roles that had previously been restricted or less accessible. Some women established small businesses, trained others, and expanded their public authority through work that emerged out of necessity but altered gender expectations in the process. This resonates with the wider feminist peacebuilding literature: conflict often produces suffering, but it can also crack open rigid gender boundaries and create new opportunities for women's leadership. In Nigeria, these transformations remain fragile and uneven, yet they matter because they reveal that local peacebuilding can simultaneously be about community survival and gender reordering.

5.3 Informal Mediation, Rescue, and Reintegration as Peace Practice

A third theme concerns informal mediation, rescue, and reintegration. One of the strongest contributions of the anchor study is its documentation of women who rescue abductees, facilitate escape, negotiate informally around release and mercy, support dialogue with community actors, and help prepare communities to accept returnees, including those associated with Boko Haram. These practices are difficult to capture in formal peacebuilding metrics because they are episodic, interpersonal, risky, and often unofficial. Yet they may be among the most consequential forms of peace work in conflict-affected Nigeria. They operate in the morally ambiguous terrain between violence and return, stigma and acceptance, punishment and survival. Women's local legitimacy, social embeddedness, and relative accessibility to households frequently position them as trusted intermediaries in this terrain.

This theme is sharpened by recent work on local peacebuilding in northern Nigeria. Akintayo's (2025) study of Sulhu argues that local peacebuilding should be understood through context-specific norms, beliefs, and practices rather than as a generic bottom-up category. Drawing on interviews, the study shows how mediation and reconciliation rooted in northern Nigerian socio-cultural and religious practice can support community reintegration of former terrorists. The relevance for women's peacebuilding is significant. It suggests that local women's initiatives succeed not simply because they are local, but because they are grounded in socially intelligible forms of authority, communication, and moral reasoning. Women's mediation often works precisely where formal security frameworks do not, because it speaks the language of community legitimacy rather than abstract state procedure.

Botha's (2021) study on women and girls associated with Boko Haram underscores why these local reintegration practices matter. The Nigerian state has recognised the issue, but its response remains uneven, and qualitative evidence shows important deficiencies in rehabilitation and support. Under such conditions, reintegration becomes not just a policy task but a

community task. Women's associations, local leaders, and community peacebuilders frequently mediate acceptance, reduce stigmatisation, and manage the emotional and social labour of reentry. This is a profoundly political form of peacebuilding. It determines whether communities reproduce cycles of exclusion and suspicion or create conditions for fragile coexistence. Yet because it occurs below the level of state spectacle, it remains undervalued in most formal accounts of peace and security.

A feminist reading of this theme also reveals its costs. Informal mediation and reintegration work often place women in risky positions without the protections, resources, or recognition afforded to formal mediators. Women may face threats from armed actors, community suspicion, emotional exhaustion, and the burden of managing tensions that state actors helped produce but cannot resolve. In other words, women's local peacebuilding is effective partly because it is proximate and trusted; but that same proximity makes it precarious. Recognising women as mediators therefore requires more than praise. It requires institutional protection and support for the labor through which communities are held together after violence.

5.4 Women's Collective Organizing From Community Associations to Public Advocacy

The fourth theme is that women's local peacebuilding in Nigeria often travels from grassroots association into public advocacy. The literature suggests that women's peacebuilding is strongest when it is collective and networked. Community associations, faith-based groups, women-led organisations, and social movements all create platforms through which local grievances can be translated into broader political claims. The anchor study documents this in the form of women's associations, interfaith networks, livelihood groups, and local advocacy. Atela et al. (2021) document it in the #BringBackOurGirls movement, where women-led organising leveraged protest, transnational visibility, and strategic messaging to challenge state inaction. Nwangwu and Ezeibe (2019) show that women-led civil society organisations in countering violent extremism similarly use organisational networks to widen women's participation and build influence. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that local peacebuilding is not anti-political. It often becomes an entry point into wider forms of civic claim-making.

This matters for two reasons. First, it unsettles the assumption that local peace work is merely informal and therefore politically modest. In Nigeria, local initiatives can scale horizontally through networks and vertically through public advocacy. They can become visible, confrontational, and agenda-setting while still remaining rooted in community-based legitimacy. Second, it shows that women's peacebuilding is often about governance as much as coexistence. Women's organisations do not simply ask communities to reconcile; they also demand accountability, recognition, resources, and institutional responsiveness. Peacebuilding, in this sense, is not only about reducing direct violence. It is also about contesting the forms of neglect, exclusion, and impunity that allow violence to reproduce itself.

The public-facing dimension of women's organising becomes even more important when formal Women, Peace and Security implementation is weak. Gbadeyan et al. (2024) show that women in northeastern Nigeria remain insufficiently incorporated into post-conflict peace processes despite the normative force of UNSCR 1325. Durueke (2025) similarly argues that Nigeria's National Action Plans have not adequately reflected women's rural lived realities. These findings suggest that women's local peace initiatives often function in a representational vacuum: they do critical peace work, but national policy does not consistently translate that work into voice, budgetary support, or decision-making authority. Collective organising therefore becomes one of the few available routes through which women can make their peace labor politically visible and institutionally legible.

A further implication is that women's peacebuilding in Nigeria should be read as part of a continuum between informal and formal politics. It is not confined to either sphere. Women may move from household survival work to neighborhood mediation, from association-based training to public protest, from psychosocial accompaniment to policy advocacy. This continuum is analytically important because it prevents the artificial separation of community work from politics. Women's local peace initiatives are political precisely because they change who speaks, who organises, who mediates, and who is recognised as a stakeholder in security and peace.

5.5 The Limits of Localization: Securitization, Policy Gaps, and the Burden of Informal Peace

The final theme is that the transformative potential of women's local peacebuilding in Nigeria is constrained by securitisation, weak policy localisation, and chronic institutional under-support. The local turn is attractive because it promises ownership and contextual relevance. Yet Nigerian evidence shows that the local can be celebrated rhetorically while

community actors remain underfunded, politically marginal, or subordinated to state security agendas. Akintayo's (2024) analysis of state-CSO relations in preventing and countering violent extremism is especially instructive here. The study argues that under a nominal whole-of-society framework, Muslim community-based civil society organisations can be used primarily as intelligence-producing partners rather than as autonomous peace actors. This observation should make scholars cautious about equating inclusion with empowerment. Women's organisations may be invited into programs, but not into agenda-setting power.

Durueke's (2025) critique of Nigeria's National Action Plans adds a second layer to this problem. If Women, Peace and Security frameworks are not localised to women's lived realities in rural and conflict-affected settings, then policy recognition remains thin and abstract. This is not simply a technocratic flaw. It reproduces a hierarchy of knowledge in which formal policy frameworks are treated as authoritative while women's actual experiences of insecurity, displacement, stigma, livelihood collapse, and informal peace work are treated as secondary. The result is a mismatch between where peace is imagined and where it is practiced. In Nigeria, women's local peacebuilding initiatives are often closest to the lived realities of conflict, yet they remain furthest from the center of formal authority.

The literature also warns against romanticising the local. Leonardsson and Rudd (2015) show that local peacebuilding is often defended on the grounds of ownership and effectiveness, while Randazzo (2016) reminds us that the everyday can be a site of domination as well as emancipation. This is especially relevant in Nigeria, where local women's peace initiatives operate within patriarchal social orders, religious conservatism, economic precarity, and ongoing violence. Women's local peacebuilding is therefore not a substitute for structural reform. It is best understood as an indispensable but insufficient foundation. Without stronger institutional recognition, safer civic space, predictable funding, and genuine inclusion in peace and security decision-making, women's initiatives risk becoming an endlessly compensatory labour force for failures they did not create.

This critique does not diminish the significance of women's local peacebuilding; it clarifies it. Women's initiatives are transformative not because they have already solved Nigeria's peace deficits, but because they expose what formal systems overlook: peace depends on social trust, daily survival, community legitimacy, and the repair of fractured relations. The most serious policy error is therefore to treat women's local peace work as admirable but auxiliary. In fact, it is foundational. The challenge is that Nigeria's peace and security architecture still does not consistently resource, protect, or institutionalise that foundation.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has argued that women's local peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria are best understood as a gendered politics of everyday survival, social repair, and public accountability. Drawing on qualitative studies, it has shown that women's peacebuilding is not confined to elite peace tables, nor can it be reduced to symbolic participation in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In conflict-affected Nigeria, women build peace by bridging religious and communal divides, sustaining households and local economies, mediating return and reintegration, creating safe and dialogic spaces, and organising collectively to challenge state neglect. These practices are locally grounded, materially consequential, and politically significant. They are also frequently invisible within orthodox peacebuilding frameworks.

The findings also suggest that women's peacebuilding in Nigeria is transformative in two linked senses. It transforms communities by rebuilding trust, livelihoods, and coexistence from below. And it can transform gender relations by expanding women's authority, organisational capacity, and public voice under conditions of conflict. Yet this transformation remains uneven and fragile. Women's peace initiatives continue to be constrained by militarised security responses, inadequate reintegration structures, weak localisation of gender policy, and state practices that instrumentalise civil society rather than sharing power with it. Women are often asked to stabilise broken communities without being granted the authority to design the systems meant to support peace.

The policy implications are therefore substantial. Nigeria needs a peace architecture that moves beyond rhetorical endorsement of women's participation and treats women's local peace labour as central to national peacebuilding. This means resourcing women-led local organisations over the long term rather than only through short project cycles; building protection mechanisms for women mediators, organisers, and return-support workers; designing reintegration policy around community realities rather than bureaucratic abstraction; and localising Women, Peace and Security implementation in a way that starts from women's lived experiences in rural and conflict-

affected settings. It also means resisting the reduction of women's organisations to auxiliary arms of intelligence gathering within securitised, prevention-and-countering violent extremism models.

A final point bears emphasis. Since the study period, as anchored in much of the literature, extends through the years of intense insurgency and its aftermath, recent policy developments should be read carefully rather than uncritically. Nigeria's launch of a third National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in December 2025 signals a continued formal commitment to women's inclusion in peace and security, but the deeper question remains whether that commitment will materially shift power and resources toward women already doing the daily work of peace at the community level. Until that happens, women's local peacebuilding in Nigeria will remain both indispensable and under-recognised: the hidden infrastructure of peace in a state that still too often sees peace from above.

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