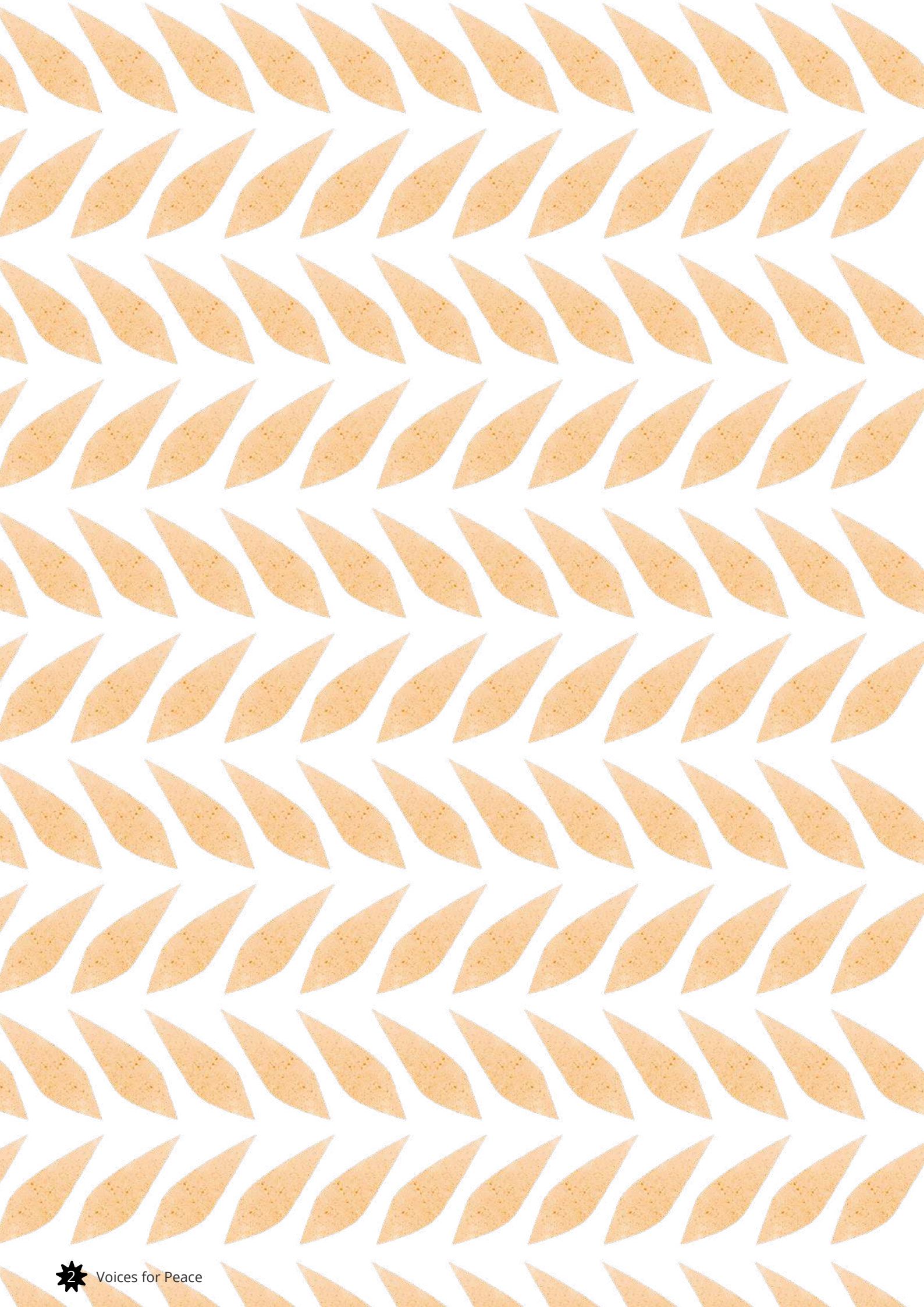


VOICES FOR PEACE

The Critical Role of Women
Human Rights Defenders
(WHRDs) in Nigeria's
Peacebuilding Landscape



PROTECTION
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May this publication serve as a platform to amplify your voices and to support your ongoing efforts toward building a more just and peaceful Nigeria.

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Voices for Peace

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1. Introduction: brief overview of knowledge and practices on WHRDs and peacebuilding

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are central to peacebuilding and social cohesion, particularly in conflict-affected countries like Nigeria. They can foster inclusive and sustainable pathways to peace thanks to gender-sensitive approaches they promote while addressing the root causes of violence. Despite their transformative contributions, WHRDs roles and contributions in peacebuilding remain underrecognised. Moreover, in Nigeria, they often face systemic challenges, including violence, discrimination, and exclusion from formal peacebuilding processes. Based on the testimonies of some courageous WHRDs, this research sheds some light on how women activism contributes to achieving long-lasting and inclusive peace.

The objectives of this research are threefold:

- **Increase the visibility of WHRDs and their critical role in peacebuilding and social cohesion in Nigeria.** The research will document and highlight WHRDs' transformative contributions to dialogue, conflict resolution, and social cohesion, amplifying their voices in peacebuilding processes.
- **Identify the challenges and threats faced by WHRDs in peacebuilding.** This study will provide an intersectional lens to examine gender-based violence, harassment, and systemic exclusion faced by WHRDs, providing a deeper understanding of how these barriers impact their work.
- **Provide policy recommendations to support, protect, and create an enabling environment for WHRDs in peacebuilding.** The research will develop actionable recommendations for protecting WHRDs, promoting their inclusion, and fostering a safe and enabling environment for their right to defend human rights and build peace.

2. Short context analysis of conflict in Nigeria and literature review on the role of women HRDs, in peacebuilding

2.1 The context of conflict in Nigeria

President Bola Tinubu assumed office in May 2023 after a controversial election that led to protests over alleged vote rigging and administrative irregularities. Despite initiating ambitious economic reforms, his administration has faced growing public dissatisfaction and widespread protests fueled by growing public anger over soaring inflation, worsening insecurity, ineffective governance and rising fuel prices¹.

Additionally, Nigeria grapples with severe security challenges, including ethno-religious violence, mass kidnappings, and insurgencies led by Boko Haram and its affiliate, the West African Province of the Islamic State. The southeast is also marked by violent conflict between security forces and separatist groups, while the Niger Delta experiences persistent gang violence. These conditions have strained Nigeria's security forces, leading to human rights abuses and widespread impunity for perpetrators of violence.

Nigeria's human rights situation remains dire, with systemic violations such as extrajudicial killings, torture, and repression of media and LGBTQIA+ communities. The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2013, in particular, has further marginalized LGBTQIA+ individuals. Human rights defenders (HRDs) operate in a highly unsafe environment, with no legal protections and ongoing threats from both state and non-state actors².

In 2023, a network of HRDs was established to strengthen their protection³, but challenges persist. International bodies, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs and the African Commission, continue to monitor Nigeria's human rights situation, particularly the conditions faced by HRDs. Resolution 1325 (2000) and nine subsequent resolutions now constitute the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. In August 2013, the Government of Nigeria, in taking forward this global charge, committed itself to addressing and responding to the immediate and long term needs of women before, during and post conflict by developing and adopting a National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions. The first NAP was designed around five (5) pillars: Prevention, Participation, Protection, Prosecution and Promotion.

Despite being included in different NAPs since 2013, Nigeria's commitments had not been yet fully accomplished, which led the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) to urge state governors and local government chairmen in Nigeria to ensure the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 action plan in local communities across the country in order to fulfil Nigeria's commitment to the implementation of the document.⁴

¹ Chris Kwaja; Matthew Edds-Reitman (October 2024). [Nigeria at a Crossroads: Navigating Protests Amid Elections](#). United States Institute of Peace.

² FOCUS Observatory on Public Policies for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (September 2024). [Nigeria country profile](#).

³ The Sun (September 2023). [Network of human rights defenders launches in Nigeria](#).

⁴ IWD (2024). [WANEP urges govts, LG chairmen to implement UN resolutions](#).

2.2. Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in peacebuilding

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) play an indispensable role in promoting peace, justice, and human dignity in conflict and post-conflict settings. According to the UN General Assembly Resolution on the recognition and protection of human rights defenders (A/RES/74/146), HRDs are critical actors in addressing the root causes of violence, advocating for the protection of vulnerable populations, and ensuring accountability for human rights violations. In the aftermath of conflict, HRDs contribute to rebuilding trust between communities, pushing for legal and institutional reforms, and monitoring peace agreements to ensure they are inclusive and sustainable. Their work often challenges entrenched power dynamics, making them targets of threats, harassment, and violence, particularly in volatile and fragile environments.

The Human Rights Council report (A/HRC/43/51) by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders emphasizes the heightened risks HRDs face, particularly in conflict and post-conflict zones. The report notes that HRDs are often the first to speak out against injustices during and after conflicts, making them crucial actors in preventing impunity and holding perpetrators of human rights violations accountable. Women peacebuilders are the first responders in crises, addressing immediate needs and laying the groundwork for sustainable peace. Their efforts are essential in transforming societies from conflict to peace⁵.

Women HRDs (henceforth WHRDs) working in conflict and crisis-affected settings face heightened risks, including gender-based violence, threats, and intimidation, which impede their vital work in promoting peace and human rights⁶. This is exacerbated by “militarised masculinity”, a concept that underscores the dominance of male-centered, aggressive approaches to conflict resolution, and societal control⁷. WHRDs play a vital role in deconstructing these harmful gender norms by promoting alternative, non-violent approaches to peacebuilding that emphasize collaboration, justice, and equality.

The Global Study on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 emphasizes that security encompasses far more than just the absence of physical violence. For women and WHRDs, security is multifaceted, including economic, psychological, and environmental dimensions. WHRDs not only work to prevent direct violence but also strive to create conditions where communities can thrive, addressing systemic issues like political and economic exclusion, and gender inequality. Thus, their role in peacebuilding extends beyond traditional conceptions of “security”, focusing on sustainable peace that encompasses all aspects of human life⁸.

In patriarchal societies, such as those in many conflict-affected regions, women are often excluded from formal peace processes, despite their roles in maintaining family and community cohesion. WHRDs work within and across their communities to challenge these exclusions, advocating for inclusive peace processes that reflect the needs and rights of all, not just a select group of political elites or military actors.

From a collective protection perspective, WHRDs play a key role in strengthening the internal cohesion and social fabric of a collective and building bridges with supportive actors and networks for protection⁹.

⁵ International Civil Society Action Network - ICAN (2020). [Protecting Women Peacebuilders: The Front Lines of Sustainable Peace](#).

⁶ Amnesty International (2023). [Challenges faced by WHRDs in a context of crisis, conflict and post-conflict](#).

⁷ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom - WILPF (2024). [Militarised Masculinities: A Closer Look](#).

⁸ UNWOMEN (2015) [Preventing conflict transforming justice securing the peace. A global study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325](#).

⁹ Protection International (2024). [A Critical Approach to Collective Protection: Taking Stock of Protection International's Experience](#).

WHRDs work with a diverse range of communities, recognising that factors such as ethnicity, class, religion, and sexual orientation shape experiences of violence and peace. An intersectional approach to peacebuilding allows WHRDs to tailor their advocacy and peacebuilding efforts to address the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, who often bear the brunt of conflict. This approach also enables a more inclusive and comprehensive peace process that reflects the realities of all affected populations, rather than reinforcing existing inequalities.

For peace to be sustainable, it must be rooted in a comprehensive approach that addresses not only the physical aspects of violence but also the psychosocial traumas that perpetuate cycles of conflict. WHRDs often engage in trauma healing and reconciliation work, recognising that unresolved psychological scars can fuel future violence. Psychosocial support, including counseling and community-based healing practices, is critical in rebuilding trust and fostering reconciliation in post-conflict settings. WHRDs are particularly attuned to these needs, often drawing on local knowledge and practices to address the emotional and psychological wounds of conflict.

The digital sphere has become an increasingly important arena for both conflict and peacebuilding. WHRDs are leveraging digital platforms to amplify their voices, raise awareness about human rights violations, and mobilize support for peace initiatives. However, they are also vulnerable to online harassment, threats, and misinformation campaigns, which can undermine their work and put them at risk.

Women-Led Peacebuilding Initiatives in Nigeria

The **#EndSARS movement**¹⁰ was a decentralised social movement that called for the disbandment of Nigeria's notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS).

The [Feminist Coalition](#) (group of young Nigerian women activists who use digital platforms to mobilize for gender equality, justice, and peace from a feminist perspective) played a central role in organising peaceful protests against state violence, corruption, and police brutality and raising funds for legal aid, medical support, and food for protesters. Their efforts highlight the power of collective action and digital advocacy in driving social change and advancing peace.

The [Stand to End Rape Initiative \(STER\)](#), a women-led NGO in Nigeria, combats sexual violence and supports survivors while promoting accountability and justice. By addressing gender-based violence, particularly during conflict, STER aligns with peacebuilding efforts, advocating for women's inclusion in formal processes and grassroots conflict resolution. These efforts reshape Nigeria's peacebuilding landscape, amplifying women's voices and experiences.

Established in 2023, the **Nigeria Human Rights Defenders Network** is a coalition of activists working to protect the rights of WHRDs and other activists in Nigeria. This network provides a platform for WHRDs to share experiences, coordinate advocacy efforts, and develop strategies to combat the threats and challenges they face. By providing solidarity and support, the network helps to ensure that WHRDs can continue their work in promoting peace and human rights in Nigeria, even in the face of systemic challenges.

¹⁰ Uwazuruike, Allwell Raphael (2020). [#EndSARS: The Movement Against Police Brutality in Nigeria](#). Harvard Human Rights Journal.

3. Testimonies of the individual WHRDs

3.1. Methodological considerations

Research Design

In this research project we wanted to seek the testimonies of WHRDs, who are on the frontline of addressing conflicts and building peace in their communities. We selected a group of WHRDs that we identified as key participants in the project supported with the German Federal Foreign Office's funds by IFA (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), Zivik Funding programme project.

- **Purpose:** There is extensive literature on women and peacebuilding. In this project, we sought to give a voice to WHRDs who build peace. And that their voice is heard.
- **Qualitative Approach:** This is a qualitative research approach, particularly based on interviews, which is well-suited to explore the deep, nuanced experiences of individuals.

We sampled nine WHRDs for this research. Primarily, we focused on the women who are providing mentorship to young women undertaking peace work. This number allowed us to get an in-depth interview of the WHRDs. They also work within communities and NGOs.

Data Collection

- **Interview format:** Semi-structured interviews combined predefined questions with flexibility to explore participants' experiences, challenges, and recommendations.
- **Mode of interviews:** Some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and in some cases, via video calls for accessibility and safety.
- **Recording:** With consent, all interviews were recorded, and participants agreed to public dissemination of findings.

Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** PI Africa (PIA) did an email introduction of the objectives and the nature of the research. We also took the opportunity to explain how the dissemination will take place. We also introduced the data collector to the WHRDs.
- **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** This is a publicity document to the work of WHRDs. We sifted through the information and agreed with them what will be made public and what remains within the organization for programming purposes.
- **Power Dynamics:** Identify and manage power imbalances to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences.

Data Analysis

- Interviews with each participant were transcribed, and thematic analysis was undertaken to identify recurring themes and key insights. Depending on the issues, we triangulated with other data sources, such as documents, reports, or additional interviews, to corroborate findings.

Limitations

- **Timeline:** Being the end of the year, and with many CSO activities taking place in Nigeria, it was really difficult to get the WHRDs to participate in the interviews. We however worked on this by getting a flexible schedule for them even during the weekends.
- **Sample Representation:** The sample collected cannot represent all women working on peace and security in Nigeria. However, the nine women selected have provided information that goes a long way in upcoming peace actors and especially young women in Nigeria.
- **Interview Dynamics:** Self-reported data may be subjected to certain data sharing limitations, as participants (sometimes) present socially desirable answers or withhold certain information.

3.1. WHRDs testimonies

Deborah Achanya



Identity and framing

I identify myself as a passionate advocate for justice, equity, and empowerment, focusing on gender equality, legal reform, and mentorship. I present myself as a community-driven leader bridging grassroots advocacy and legal expertise.

My gender and cultural identity deeply influence my work, helping me address challenges unique to women in patriarchal settings. I highlight my gender and cultural identity to spotlight barriers women face while advocating for their potential and rights.

Challenges faced in peacebuilding work

My work is respected, though some traditional settings resist change. I balance cultural sensitivity with assertiveness to build trust and drive progress. Some of the key challenges I face include resistance to change in deeply traditional settings, limited resources for grassroots initiatives, and security concerns while advocating for women's rights. Additionally, there's often a lack of awareness or understanding of the significance of gender equality in peacebuilding.

Contribution to peacebuilding

For me, peacebuilding is a strategic process to address the root causes of conflict, fostering reconciliation, and building structures that promote justice, equality, and harmony. It is not just the absence of violence but the presence of systems that empower marginalized groups and uphold dignity.

As the founder of Debachanya Girl Child Empowerment, I contribute to peacebuilding by addressing gender inequality through education, mentorship, and skills training for young girls, reducing vulnerabilities that lead to instability. In my roles with groups linked to the Nigerian Bar Association NBA (NBAWF Young Female Lawyers, and the Young Lawyers Forum NBA National), and the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), I advocate for legal reforms and initiatives that protect women and children, ensuring their voices are central to decision-making processes. I engage in peacebuilding individually and within networks. Through my platforms, I drive awareness and create initiatives for young girls, while collaborating with stakeholders to promote inclusive legal and societal frameworks, amplifying my impact through collective action.

My work focuses on grassroots efforts with local and national organizations to address immediate challenges and empower communities to lead change. I also engage with international bodies for capacity building and advocacy to scale sustainable solutions.

” ***In summary, my contributions to peacebuilding are rooted in advocacy, empowerment, and collaboration, with a focus on dismantling systemic inequalities that threaten peace in Nigeria.***

How to remain resilient in her work

Conflict dynamics have added layers of complexity to my work. In areas affected by violence, women and girls face heightened risks of sexual violence, displacement, and economic insecurity, which I work to address. For example, in conflict zones, providing safe spaces for women and girls becomes difficult due to security concerns and limited access to affected communities. These challenges often require adapting strategies and working with local leaders to ensure safety and effective delivery of services.

Three daily reflexes for protection

Risk Assessment: Evaluating safety before engaging in activities.

Strong Support Network: Regular communication with colleagues and community leaders.

Discreet Engagement: Limiting exposure in sensitive areas.

Gender and cultural identity in protection

My gender impacts how I navigate public spaces, especially in conservative areas, and my cultural identity helps me build trust while respecting local norms. Due to my gender and cultural identity, I travel with trusted companions in high-risk areas and engage with community gatekeepers to ensure safety.

I feel included in peacebuilding discussions, though women's voices, especially from grassroots organizations, are sometimes underrepresented. I feel safe to participate in most events, but security concerns arise in conflict zones or conservative settings.

I am heard in policy discussions, but full representation in decision-making spaces remains limited. I receive support from organizations like FIDA and NBAWF, but I would like more backing from international groups, especially in funding and capacity-building.

I have implemented mentorship programs that offer legal and emotional support for women HRDs, helping them navigate challenges in peacebuilding. I also create safe spaces for women to share their experiences and collaborate, strengthening their networks and ensuring mutual support.



Contribution to peacebuilding

I consider peacebuilding as a comprehensive and dynamic approach to conflict resolution, which integrates early warning systems, gender inclusivity, and community-driven action. Central to this approach is its focus on empowering women to actively contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Working with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) first as a Women, Peace and Security Manager – leading the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) has exposed me to be involved in the design and implementing programs aimed at equipping women with the necessary tools to effectively engage in early warning systems, conflict prevention strategies, and community mediation.

WIPNET provides a platform for women's groups and associations working and living in conflict situations to form strong alliances aimed at ensuring women's involvement in peacebuilding at all levels. My objectives include mainstream gender and in particular women issues in international, regional and national mechanisms on peace and security and to create a platform for rural women engagement in peace and security and bridge policy and practice (engender policy and practice) in the area of peace and security.

Strategies used at WIPNET include creating women-only spaces and fostering holistic sisterhood to build relationships and achieve common peace goals. It links the violence women face during conflict with everyday societal discrimination, addressing both physical and structural violence. WIPNET supports through building the capacity of women to participate in formal peace process and peace building initiatives, policy analysis and advocacy and improve local women's access to basic skills and knowledge of community peacebuilding. This has also led to a wider appreciation of the role of women in social cohesion, and community management which is key in conflict transformation, management and peacebuilding.

“ I work within WANEP’s network structure which plays a crucial role in connecting WHRDs with both formal organizations and informal networks, thereby amplifying their efforts through a collaborative framework. This network not only strengthens the visibility of their work but also enhances the impact of their peacebuilding initiatives by fostering cooperation across various levels of society.

Through its local peace networks, WANEP fosters a supportive environment for WHRDs by enabling them to share resources, strategies, and expertise. We have a community-driven approach that helps to build solidarity, ensuring that WHRDs can address peacebuilding challenges in a collective and more effective manner. For instance, WANEP facilitates community forums and alliances where marginalized groups can exchange best practices, establish mutual support systems, and contribute to broader peacebuilding frameworks. This organizational support provides a vital backbone for WHRDs, enabling them to collaborate and tackle peacebuilding challenges more efficiently, ensuring their work has a far-reaching and sustainable impact on local and national peace processes.

WANEP's programs affirm the unique perspectives that gender and cultural identities bring to peacebuilding. This approach reinforces the value of diverse identities, positioning them as assets in conflict mediation and community resilience efforts. WANEP's programs are designed to affirm these identities, helping WHRDs to use their cultural and gendered perspectives as strengths in peacebuilding efforts.

WANEP actively collaborates with international partners such as ECOWAS, USAID, African Union, the United Nations, and various NGOs to access resources, research, and policy influence. This collaboration strengthens WANEP's ability to scale up peace activities across Nigeria. At the national and local levels, WANEP engages with state actors, local government authorities, and grassroots organizations, ensuring that peacebuilding efforts are context-specific and culturally resonant. WANEP's setup of Local Action Plans (LAPs) in Nigerian communities is a prime example of this, as these plans address community-specific needs and mobilize local resources for peace efforts.

How to remain resilient in her work

Safety is first and foremost personal, however, WANEP emphasizes essential self-protection measures to support WHRDs in safely conducting their advocacy work. Recognizing the specific challenges these defenders face, WANEP provides training in secure communication, situational awareness, and basic physical security.

Secure communication training helps women understand how to use encrypted messaging, protecting their conversations and data. Situational awareness teaches them to stay alert and recognize potential threats, while physical security training emphasizes tactics like varying routines and establishing trusted contacts for emergencies.

WANEP also encourages defenders to build a network of reliable contacts, offering both emotional and practical support. Additionally, WANEP advocates for gender-sensitive protection strategies to address the unique, gender-specific risks women defenders face, such as harassment and intimidation. Through these combined efforts, WANEP ensures that women defenders are better prepared to protect themselves while continuing their critical work in safer and more resilient ways.

” I see my various activities as geared towards defending individual women and collective groups both in social spaces and in conflict situations. Participants I engage may identify differently in various contexts. In community peacebuilding, they might focus on their roles as mediators, while in advocacy, they may highlight gender equity or policy advocacy.

Identity and framing

I identify myself as an expert in women's activism and encourage WHRDs to present themselves as leaders and advocates within their communities, equipping them with the language and tools to articulate their roles as peacebuilders.

On a personal note, my identity as a WHRD can make me a target of attacks while my engagement through WANEP's community programs contribute to positive perceptions of women's roles in peacebuilding, helping reduce any stigma they might face, and fostering respect for women's contributions to peace and security.

Influence of context and conflict dynamics

WANEP recognizes that conflict dynamics, such as communal violence or insurgency, societal discrimination, limited resources, and security risks have exacerbated gender-specific challenges. WHRDs face heightened risks, from violence and intimidation to limited access to resources. To address these, WANEP provides access to resources, training, and protective measures to mitigate these challenges and ensure the safety of participants.

In WANEP, we acknowledge that WHRDs often work in environments where violence against women is normalized, adding layers of difficulty to their roles as peacebuilders. Through capacity-building programs, we equip WHRDs with the resilience and resources to navigate these environments.

Three daily reflexes for protection

Environmental Awareness: staying alert to one's surroundings.

Secure Communication: use of encrypted or secure messaging for all sensitive communication. This ensures that conversations remain private, protecting individuals and organizations from unwanted surveillance or data breaches.

Regular Check-ins with Network Members/ Participants: regularly checking in with colleagues or contacts.

Gender and cultural identity in protection

In relation to gender and cultural identity, the following protection measures may be particularly relevant:

- **Gender-Sensitive Security Strategies:** WANEP-Nigeria's training of WHRDs includes strategies to address risks stemming from gendered threats (e.g. harassment and violence). This may involve setting boundaries, responding to gender-specific intimidation, and ensuring that communication channels are secure to protect against gender-based violence or exploitation.
- **Cultural Identity Protection:** For those operating in culturally sensitive contexts, WANEP-Nigeria helps individuals navigate cultural norms that could impact their safety. This includes respecting local traditions while still advocating for human rights, as well as understanding the specific cultural dynamics that might make certain individuals more vulnerable to targeted risks.
- **Inclusion and Agency of WHRDs in Peace Building:** WANEP-Nigeria prioritizes creating a safe and supportive environment during its events, ensuring that participants feel secure and respected. By promoting clear guidelines for respectful dialogue and enforcing zero tolerance for discrimination, WANEP fosters a space where individuals can engage openly without fear of judgment or harassment. This approach allows participants to share their perspectives confidently, knowing their voices will be heard and valued.



Contribution to peacebuilding

My understanding of peacebuilding is rooted in the idea of fostering long-term reconciliation, establishing justice, and promoting sustainable development within communities affected by conflict or unrest. To me, peacebuilding goes beyond simply ending immediate hostilities; it involves creating conditions where communities can thrive peacefully over time. My contributions to peacebuilding focus on advocacy, mediation, and community engagement. Through advocacy, I work to amplify the voices of marginalized groups, especially women, who are often excluded from formal peace processes. In mediation, I help facilitate dialogues between conflicting parties, aiming to bridge differences and find common ground. Through community engagement, I work directly with individuals and groups, educating them on the importance of peace, fostering mutual respect, and supporting initiatives that address the root causes of violence and inequality.

I collaborate primarily with local organizations and networks, which greatly enhances my peacebuilding efforts. Working within a network allows me to draw on the expertise, resources, and connections of other committed individuals and organizations. By engaging with a network, I'm able to extend my reach, share insights, and learn from others' experiences. Local organizations also help to contextualize peacebuilding initiatives, ensuring that our approaches are culturally relevant and directly address the specific needs and dynamics of

the communities we serve. This collaborative structure strengthens the overall impact of our work and ensures that efforts are well-coordinated and sustainable.

” My work is primarily with local and national organizations. This focus allows for a deeper understanding of the specific challenges faced by communities and enables the implementation of contextually relevant and sustainable peacebuilding initiatives. Additionally, working at these levels facilitates stronger connections and trust within the communities we serve. Although I occasionally engage with international bodies for support or collaboration, my core focus remains on local and national partnerships, as these are critical to creating lasting change.

Identity and framing

I identify myself as a woman human rights defender (WHRD) and peacebuilder. My role is rooted in advocating for justice, equity, and sustainable peace, especially for women and marginalized communities. I present my work as community-centered, focusing on addressing the unique needs and challenges of the communities I serve. This identity is essential as it encapsulates my dedication to both human rights and peacebuilding, reinforcing that both are essential for lasting change.

I adapt my identity depending on the context of my work. In peacebuilding settings, I focus on the role of a mediator and community facilitator, focusing on reconciliation and dialogue. In advocacy spaces, I highlight my role as a human rights defender, using my platform to advocate for justice, equality, and systemic change.

My gender, cultural background, and community identity profoundly influence my approach to peacebuilding and human rights advocacy. As a woman, I bring a unique perspective to peacebuilding, often highlighting issues related to gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment, and women's roles in conflict resolution. My cultural and community identity enables me to connect deeply with the communities I work with, allowing me to understand and address their specific needs.

My community ties strengthen my credibility and trust within the areas I serve.

I actively emphasize my gender, cultural background, and community identity in my work. I believe these aspects are crucial in building trust and credibility, especially in communities where local cultural dynamics are integral to the peacebuilding process. Highlighting my identity also challenges stereotypes, showing that women from diverse backgrounds can be effective leaders in peace and human rights advocacy. My gender identity, in particular, helps me relate to other women in the community, who may feel more comfortable discussing sensitive issues with someone they see as understanding their experiences. However, I am mindful of the context and adapt my presentation to suit the specific needs and dynamics of each situation.

My community respects my commitment to peacebuilding and values the work I do. I am often seen as a dedicated advocate for justice and a trustworthy mediator in times of conflict. This respect has grown over time as people see the tangible results of my efforts in promoting peace and supporting vulnerable groups. While there are occasional challenges, such as skepticism or initial resistance, I have found that sustained engagement and an inclusive approach have gradually built trust and recognition.

Influence of context and conflict dynamics

As a woman human rights defender (WHRD), I face several significant challenges in my work. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive obstacles, as women in peacebuilding roles often experience threats, harassment, and even physical violence. This violence is sometimes normalized in communities, especially in conflict zones, making it difficult to seek justice or protection. Additionally, limited resources pose a constant barrier; peacebuilding work requires financial, logistical, and emotional support, yet funding for grassroots efforts is often scarce. These challenges, both physical and systemic, create obstacles that make it harder to consistently engage in and sustain peacebuilding activities.

” ***Conflict dynamics have a profound impact on my work as a peacebuilder and advocate. The ongoing instability in certain regions has intensified security risks for myself and other WHRDs. For example, displacement has become a major issue, with both WHRDs and the communities we serve frequently uprooted due to violence. This disrupts the stability of communities, making it more difficult to establish long-term peacebuilding efforts. Furthermore, the constant threat to personal safety necessitates additional precautions, which also slows down the pace of our interventions.***

Practically, conflict has introduced additional hurdles such as restricted mobility and frequent communication disruptions. Restricted mobility limits our ability to reach remote or conflict-affected areas, making it difficult to assess needs, conduct mediation, or provide support. Communication disruptions, which can include everything from internet shutdowns to the physical inaccessibility of regions, hinder timely coordination with local organizations and reduce our ability to respond effectively to emerging issues. These obstacles make it challenging to maintain continuous support and monitor the progress of our initiatives.

How to remain resilient in her work

In my peacebuilding work, implementing protection measures is essential for ensuring my safety and that of the communities I serve. One primary measure is conducting thorough risk assessments before engaging in any field activities. This involves evaluating the security conditions in areas I plan to visit, identifying potential threats, and establishing protocols for handling emergencies. Additionally, I prioritize secure communication methods to protect sensitive information and ensure the safety of all parties involved in peacebuilding efforts. Whether communicating with colleagues, local communities, or organizational partners, I use secure platforms to minimize risks associated with data breaches or surveillance.

Three daily reflexes for protection

Secure communication practices: It is a priority; I use encrypted messaging apps and avoid sharing sensitive information through insecure channels.

Situational awareness: I maintain constant situational awareness, staying alert to my surroundings and assessing any changes in the security environment.

Cautious planning of my movements: I plan my movements carefully, especially when traveling between locations, ensuring that someone always knows my schedule and that I have an emergency contact plan in place.

Gender and cultural identity in Protection

Certain protection measures are directly influenced by my gender and cultural identity. For instance, avoiding solo travel is a precaution I take due to the additional risks women face in many communities. Being a woman in a field that sometimes involves entering unfamiliar or potentially hostile areas means that traveling alone can increase vulnerability to gender-based threats. By ensuring that I always travel with trusted companions, I can better protect myself from these specific risks. This measure is both a practical and cultural reflex, shaped by the local context and societal perceptions around women's safety and mobility.

I have additional security measures that I implement due to my gender and cultural identity. One such measure is the creation and use of female-only safe spaces where women can gather and discuss issues freely without fear of harassment or judgment. These spaces provide a secure environment for sharing experiences, supporting each other, and strategizing on peacebuilding efforts. Additionally, I often dress in a manner that aligns with local cultural norms to avoid drawing unnecessary attention and to demonstrate respect for the community's customs.

Inclusion and agency of WHRDs in peacebuilding

I feel partially included in important discussions, roundtables, and events around peacebuilding. While I am occasionally invited to participate in dialogues and forums, there are still many high-level discussions where the voices of WHRDs

and local peacebuilders are overlooked. This limited inclusion sometimes creates barriers, as important insights and firsthand experiences from the field, particularly those of women, are missing from key conversations. Being included in these discussions would strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of peacebuilding policies and programs, making them more reflective of the realities on the ground.

I feel moderately safe participating in discussions and events, but there are some concerns. While I am generally comfortable sharing insights and advocating for issues during discussions, the possibility of backlash or even subtle forms of intimidation remains, especially in spaces where certain opinions or perspectives might not align with the mainstream. I take precautions to ensure that I am protected and that my views are framed carefully, yet the underlying risks mean that full freedom of expression is not always possible. More supportive and secure platforms would encourage greater openness and help WHRDs like myself to share more candidly.

“ I often feel underrepresented in policy recommendations and decision-making spaces. Despite our significant contributions to peacebuilding, WHRDs often struggle to secure a seat at the table where critical decisions are made. This lack of representation means that policies sometimes fail to address the gender-specific and local challenges we face. Greater representation in these spaces would allow for more inclusive and effective policies, as it would bring to light the unique obstacles and needs that women face in conflict-affected areas.

I receive strong support from local civil society organizations (CSOs), which play a crucial role in sustaining my work in peacebuilding. These organizations provide a network of resources, knowledge-sharing, and local partnerships that help me engage effectively with communities. However, there is a need for increased support from larger national and international organizations. Support from these organizations could provide access to additional resources, capacity-building opportunities, and platforms where WHRDs can advocate for systemic change. I believe that increased backing from international CSOs and advocacy groups would amplify the reach and expand our impact.



Contribution to peacebuilding

I view peacebuilding as a holistic process that promotes social cohesion, reconciliation, and sustainable peace within communities affected by conflict or violence. To me, peacebuilding is about addressing the root causes of conflicts, fostering meaningful dialogue, and strengthening institutions so they can serve as pillars of peace that prevent future conflicts. My contributions to peacebuilding are rooted in these principles, and I engage in several activities to support this vision. I believe that providing accurate, unbiased information is critical in peacebuilding efforts. I focus on disseminating information that explains peacebuilding concepts, initiatives, and best practices, aiming to inform and empower those I work with. Additionally, I facilitate dialogue among individuals and groups, promoting empathy and understanding to bridge differences. This is complemented by my work in capacity building, where I offer guidance on peacebuilding strategies, resources, and tools, helping others develop the skills necessary to support peaceful communities.

I work within organizations, where collaboration plays an integral role in my peacebuilding efforts. This organizational framework enhances my work significantly, as it provides valuable context and insights into each organization's culture, challenges, and specific goals. I am able to tailor my approach based on these insights, providing personalized support to

individual peacebuilders within the organization. Working with organizational teams also helps in establishing trust and credibility, which is critical in peacebuilding work. By building these relationships, I gain access to the institutional knowledge and expertise of those I collaborate with, allowing me to draw on a broader pool of resources and experience to enhance our collective impact. Additionally, being part of an organization opens doors to wider networks and partnerships, extending the reach and influence of our peacebuilding initiatives.

Within these collaborative environments, I also play specific roles that drive our peacebuilding efforts forward. I serve as a mentor, guiding individuals in developing and refining their peacebuilding practices. I focus on capacity building, offering training and skill development to staff within the organization, equipping them to address the complex dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding. When conflicts arise within organizations, I step in to assist with mediation and resolution, helping to maintain cohesion within the team. I also advise on the development of policies related to peacebuilding, providing insights that shape the organization's strategic approaches. Additionally, I engage in research partnerships, working with others on joint initiatives that deepen our understanding of peacebuilding challenges and inform our strategies.

Identity and framing

I do identify myself differently depending on whether I am engaged in peacebuilding missions or working within advocacy spaces.

“I work primarily with national organizations in collaboration with international bodies and the United Nations. This partnership between national and international actors allows for a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding, where local insights inform global strategies and global resources support local peace initiatives. National organizations provide a deep understanding of the context, while international collaboration brings additional resources, broader perspectives, and platforms for influencing policy on a larger scale.”

In peacebuilding contexts, I adopt a role that emphasizes neutrality, facilitation, and inclusivity. I identify as a Neutral Facilitator, Conflict Resolution Specialist, or Community Engagement Expert. These roles allow me to approach peacebuilding with an impartial stance, helping to build trust and encourage open communication among all stakeholders. I focus on facilitating inclusive dialogue, analyzing conflict dynamics, and developing tailored solutions that empower local voices. This approach positions me as someone who is dedicated to fostering social cohesion, reducing tensions, and creating context-specific strategies that resonate with those directly impacted by conflict.

My cultural identity adds another layer of depth to my work. My cultural background enables me to understand the complexities of local conflict dynamics and approach each situation with cultural sensitivity. I adapt my approach to different cultural contexts, ensuring that my work respects local norms while advocating for positive change. Additionally, my visibility as a peacebuilder gives marginalized communities representation, allowing me to voice their concerns in both local and broader advocacy platforms.

My community identity also plays an essential role, providing a foundation of local knowledge and fostering trust with the communities I serve. My ties within the community help me gain deeper insights into the underlying causes of conflicts, which aids in developing effective, grounded peacebuilding strategies. These community relationships also enable me to mobilize grassroots support for peace advocacy, strengthening our collective impact and building credibility.

In my experience, my identity and work are perceived with a mixture of positive appreciation and challenging misconceptions by the communities I serve. On the positive side, many community members respect the courage, dedication, and resilience that women

peacebuilders bring to their roles, recognizing that we offer unique perspectives and insights that enhance the peacebuilding process. My work often garners appreciation for its empathetic approach and understanding of local needs, which is essential for building trust and fostering an inclusive environment for dialogue. As women, our efforts to empower marginalized groups and uplift the voices of the underrepresented are seen as a source of inspiration for others, encouraging

women and marginalized individuals to believe in their own capacities to create change.

However, there are also challenges and misconceptions that women peacebuilders face. Stereotyping and tokenization are common, as some individuals may view us through a narrow lens, seeing us only as symbols rather than as skilled professionals. Skepticism can sometimes arise regarding our abilities or qualifications,

particularly in contexts where traditional gender roles still hold significant sway. Our advocacy efforts can face resistance, especially when they challenge deeply rooted patriarchal norms or advocate for shifts in power dynamics. Additionally, safety and security concerns are real considerations, as advocating for human rights and gender equality can attract hostility, making it crucial to take precautions and assess risks continuously.

Finally, historical context and legacy are influential; communities with a history of social activism may be more receptive to WHRDs, while others with limited exposure to gender equality efforts may be more resistant.

Influence of context and conflict dynamics

Externally, I often face threats of violence and intimidation due to my visible role in challenging societal norms. Patriarchal resistance and entrenched cultural barriers restrict women's participation in peace processes and create hostility toward change. Limited access to resources and funding is a persistent struggle, hampering the expansion and sustainability of

” ***My gender, cultural, and community identities profoundly shape my approach to peacebuilding and advocacy. As a woman, my experiences and perspective bring a unique depth to my work. Women often bring insights into peacebuilding shaped by experiences of marginalization and resilience, which fosters a strong sense of empathy and understanding in conflict resolution. My gender identity also facilitates coalition-building, as women are skilled at creating networks across social divides, which strengthens advocacy efforts and promotes community cohesion.***

peacebuilding initiatives, while political instability and corruption disrupt efforts. GBV, harassment and the stigma surrounding GBV remain constant risks, complicating open discussions. My mobility and access to conflict zones are frequently restricted, limiting my ability to provide support where it is most needed.

Internally, the work takes a considerable toll on my well-being. Burnout is a constant risk, as the demands of peacebuilding can be relentless, with few opportunities to fully disconnect. Managing trauma both my own and that of those I work with—adds an emotional burden that is difficult to alleviate.

Striking a balance between personal and professional life is also challenging, as peacebuilding requires sustained commitment and often overlaps with my personal values

and identity. Staying neutral and impartial is essential, but can be difficult when personal beliefs or the urgent needs of vulnerable groups come into play. There are often conflicting interests and priorities to navigate, both within communities and among external partners, requiring careful consideration and sometimes difficult compromises. Building and maintaining trust within communities is another challenge, requiring consistent, long-term engagement, while power dynamics and hierarchies can complicate efforts. Managing expectations—both my own and those of stakeholders—adds further pressure, as community members and partners look to me for solutions beyond my immediate capacity.

At the organizational level, limited capacity and resources within my organization frequently hinder our ability to respond effectively to emerging challenges or expand our programs. There is often a lack of adequate support and training tailored to the unique risks and needs of women peacebuilders, which can make it difficult to build resilience within our team. Bureaucratic barriers and red tape slow down decision-making processes, while funding constraints create uncertainty and hinder long-term planning. Collaborative efforts can be challenging as well, with differing agendas and priorities among partner organizations that sometimes conflict with our peacebuilding goals.

Ensuring the safety and security of staff is a constant concern, especially in regions where the risk of violence is high. Program evaluation and measuring impact present additional challenges, as peacebuilding outcomes are often intangible or only visible over extended periods. Finally, maintaining the sustainability of our efforts and ensuring long-term impact requires careful planning and adequate resources, both of which can be in short supply.

Conflict dynamics have a profound influence on my work as a female peacebuilder and advocate, shaping the practical and logistical realities

of my day-to-day efforts. The pervasive violence and insecurity that accompany conflicts are significant challenges, as they create volatile environments where safety is constantly at risk. Displacement and refugee crises add another layer of

complexity, with large populations uprooted from their homes, complicating efforts to engage communities in peacebuilding initiatives. Limited access to conflict zones is a frequent obstacle, as security restrictions and ongoing hostilities prevent me from reaching affected areas where peacebuilding efforts are most urgently needed. Additionally, engaging directly with armed groups remains a delicate task, requiring caution and strategic negotiation to avoid jeopardizing the safety of participants and stakeholders.

GBV often intensifies during conflicts, posing direct risks to women peacebuilders and creating additional burdens as we work to support survivors and address gender-specific issues. Economic instability and scarcity impact communities deeply, creating conditions where basic resources are limited and tensions escalate. Political polarization further complicates peacebuilding, with competing factions fragmenting societies and making it difficult to foster unity. Similarly, social and cultural fragmentation emerges as communities are divided by conflict, which can hinder efforts to build trust and promote reconciliation.

In practical terms, these conflict-related dynamics introduce specific challenges that affect the logistics and effectiveness of my work. Conducting workshops and training sessions in insecure areas becomes challenging, as both my safety and that of the participants are at risk.



As a female peacebuilder and advocate, I encounter numerous challenges that span external, internal, and organizational levels, each presenting distinct obstacles to the work I do.

How to remain resilient in her work

In my work as a peacebuilder, implementing a variety of protection measures is essential for maintaining safety, security, and effectiveness in challenging environments. These measures cover a broad range of areas, from physical protection and digital security to emotional well-being, professional precautions, community-based protection, organizational support, and the use of technological tools.

Maintaining emotional well-being is also a priority, as the nature of peacebuilding can be demanding and emotionally taxing. I incorporate self-care practices into my routine, such as mindfulness exercises, physical activity, and meditation, to help manage stress. Peer support networks and counseling services provide emotional support, while stress management techniques help prevent burnout. Time management and setting boundaries are essential for balancing my workload, and I make sure to have access to mental health resources when needed.

Three daily reflexes for protection

Situational awareness at all times: This involves staying mindful of my surroundings, noting potential exit routes, and observing any suspicious behavior or unfamiliar individuals.

Digital security: I prioritize password hygiene to protect sensitive information. I use strong, unique passwords for each account, enable two-factor authentication, and change passwords regularly.

Emotional well-being: I incorporate self-care check-ins into my daily routine. I set aside time for self-reflection, using stress management and relaxation techniques like deep breathing and meditation.

Gender and cultural identity in protection

Some of the protection measures I implement are directly linked to my gender and cultural identity include safety planning to mitigate risks of gender-based violence, using secure online platforms to advocate for women's issues, female-only support networks to provide solidarity, and cultural competency training

Intersectional protection measures address compounded risks, by creating inclusive,

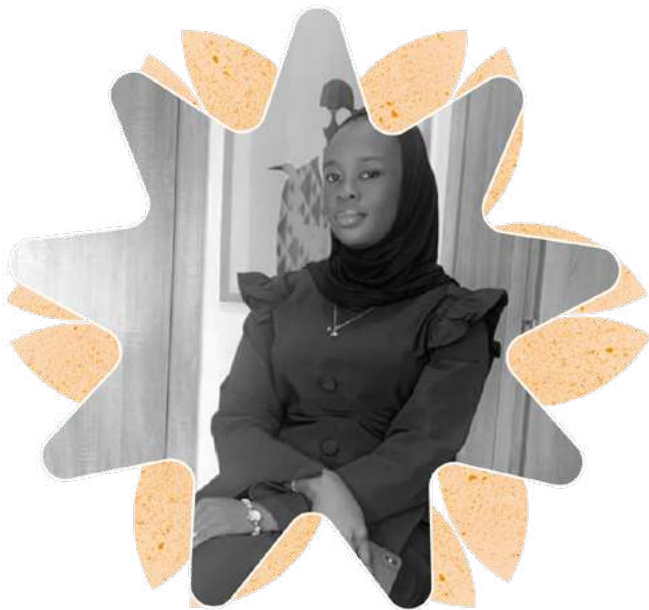
culturally sensitive support services and safe spaces for marginalized communities. These measures ensure that my protection strategies are adaptable and relevant to the diverse contexts in which I work.

Inclusion and agency of WHRDs in peacebuilding

In my experience, inclusion in important discussions, roundtables, and events around peacebuilding has been partial. While I am invited to participate in some discussions, there are still many spaces where the voices of women peacebuilders are overlooked, especially when it comes to high-level decision-making. Although I bring valuable perspectives to these discussions, it can feel like an uphill battle to ensure that women's contributions are fully recognized and valued.

“When I do participate, I feel a moderate sense of safety in these spaces. There is generally an environment of respect, but the underlying risk of backlash or subtle forms of intimidation persists, particularly when addressing sensitive issues. I take precautions and I am mindful of how I present my views, yet full openness isn't always possible. More secure and supportive platforms would help foster a safer environment where women like me could speak more freely.

I feel supported primarily by local civil society organizations (CSOs), which play a critical role in sustaining my work. Local CSOs offer resources, guidance, and a network of peers that strengthen my peacebuilding efforts. However, I believe that support from larger national and international organizations would significantly amplify my work. Increased backing from these organizations could provide access to more resources, opportunities for capacity-building, and a larger platform to advocate for women's rights and peacebuilding. Support from international CSOs, advocacy networks, and policy-driven organizations would allow me to expand my reach and impact, particularly in addressing structural issues within peacebuilding. Our agency is committed to supporting WHRDs through its training programs, advocacy, and various events related to women rights.



” I identify myself as a lawyer who is always willing and ready to render human rights services and contribute to peace building.

Contribution to peacebuilding

I understand Peacebuilding is a process that aims to: address root causes of conflict, promote reconciliation and social cohesion, strengthen institutions and governance, foster economic development and livelihoods, and ensure human rights and justice.

By resolving conflicts peacefully, information dissemination, education and awareness, fostering inclusive and respectful dialogue, advocating for human rights, advocating against gender discrimination and promoting equality.

I work both individually and with a team in an organization and it contributes positively to my work as a lawyer who promotes peace building.

Influence of context and conflict dynamics

Conflict dynamics have influenced my work in a great way. Some practical challenges that conflict has added to my work are insecurity, disagreements, miscommunication, withdrawal behaviors etc.

Identity and framing

When working in a community, I first try to know who my audience are because this helps me in easily passing the information to them. I communicate in clear and simple terms. I don't identify myself differently in the peace building mission, I try my best to relate well and make my audience comfortable with me before starting the work. As a northern woman, my origin and gender helps really well in my work because I mostly work in the northern region and most of my audience are mostly women.

How to remain resilient in her work

Collaboration, effective communication, conflict resolution training, safe target location and audience, feedback mechanisms etc.

Three daily reflexes for protection

Effective communication with the security team or unit.

Avoiding unsafe locations.

Dressing decently and modestly.

Gender and cultural identity in protection

I am always aware of my way of dressing where I ensure I am modest and decent according to the cultural background of my location.

Inclusion and agency of WHRDs in peace building

When peace meetings and dialogues are hosted in a safe location, when there are anonymous feedback mechanisms I feel safe participating in such discussions to a great extent.

For every meeting, I do the following assessments: Conduct regular security and inclusion assessments. Feedback mechanisms: Establish feedback channels for women to inform protection strategies. Gender-sensitive risk assessments: Conduct thorough, context-specific assessments to identify women's unique risks. Safe spaces: Establish secure meeting and gathering spaces.

Ms. Bridget Affiah



” I do not put forward my gender or cultural identity during my work as this brings a lot of resistance to the intended goal of our work.

Contribution to peacebuilding

Peace building is the constructive process of repairing relationships across tribe, class, religion and all boundaries. With the aim to prevent violent conflicts and end direct violence.

My organisation and I are contributing to build peace by building the capacity of community leaders, especially women leaders, on how to build peace, as they are worse affected by every violent conflict all over the world. So they should have the capacity to be part of peace processes and understand early warning signs and when to respond, and the conflict curve. We do this via radio and television programs, capacity building of a critical mass of community and other levels of women leaders.

Influence of context and conflict dynamics

GBV has over and over been exacerbated by conflict. The truth is, conflict has been masculinized so many times people feel this turf is not for women, leave it for men to handle.

How to remain resilient in her work

First, we make sure we get strong community gate keepers support before we enter any community to work so get their support and protection.

Identity and framing

We identify ourselves as a peace building organization, advocating strongly for women and human rights. Our vision and mission is to ensure grassroot women in the Niger Delta are empowered and positioned with multiple skills, recognized and respected as critical stakeholders in every development.

We do this by positioning women groups across the Niger Delta through multiple skills to access available resources and play recognized and respected solely in the development of the region.

I identify myself as a peace building practitioner, an advocate for women and human rights. My gender, culture that is very patriarchal and community has influenced my work greatly sometimes very negatively as they see us as a women liberation group and are very resistant, however it has also opened doors in some clime that want change and we have male champions working with us.

Two daily reflexes for protection

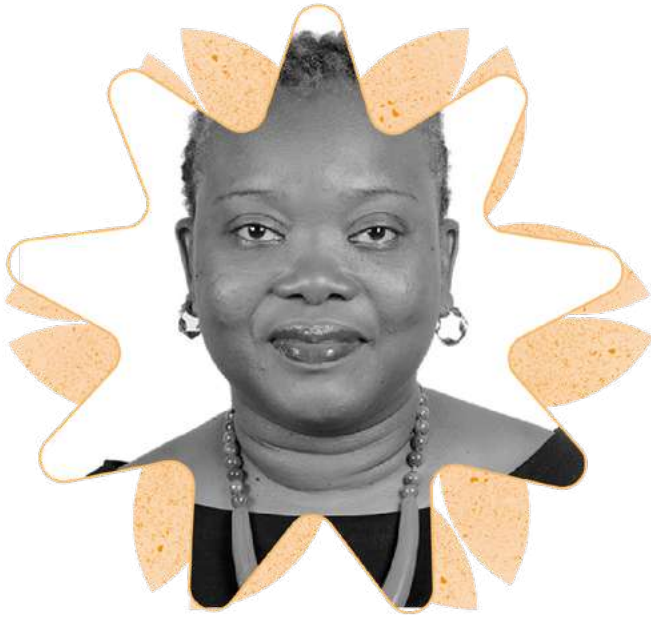
Community leaders buy in. Culture sensitive and mutual respect for the community values are the most effective preventive measures I apply in my work.

Our dressing, we dress the way women dress in the setting and context we are working to remove any bias and potential challenges associated with our gender identity.

Inclusion and agency of WHRDs in peacebuilding

I feel included in important discussions, roundtables, events around peacebuilding especially in recent times, we are gaining recognition of the contributions we are making to peace efforts. We always gauge the context and environment to safely participate.

I often feel underrepresented in the development of policies and decisions on peace initiatives. That said, there has been notable progress compared to the past. We have received significant support, particularly from CSOs focused on peacebuilding and enterprise development, which has been instrumental in advancing our efforts.



Contribution to peace building

Initially, it took me a while before I accepted I was part of the peacebuilding community, because my thought/concept initially when you talk about peacebuilding; you are talking about the people that are involved in conflict resolution, mediation, and all those kinds of community-based kinds of engagements. I attended a program where a senior colleague initiated a discussion on peacebuilding. I dismissed it, saying, "I don't do peacebuilding; I work in governance, security, and justice reform." She challenged me, asking, "To what aim and purpose? Why focus on these areas, especially in a conflict-prone area?" Her question made me reconsider the broader impact of my work and its connection to peacebuilding.

As an engagement strategy, when I started Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN), I looked forward to the Northern area of the country. And also because I've worked in the security area, I find that I'm very inclined to stabilization, interventions that come almost immediately after the conflict that is aimed at restoring the institutional or governmental framework, so it's basically tagged stabilization. So, she was like; "those of us in peace building, what do you think we are doing here?" So, I'll say that's how I contribute to peace building, I am looking at stabilizing conflict prone communities or societies that have been prone with conflict. So, it's that initial conversation that takes place post the conflict, puts in the voices of the women

on the table. In recent times, because I run an organization that is women led, and we are 99% women, you find that women. We are not homogenous demography, so we have the Gen-Zs and the Millennials now in the organization to be pushed for us to also look at the youth peace and security framework.

“ So, I would say, we talk women, we talk young persons, and we now in recent times, are also talking persons living with disability, because women; can be youth, and we can also be persons living with disability.

I work in an organization, and also in a network of different organizations. The network arrangement is the reason we have our name, Partners West Africa Nigeria. So, there's a network at the global level; partners' network that's made up of organizations that work around peace building, across the globe. We are independent of each other, we are about 22, mostly led by women. So, the whole idea is to learn from each other, it's like a pair learning network and then, an amplifying network.

We work with community based organizations in the country. We have a bias for women-led organizations at the grassroots level, and it's still the same principle; that we strengthen women-led organizations at the grassroots level, they would be able to address certain things, and be able to be more resilient, which means the community or the society where they live, they will provide certain support that would make the society more resilient, it will also make them more adaptive and responsive to the issues, at their community level. Then, at the national level/sub national level it is mixed, as it doesn't have to be women-led. And of course, the internationals give us support.

Identity and framing

The reason I'm very passionate or I became passionate about women within the context in which I work is because, when I joined the sector in 2003, it was male dominated. I was the only female in the technical program team as a gender program officer. So, I guess it just made sense to recruit a woman, but I did not enjoy at the beginning. But along the line, I found out the nexus between gender and accountability, that gender could be an accountability issue; having

women at the table to have a conversation, and this was before women Resolution 1325. So, when 1325 came into being, and we had a national action plan, everything just generally worked together “for good”.

Influence of context and conflict dynamics

Work-life balance is a major thing. There are times some of your colleagues feel like you are not experiencing life, or you do not have a life outside work, because you are passionate about the work you do.

At the programmatic level, we often encounter complex situations while working in the field, which can be overwhelming. For example, in one case, a father abandoned his family, and later, the mother also left, leaving their children behind. The family had initially fled their home state due to conflict, but sustaining themselves in the new state they migrated to proved challenging. We had to intervene to support the children, but securing adequate funding for such cases remains a significant challenge.

How to remain resilient in her work

Because we are also within the security landscape, we base our security management on weekly assessments to guide our operations at the organizational level. We undertake a cautious approach to risk, though we are cognizant of the fact that we work in a conflict prone environment.

Protective measures applied in her work

I would say my team and myself are relatively safe, but also dependent on the environment that we work in. Given the nature of the sector I work in, I am often hesitant to engage in certain conversations unless I feel comfortable with the person I am speaking with and confident that they will not misconstrue or misunderstand my words.

This conversation rarely happens in formal settings, except informally over tea or lunch with a few female colleagues, where we discuss coping mechanisms, staff strength, younger generations’ expectations, and more. We have a quarterly gathering, but participation has waned, and it is not as strong as before.

Gender and cultural identity in protection

As a woman working in the field, I would not say our security approach is directly tied to our gender identity. Instead, it reflects a holistic strategy applied across the organization, although our team primarily consists of women, with few or no men involved in project delivery. While our security measures are not explicitly gender-focused, we take additional precautions when deploying to different states. For instance, we ensure that the person is someone familiar with the region and its dynamics.

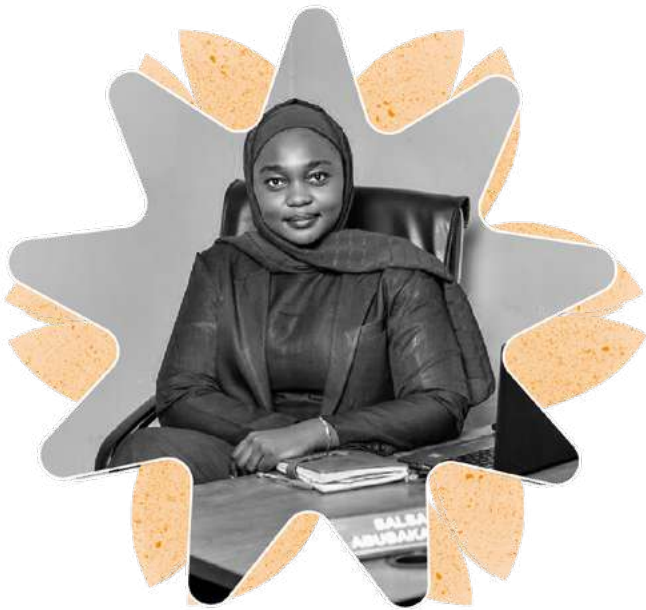
Inclusion and agency of WHRDs in peace building

To a reasonable extent, I would say: ‘Yes’. Although, it remains a continuous battle, as I am still fighting and pushing to keep my seat at the table. I say this because you would find people that want to undermine you, and also people that over the years, they have learned to respect and accept that you are someone they need.

To a reasonable extent, we are represented in policy and decision making processes, because our work speaks for us, we have had scenarios where reports of our work have been scaled up at the policy level. Sometimes, we get feedback on wanting to get more from our inputs.

Regarding peace building missions, we have interventions that showcase what we can do, and provide technical capacity. Whereas for advocacy, I would say yes, as it is the bread and butter of all that we are doing.

” We collaborate with CSOs as much as possible at the national level, but I would say clearly that I work with organizations and leaders of organizations that we align with, as per values and ethics. I know that one organization cannot do it all, but rather than align with an organization that I’m not comfortable with its leadership and what the organization stands for



” ***At Protection Without Borders (POWIB), We believe peacebuilding encompasses more than just conflict resolution. We define peacebuilding as a multifaceted process of addressing root causes of conflict, fostering social cohesion, and empowering marginalized communities.***

Contribution to peace building

Our peacebuilding initiatives focus includes conflict resolution and mediation; advocacy for inclusive policies and laws; community engagement and mobilization; and economic empowerment programs for women. We provide enabling environment, capacity-building training, advocacy, and resources to WHRDs, enabling them to promote peace and stability; address and attend to GBV cases; and provide support and intervention for victims of conflict.

As Protection Officer at POWIB, I have witnessed the power of collaborative partnerships in advancing peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria as our geographical coverage includes Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Zamfara and Katsina States. Our organization works with a diverse range of partners, including international organizations like Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF) and The Global Strategy Network – UK.

We also partner with national organizations such as Borno State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Katsina State Ministry of Health, NorthEast Regional Initiative NERI,

Street Child of Nigeria, International Federation of Women Lawyers FIDA-Borno, Stand Up for Women Society, Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Borno State Ministry of Justice.

At the local level, we collaborate with community-based organizations, Borno State Agency for Humanitarian Response and Sustainable Development, and the Network of Civil Society Organizations (Borno State Chapter).

These partnerships enable us to mobilize resources, leverage technical expertise, amplify advocacy and policy influence, enhance community engagement, ensure sustainability and impact, advocate for inclusive policies and laws, promote gender-inclusive programs and persons with disability initiatives, to address complex peacebuilding challenges, foster inclusive partnerships in promoting peace and stability.

Identity and framing

I identify as a passionate advocate for women and children’s rights and peacebuilding. I present myself as an empowered facilitator promoting peace and stability in Nigeria. In peacebuilding missions, I emphasize my role as a neutral facilitator, focusing on community engagement and conflict resolution. In advocacy spaces, I highlight my expertise as an advocate, pushing for policy changes and inclusive practices.

My gender, cultural, and community identity deeply influences my work and helps me attain a level of understanding of the context of a case and effectively play a commendable role in its resolution. As a woman from a conflict-affected community hailing from Gwoza, Borno State, I understand the nuances of GBV and other cultural sensitivities. This informs my skill of human rights issues and my effective approach to peacebuilding, advocacy and conflict resolution.

My mission revolves around promoting peace, protection, and empowerment of vulnerable community members. My community perceives me as a trusted advocate and facilitator. They appreciate my commitment in advocating and promoting peace, defending rights of women and children, creating awareness and sensitization in the communities.

Influence of context and conflict dynamics

As a Protection Officer, I have witnessed the devastating impact of conflict on vulnerable communities. Key challenges include entrenched patriarchal norms that exacerbate GBV, insecurity, and logistical constraints that hinder our outreach, monitoring and accountability for the cases we follow. Insufficient funding and resources delay timely and effective response to conflicts, leaving victims hesitant to continue conflict resolution processes.

Conflict dynamics have intensified GBV cases, disproportionately affecting women and children, while IDPs face heightened risks due to their vulnerability. Natural disasters like floods and ongoing insecurity restrict our movement, delaying our interventions in support of victims and communities. Conflict has introduced complex security protocols and heightened health risks, while limited and destroyed infrastructure hampers service delivery.

How to remain resilient in her work

As a Protection Officer, I prioritize safety and security in our peacebuilding work by identifying potential security threats, taking cognizance of local dynamics and cultural nuances of the conflict, engaging relevant stakeholders and building trust with the community involved, selecting a secure communication and approach method.

Three daily reflexes for protection

- Maintaining situational awareness by monitoring circumstances.
- Avoiding predictable patterns by varying approaches.
- Establishing and up keeping emergency protocols with handy contacts and designated safe zones.

Gender and cultural identity in protection

Almost all the measures above are connected to my gender or cultural identity. To mention, cultural sensitivity and respecting local customs while diplomatically implementing my work, gender-aware security protocols considering gender-specific risks which makes me determine my approaches for effectiveness and network building by collaborating more with women-led organizations.

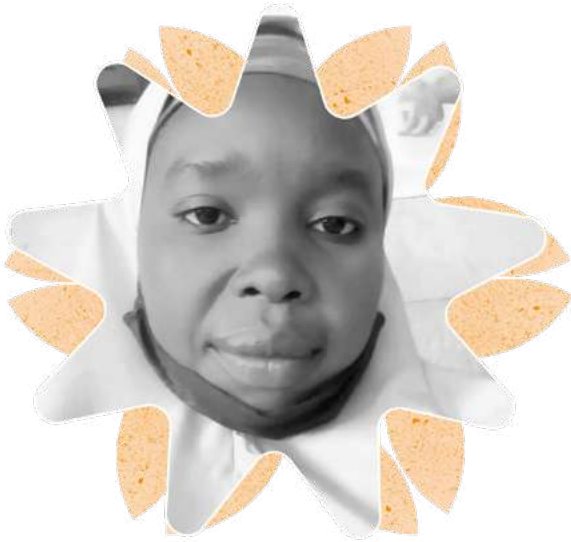
Due to my gender and cultural identity, I tend to appear modestly and smartly while acknowledging and respecting local norms with decorum to build the community's confidence in me and my work.

Inclusion and agency of WHRDs in peace building

I feel moderately included in important discussions, roundtables, and events. POWIB's partnerships with key stakeholders and donors facilitate access. I generally feel safe participating in discussions, particularly when I understand my audience and engage in meaningful deliberations that will promote and enhance sustainable development goals.

“ I believe my expertise and contributions are moderately represented in policy recommendations within my organization and partners on project implementations though there still are limited invitations to high-level meetings. POWIB receives valuable support from women and children centred organizations, partnerships, collaborations among humanitarian networks.

Increased participation in decision-making spaces will avail more inclusive policy development contributions. I would appreciate more support from international organizations (e.g., UN agencies), Government institutions (e.g., Ministry of Women Affairs) and the private sector partners for a more effective and comprehensive approach in discharging my work. Technical assistance, funding from donors and partners and strategic partnerships with government institutions are supports that are highly recommended.



Contribution to peace building

I am a peace crusader. In my work, I engage in various community programs and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting peace and unity. I focus on empowering local communities, particularly women and youth, to engage in dialogues that address sources of conflict. My role involves facilitating workshops and discussions that foster mutual understanding and cooperation among diverse groups.

” **To me, peacebuilding means creating sustainable processes that help communities resolve conflicts peacefully and prevent future violence. It involves addressing the root causes of conflicts—whether economic, social, or cultural—and working toward an environment where everyone feels safe, valued, and included.**

I work as part of a larger network, collaborating with both local and international organizations. This network approach allows for resource sharing, increased outreach, and a stronger collective impact. Working in a network also provides support systems and a collaborative environment to tackle complex issues more effectively.

Identity and framing

I identify as a community advocate and peacebuilder, particularly focusing on women's rights and empowerment. My mission is to bring about positive change by empowering communities and ensuring the voices of women are heard in peacebuilding processes.

My gender and cultural identity strongly influence my work. Being a woman allows me to connect deeply with other women, who are often the backbone of communities yet are overlooked in decision-making. My cultural background gives me insight into the challenges my community faces, and I use this understanding to bridge gaps and foster unity.

My community generally respects and values my work, though there are times when I encounter resistance due to gender norms. Some may view peacebuilding as a male-dominated field, but I use this as motivation to show the importance of women's roles in creating lasting peace.

Influence of context and conflict dynamics

Some of the main challenges I face include limited resources, societal resistance to women in leadership, and security concerns due to volatile conflict areas. Additionally, accessing certain communities is difficult due to infrastructure and safety issues.

Conflict dynamics, such as heightened violence and gender-based discrimination, have made it challenging to carry out peacebuilding work. For example, safety concerns sometimes restrict my mobility, limiting my ability to reach communities most in need of peacebuilding efforts.

Two daily reflexes for protection

Some of my protective measures are linked to my gender:

I am mindful of dress codes and social norms to avoid unwanted attention.

I often work with trusted male colleagues in certain settings to enhance security.

Inclusion and agency of WHRDs in peacebuilding

While there has been progress, I still find that women HRDs are often underrepresented in key discussions. However, I strive to ensure that my voice and perspectives are heard in every space I enter.

In some instances, I feel safe and supported, especially when working with like-minded organizations. However, I still face moments where I feel my contributions are undervalued because of my gender.

Local women's groups and civil society organizations are key supporters in my work. They provide resources, create networks, and advocate for safer environments for women HRDs. I would welcome additional support from international bodies, especially those that can provide security resources and training.

4. Conclusions

WHRDs are pivotal in fostering sustainable peace in Nigeria. Their efforts bridge gaps in conflict resolution by integrating gender-sensitive approaches and addressing systemic issues like political exclusion and gender inequality. This research highlights three critical insights:

- i) **Transformative contributions of WHRDs:** WHRDs play a central role in community resilience, mentoring young peace actors, and advocating for inclusive peace processes. Their grassroots initiatives create safe spaces and empower marginalized groups, which are vital for long-term peace.
- ii) **Barriers faced by WHRDs:** despite their impact, WHRDs encounter significant challenges, including systemic gender bias, deeply rooted in patriarchal structures. Institutional support remains limited, with inadequate access to resources, training and networks to amplify their initiatives. Furthermore, they face threats to their personal safety, including harassment, intimidation and violence. These barriers often limit their capacity to expand WHRDs' efforts, while weakening the broader potential for inclusive peacebuilding processes.
- iii) **Need for structural support:** Addressing these challenges requires tailored protection mechanisms, increased funding for WHRD-led initiatives, and stronger policies that prioritize gender equity in peacebuilding frameworks.

These findings underscore the necessity of amplifying WHRDs' voices and providing them with the resources and institutional support needed to overcome existing barriers. Only then can their full potential in achieving sustainable peace be realized.

5. Good Practices employed by WHRDs in Nigeria

- **Creating Safe Spaces for Dialogue:** Organizing gender-sensitive spaces where WHRDs can engage freely, share experiences, and discuss strategies. These forums provide a platform for women to voice their concerns without fear of judgment or reprisal, contributing to a more inclusive and secure environment for their involvement.
- **Mentorship and Capacity Building:** Offering mentorship programs where experienced women peacebuilders support newer WHRDs. This peer-to-peer learning helps build confidence, improve skills, and provide guidance on how to navigate the challenges women face in peacebuilding roles. Mentorship also strengthens networks of solidarity among women in the field.
- **Gender-Sensitive Protection Mechanisms:** Implementing local protection strategies tailored to the unique risks faced by WHRDs. These might include safety training on secure communication, conducting risk assessments, and establishing safe houses or emergency contacts. These strategies help ensure that women are protected from physical and psychological harm while engaging in peacebuilding activities. Additionally, fostering environmental awareness by being mindful of social norms and cultural sensitive practices – including dress codes – helps ensure respect for community values during engagements. In sensitive areas, discreet engagement and cautious planning of movements are key to minimize exposure and risks. Support networks, can help enhance safety and protection preparedness by establishing protocols for regular check-ins among members, ensuring a collective approach to safeguarding WHRDs involved in peacebuilding activities.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Partnering with local community leaders, security forces, and international organizations to ensure the safety of WHRDs. These partnerships strengthen security protocols and ensure women have allies who can provide support during sensitive situations.

6. Recommendations

To Nigerian WHRDs

- Build strong support networks and strong community ties for legitimacy of WHRDs' work and their protection. Building and nurturing strong relationships within the community is key to both safety and effectiveness in peacebuilding. WHRDs should engage with community members, including local leaders, activists, and allies, to create a support network that can offer protection and solidarity in times of need.
- Continuously learn and adapt: WHRDs should prioritize ongoing learning and development to improve their skills in conflict resolution, security protocols, and peacebuilding strategies. Continuous training and mentoring programs will not only enhance their capacity to lead but also provide them with the tools to navigate challenges and threats more effectively.

To protection actors and donors

- Prioritize context-specific strategies is essential to address the unique challenges faced by WHRDs. These strategies should include conducting thorough risk assessments and security audits tailored to dynamic conflict settings, providing legal and psychological support. Ensuring improved inclusion and representation in decision-making processes is critical, alongside integrating WHRDs into security planning and risk assessments.
- Develop tailored security protocols: Protection actors should work with WHRDs to develop specific, context-sensitive security protocols that address the unique risks women face in peacebuilding. These protocols should include strategies for physical, emotional, and digital safety, ensuring that WHRDs are protected from gender based violence and harassment.
- Provide ongoing training and support: Protection actors should ensure that WHRDs receive regular capacity-building training on self-protection measures, enhanced access to secure communication tools, and risk management. Provision of funding, resources, and logistics are vital for the effective implementation of these strategies. This will empower women to protect themselves and remain resilient in the face of challenges.
- Strengthen collaboration with local networks: Close collaboration with local networks, such as community leaders, women's groups, and grassroots organizations, is crucial. These local connections can provide valuable insights into emerging threats, offer immediate support in emergencies, and help WHRDs navigate culturally sensitive issues safely.
- Establish safe reporting mechanisms: Create confidential and accessible reporting systems where women can safely report threats or incidents of violence. Ensuring that these systems are trusted and responsive is essential for increasing the security of WHRDs.
- Advocate for gender-sensitive policies: Protection actors should advocate for gender-sensitive policies that address the specific challenges women face in peacebuilding roles. This could involve pushing for legal reforms, access to resources, and dedicated spaces for women to participate in peace processes.

To civil society organizations (CSOs)

- CSOs should offer more capacity-building opportunities, foster solidarity among WHRDs, and work to amplify women's voices in peacebuilding discussions. Collaboration with local communities and leaders is also essential to enhance security and inclusion.
- Amplify women's voices in policy advocacy: CSOs should actively advocate for women's inclusion in peace and security decision-making processes at all levels. This includes ensuring that women's voices are part of policy dialogues, peace agreements, and national security strategies. By advocating for gender-sensitive policies and frameworks, CSOs can help elevate the role of WHRDs in peacebuilding while ensuring their safety and inclusion.

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