2024

POLICY BRIEF

STRENGTHENING PEACE STRUCTURES AND ADOPTING RIGHT-BASED APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING THE CONFLICT IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA.

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1.1 Introduction

Between December 23 and 25, 2023, armed gunmen, suspected to be herdsmen, carried out coordinated attacks on 23 Christian farming villages in Plateau State, Nigeria, including in Barkin Ladi, Bokkos, and Mangu LGAs. Over 213 people, including women and children, were killed.

On January 23, 2024, 30 more individuals were killed in Kwahaslalek village, Mangu LGA, as they sought refuge from earlier unrest. On March 10, 2024, another attack in Wase LGA left seven dead, including three women.

In response to these attacks, the government imposed a 24-hour curfew, but violence continued. The latest reports show that over 200,000 people were affected, with 331 people killed, 153 injured, 221 houses burned, and over 34,000 displaced. Women and girls made up over 40% of the casualties.

The continued rise in casualties from coordinated attacks in Mangu LGA of Plateau State has generated urgent humanitarian needs, including medical supplies, food, and shelter for affected communities. Many are grappling with severe psychological trauma and disruptions to their lives, while displaced individuals require immediate aid.

In response to the violence, women from Bokkos LGA staged a protest on January 5, 2024, demanding justice and the release of youths arrested over the killing of a suspected herder. During the protest, they set fire to the residence and office of the District Head. The protest led to the death of one person, and women are mobilizing for another protest, which could turn violent due to a lack of peacebuilding skills.

To address this escalating conflict, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Nigeria), with support from the Urgent Action Fund Africa, launched the "Engaging Stakeholders in Conflict Mitigation and Peacebuilding" project. This initiative seeks to tackle both the immediate humanitarian needs and the root causes of the unrest in Plateau State, promoting inclusivity, understanding, and peacebuilding.

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1. *https://www.thecable.ng/killing-fields-despite-special-military-operation-plateau-communities-suffered-monthly-attacks-in-2023*

📅 **DECEMBER 23-25** • **213 people killed** in coordinated attacks across **23** villages in Barkin Ladi, Bokkos, and Mangu LGAs, Plateau State. Victims included children and women, targeted by suspected herdsmen.

📅 **JANUARY 23, 2024** • **30 people killed** in Kwahaslalek village, Mangu LGA, primarily **women and children** seeking refuge.

📅 **MARCH 10, 2024** • **7 people killed (including 3 women)** in Zurak Company Market, Wase LGA.

It is against this background that the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding WANEP-Nigeria with funds from Urgent Action Fund Africa initiated the Project Engaging stakeholders in Conflict Mitigation and Peacebuilding in Plateau State. The project which targets four conflict prone Local Government Areas (LGAs) included Barkin – Ladi, Bokkos, Mangu and Wase consisted of the following interlinked activities,

- Advocacy visits to key stakeholders at state and local levels to discuss strategies to promote an inclusive approach to peacebuilding in Plateau State.

- 1-Day Conflict Mitigation and Peace Dialogue Meeting.

- 1- Day Town Hall Meeting on Enhancing Community Policing in Plateau State.

- Produce and disseminate 500 copies of a policy brief on the topic "Strengthening Peace Structures and Adopting Rights Based Approaches to Addressing the Conflict in Plateau State, Nigeria.

The project was structured to allow community stakeholders to drive the process by identifying the conflict issues in their local communities and exploring local solutions to them. It is expected that when women and men partner on issues of peace and security their unique views and perspectives are reflective in ensuring a holistic approach to peacebuilding.

2. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/attacks-nigerias-plateau-state-leave-least-30-dead-2024-01-25/

1.2 Brief History of Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria's recurrent crises, rooted in issues of regional and state legitimacy, have hindered efforts toward democratization, stability, and national cohesion. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) marked a significant crisis, but since transitioning to civilian rule in 1999, the country has seen a rise in various conflicts. These include violent extremism in the North East, militancy in the Niger Delta, pro-secession movements in the South East, land disputes in the South-South, and ethno-religious and agro-pastoral conflicts in the North Central region.

As a result, property worth millions of naira has been destroyed, lives lost, and many displaced. By December 2023, there were **3.5 million** internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), with **2.3 million** in the northeast. Over **340,000** Nigerians sought refuge in neighboring countries, and **8 million people** are in need of humanitarian assistance according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Many of Nigeria's problems stem from the negative impact of long-term military rule, which weakened governance and accountability. After 25 years of uninterrupted democracy, political competeition remains fierce, with corruption threatening the democratic process, as access to state resources drives intense political rivalry.

Corruption and the looting of state resources are major factors exacerbating conflicts in Nigeria. Despite its wealth in natural resources and human capital, corruption deeply affects the country's development, leading to widespread poverty and social inequality. The misuse of state resources by a select few fuels resentment, weakens social cohesion, and ignites social hatred, radicalism, and violence. Poverty and injustice caused by corruption undermine mutual tolerance and coexistence, contributing to the recurring violence across the country.

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3. http://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/ethnic-religious-crises-nigeria/

4. Caught in the divide; A situational assessment of the plight of women in conflict –prone communities in Nigeria; A publication by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Nigeria.

Youths protesting to an end to SARS in Nigeria

Social inequality and the lack of opportunities for young people have heightened tensions and fueled civil unrest. Notably, the #EndSARS protests of October 2020 saw thousands of young Nigerians taking to the streets to demand an end to police brutality. This movement was sparked by a viral video of a man allegedly killed by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The protests led to the disbandment of SARS and the creation of judicial panels to investigate police abuses. However, the protests came to a violent end when the military opened fire on demonstrators at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos.

On August 1, 2024, another wave of protests erupted under the banner #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria. Tens of thousands protested against corruption, unemployment, and the rising cost of living, which has left millions in poverty. Over **20 people were killed** in the demonstrations, which highlighted widespread discontent with the government that took office on May 29, 2023. Food inflation, standing at 40%, and increasing unemployment, alongside kidnappings, terrorism, and banditry, have deepened the sense of disillusionment among Nigerians, who believe their government is out of touch with the country's growing challenges.

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5. https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/8/2/nigerians-are-tired-protesters-fed-up-with-bad-governance-soaring-costs

1.3 Socio- Demographic Landscape of Plateau State

Map of Nigeria showing Plateau State.

Plateau State Overview:

- 12th largest state in Nigeria by size.
- Located in the North Central Zone of Nigeria.
- Area: 26,899 square kilometers (10,386 sq mi).
- Population: Estimated at 4 million people

Key Features

- Named after the Jos Plateau, a mountainous region in the north of the state.
- Known for unique rock formations scattered across the grassland.
- Altitude: From 1,200 meters (3,900 ft) to a peak of 1,829 meters (6,001 ft) in the Shere Hills near Jos.
- **Mining legacy:** Years of tin and columbite mining have created deep gorges and lakes across the plateau.

Commonly referred to as **"The Home of Peace and Tourism"**, Plateau State is bounded by the states of Kaduna and Bauchi on the north, Taraba on the east, and Nassarawa on the south and west. Although situated in the tropical zone, the higher altitude gives the state a near-temperate climate, with an average temperature between **13 and 22 °C**. Harmattan winds cause the coldest weather between December and February, with the warmest temperatures usually in the dry season months of March and April. The mean annual rainfall varies between **1,317 mm (52 in)** in the southern part to **1,460 mm (57 in)** on the plateau, with the highest rainfall during the wet season in July and August. The cooler climate has led to a reduced incidence of some tropical diseases such as malaria. The Jos Plateau is the source of many rivers in northern Nigeria, including Kaduna, Gongola, Hadeja and Damaturu rivers.

The Jos Plateau is thought to be an area of younger granite which was intruded through an area of older granite rock, making up the surrounding states. These "younger" granites are thought to be about 160 million years old. This creates the unusual scenery of the Jos Plateau. There are numerous hillocks with gentle slopes emerging from the ground like mushrooms scattered with huge boulders.

Volcanic activity 50 million years ago created numerous volcanoes and vast basaltic plateaus formed from lava flows. This also produces regions of mainly narrow and deep valleys and pediments (surfaces made smooth by erosion) from the middle of rounded hills with sheer rock faces. The phases of volcanic activities involved in the formation of Plateau State have made it one of the mineral rich states in the country. Natural resources in the state include: barite, bauxite, bentonite, bismuth, cassiterite, clay, coal, emeralds, fluoride, granite, iron ore, kaolin, lead / zinc, marble, molybdenite, pyrochlore, salt, tantalite / columbite, and tin / wolfram.

Map of the 17 Local Government Areas in Plateau State

Plateau State is divided into 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs), each representing various ethnic groups with shared affinities or distant bloodlines. Local leaders are elected by the people and are not necessarily related to past chiefs. The state's LGAs include Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, Jos East, Jos North, Jos South, Kanam, Kanke, Langtang North, Langtang South, Mangu, Mikang, Pankshin, Qua'an Pan, Riyom, Shendam, and Wase.

Home to over 40 ethno-linguistic groups, some of the indigenous ethnic groups in Plateau State include the Afizere, Amo, Anaguta, Aten, Atyap, Berom, Goemai, Irigwe, Jukun, and Kofyar, among others. These groups are predominantly farmers and share similar cultural traditions. In addition, people from other parts of Nigeria, such as the Idoma, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, and others, have settled in the state. While each ethnic group has its own language, English serves as the official language, and Hausa is commonly used for communication and commerce across the state.

7. *https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58817690*

1.4 Overview of the Multi layered Peace and Security Challenges in Plateau State

Plateau State located in the North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria has been a flashpoint of recurrent outbreaks of brutal cycle of intense inter-communal and sectarian violent conflicts over the year resulting in destruction of lives and properties.

However, there are deep rooted challenges that affect the prosperity and peace of the state. For the purpose of this policy brief the challenges will be clustered using the human security lens into political insecurity, economic insecurity, community and personal insecurity and environmental insecurity.

Political Insecurity

Root Causes of Conflict in Plateau State:

Indigenes vs Non-Indigenes

Indigenes enjoy privileges like government employment, scholarships, and political positions.

Non-indigene/Settlers are denied these privileges, fueling tension.

Farmer-Herder Conflict

Struggle over **grazing land** and **scarce resources** between indigenous farmers and nomadic herders.

Climate change (desertification), population explosion, and urbanization leading to land depletion and violent confrontations.

Conflict Escalation

- Plateau State has experienced recurring violent conflict, with major incidents in **1994, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2010-2024.**
- The state ranks **3rd** in Nigeria for political violence and social unrest.
- Plateau State has the **2nd highest conflict-related fatalities** after Borno (Boko Haram epicenter).

8. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/25/thirty-people-killed-in-latest-herder-violence-in-nigerias-plateau-state

Violent Incidents and Casualties

Recent Attacks

📅 **December 2023**

200 civilians killed thousands displaced in coordinated attacks in **Barkin-Ladi Bokkos, and Mangu LGAs**

📅 **May 20, 2024**

40 civilians killed in simultaneous attacks in **Wase LGA** by suspected bandits and herders.

Impact on Communities

✳ Increased number of Internally displaced persons (IDPs), widows, orphans, and individuals with psychological trauma.

✳ Destruction of farms, roads, markets, schools, and places of worship.

✳ Women have been severely affected, yet their involvement in peace processes remains low.

Broader Effects and Trends

✳ The conflict has spread to neighboring states like Benue and Nasarawa

✳ **Self-defense groups (vigilantes)** have emerged due to rising insecurity.

✳ **Banditry** and **kidnapping** for ransom have worsened the situation.

✳ Poor governance, corruption, and weak state structures have exacerbated insecurity and created mistrust in local authorities.

Economic Insecurity

The alarming level of insecurity in Plateau State has increased herders and bandits attacks in different communities across the state leaving unpalatable consequences for the state's economy and its growth. Despite the security measures taken to address the daunting challenges of insecurity, the government efforts have not produced the desired positive result; this has compelled the people to take security measures to keep safe. The ongoing violence has widespread consequences:

Loss of Lives: Business owners and investors are killed during conflicts, which has caused fear and instability.

Business closure: Multinational companies are exiting, investments are declining, and unemployment is rising.

Disruption of Livelihoods: Farmers cannot work safely, businesses are destroyed, and essential infrastructure such as schools and power stations are damaged. Thus, residents cannot work productively:

Decline in Productivity: Displacement of residents has reduced agricultural output, exports, and foreign exchange, further exacerbating unemployment and lowering incomes.

Community and personal Insecurity

The persistent insecurity highlights the urgent need for effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives in Plateau state. The collective human and material impact of these dreadful experiences of violent conflict and attacks have taken a monumental cost on the community and personal lives of the people. Plateau State has witnessed increase attacks by herders men and bandits as well as insurgent groups. Uncountable lives and properties have been destroyed in cruel situations, several communities devastated, and others completely evacuated, segregated settlements established, people's means of livelihood shattered and the recorded gains of past development significantly reversed. As a result of this, a vast majority of people have been rendered economically disadvantaged, socially subordinate and politically vulnerable. Also, this has led to human rights violations and civilian casualties.

9. https://businessday.ng/life/article/food-crisis-worsens-in-plateau-benue-as-insecurity-escalates/

Environmental Insecurity

Nigeria is among the countries that relies heavily on agriculture for its survival, while its productivity relies on weather patterns like rainfall. The country is very vulnerable to climate change and natural hazards such as rising temperatures, gully erosion, drought, and increased flooding.

Devastating floods hit Nigeria in 2023 which lead to;

500+ people kiiled

Hectares of farmland destroyed

1.4 million people displaced

$2 billion in damages

90,000 homes destroyed

8.4 million food insecure

In addition, the arid regions of the northwest and northeastern parts of Nigeria are facing substantial challenges from drought and land degradation particularly in Plateau State. Compounding the climate change crisis is the rise in violence orchestrated by armed groups like the Boko Haram extremist group, farmer herders, bandits and other forms of insecurity.

Violence has affected food access in Plateau state and across Nigeria.

78,000 Farmers forced by armed bandits to abandon their farmland in Plateau, Borno, Katsina, Taraba, and other northern states.

Frequent attacks, with land and water scarcity, have driven nomadic herders from the north to migrate in search of grazing lands and water for their livestock,

5.9 million children in Northern Nigeria experienced acute malnutrition

22.4% the worst annual inflation rate in nearly 2 decades, food prices have increased after the new government removed fuel subsidies

10. https://www.coldhubs.com/coldhubnews/2023/8/30/impact-of-climate-changes-to-food-insecurity-in-nigeria
11. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/06/food-security-plateau-senator-plang-seeks-end-to-insecurity-in-constituency/

Specific Challenges Facing Women and Girls in Plateau State

The main challenges include economic exclusion, poverty, limited access education and health care, gender-based violence, limited participation in political and public life, harmful cultural practices, negatively impacts of climate change and exclusion from peace tables.

For girls in particular forced marriages, child pregnancy and child labour exacerbated by poverty are major concerns. Also, the persistent attacks by herders and armed men has led to school closure in affected communities, leading to increased gender based violence with girls out of school and confined to their homes. During this time girls out of school are susceptible to many dangers A report by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) indicated that school closures due to continuous herder attacks have eroded efforts to keep girls in schools. Repeated shocks/trauma including droughts and floods, have led to disruption of livelihoods of women who account for over 50% of the workforce in agriculture.

1.5 Peace and Security Briefs from 4 Local Government Areas In Plateau State

Insecurity is a major problem that is affecting the Nigerian people, over the years the level of civil unrest and crises has grown worse in various parts of the country including Plateau State. Participants at a 1-Day Conflict Mitigation and Peace Dialogue with Key stakeholders drawn from **Barkin Laid, Bokkos, Mangu and Wase LGAs**, Civil Society Organization., security agencies, media etc identified certain challenges as necessitating the recurrent conflicts and attacks in their communities.

MANGU LGA

The major causes of conflicts in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA) includes;

- Clashes between farmer herders
- Religious intolerance
- Land dispute and grabbing

During a plenary session, stakeholders highlighted that Mangu is experiencing fragile peace, which, if not properly managed, could be easily disrupted. The conflict has led to several adverse effects, including an economic downturn in the communities, displacement of people, and restricted access to marketplaces due to religious divides. The community has also faced educational setbacks, with parents reluctant to send their children to school. Schools in Mangu town are experiencing high student influx and overcrowding, with classrooms designed for 40 students now accommodating 100 students. The conflicts that affected rural communities have resulted in school closures for over a year, causing significant delays in the academic calendar Other issues raised are:

Social Issues

- Moral Decadence Among Youth:
  - Increased rates of rape and criminality, with many girls becoming pregnant due to the conflict.
  - Youths are increasingly involved in criminal activities, exacerbating the social fabric's breakdown.
- Displacement and Overcrowding:
  - The displacement of villagers has led to a large influx of people into Mangu town, triggering increased crime and further overburdening urban areas.
  - Overcrowding due to migration has created additional health challenges, including poor sanitation and a lack of medical resources.
- Polarization and Religious Tensions:
  - The community is deeply polarized along religious lines, with people retreating to areas where their faith is dominant, making some areas inaccessible for those of different religions.

MANGU LGA

Economic Issues
- Food Shortages
  - The conflict has severely disrupted agricultural activities, causing food shortages and driving up prices, affecting both the community and the broader country.
- Lack of Funding for Education
  - The displacement and economic downturn have left many families without the means to support their children's education, resulting in high dropout rates.

Health and Gender Issues
- Gender-Based Violence
  - The conflict has heightened gender-based violence, especially against women and girls, exacerbating their vulnerability in the crisis.
- Drug Abuse
  - As a coping mechanism, many in the community, especially the youth, have turned to drug abuse, worsening the social breakdown.
- Health challenges due to overcrowding from migration.

Political and Security Issues
- Distrust Between Civilians and Military
  - here is growing distrust between civilians and the military, with the activities of the military personnel causing further friction.
- Political Instability
  - The conflict and societal breakdown have contributed to political instability, making governance and conflict resolution more difficult.
- High Numbers of Widows and Orphans:
  - The conflict has left behind a significant number of widows and orphans, adding to the community's social and economic strain.

WASE LGA

During the plenary session, stakeholders of Wase Local Government Area (LGA) described the ongoing 15-year power tussle between the Bhogom people, who dominate Lamba, and the Tarok people, perceived as migrants despite their large population. The Tarok community claims ownership of the traditional stool, which is currently held by the Fulani people. The Tarok people, being the majority, oppose being led by the minority Fulani ethnic group. In response, the government created a traditional stool for the Tarok people, representing a significant concession by the Fulani to sustain peace in the Kadarko district.

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12. *Feedback from participant group work session during the 1- day Conflict Mitigation and Peace Dialogue Meeting Held In Jos, Plateau State on 19 June 2024*

WASE LGA

- Land Grabbing has been significant around the Wase-Langtang Road, particularly in Kadarko, primarily due to farming activities during the farming seasons.
- Wase is a major mining site in the state, experiencing high levels of illegal and underage mining. This has caused many young children to drop out of school and lose interest in formal education, resulting in conflicts within the community.
- Banditry is high in Wase because it shares borders with three states namely; Taraba, Bauchi, and Gombe. The porous borders have allowed passers-by to exploit the situation, leading to frequent attacks on the community and easy escapes without detection.

BOKKOS LGA

On **December 24th, 2023**, a series of attacks in Bokkos Local Government Area (LGA) of Plateau State displaced around **2,000 households and 13,000-14,000 individuals**, with over **200 lives lost**, many injured, and shelters destroyed. The violence was driven by ongoing farmer-herder conflicts over farm encroachment, cattle rustling, and disputes over land and resources. Rising criminality, including theft and violent attacks, illicit land grabbing, drug peddling, and the illegal sale of firearms have further destabilized the area, escalating violence among community members and ethnic groups. The situation urgently demands comprehensive conflict resolution strategies.

- Kidnapping
- Stealing farm produce at night by criminal elements
- Underage grazing of cattle by children, leading to crop destruction
- Closure of most primary schools due to insecurity, with some schools used as IDP camps (e.g., Takore in Mongoro district)
- Isolated attacks by specific individuals resulting in deaths
- Drug and substance abuse among unemployed youths, often used as political thugs, who then turn to theft and kidnapping
- Lawlessness: Protests and incidents often escalate to riots, causing destruction of lives and properties (e.g., burning of the traditional ruler's house during a women's protest)
- Lack of trust among community members
- Poor use of alternative dispute resolution methods
- Criminality: Misunderstanding of criminality and conflict escalates issues
- Certain areas in Bokkos are inaccessible due to religious and ethnic divides
- Political influence: Politicians or connected individuals often bail out criminals, leading to further crime
- High unemployment rates, leading to crime for financial survival, including theft, kidnapping, and murder

13. Feedback from participant group work session during the 1- day Conflict Mitigation and Peace Dialogue Meeting Held In Jos, Plateau State on 19 June 2024

BARKIN-LADI LGA

The session in Barkin Ladi highlighted the prevalence of attacks and kidnappings across five districts, particularly in Heiypang, Dorowa, and Kaskara. Unemployment, economic hardship, and hunger are key drivers of these issues, with conflicts further fueled by religious and tribal divisions, the influx of foreigners, and farmer-herder clashes stemming from a lack of designated cattle pathways. These tensions frequently result in violence and property destruction, with revenge killings exacerbating the cycle. Armed robbery and kidnapping are widespread due to economic struggles and rising living costs. Poor coordination among security operatives, resource constraints, and leaks of sensitive information to criminals worsen the situation. Mistrust in the government and self-serving behavior within the community impede efforts to foster unity and effectively address these challenges. Other concerns raised are:

- Planned attacks on hapless communities at NTV community
- Armed robbery occasioned by economic hardship
- Lack of operational synergy between security agencies
- Illegal artisan mining with security involvement: underage children abandoning school for mining in district such as Ropp, Gashes and Bishiki community.
- Injustice by the judiciary and security operatives
- Lack of concern by government officials/politicians
- Harboring and hiding criminals by community members
- Mutual distrust against security agencies
- Intolerance between tribes or ethnic and religious groups
- Segregated settlement along religious divides
- Drugs peddling/substance abuse high in Nyanra of Fan District.
- Prevalence of SALW
- Cattle theft perpetrated by both sides (farmers and herders)
- Cattle poisoning on farmlands
- Indigene and settlers' dichotomy
- Leakage of intelligence within the security agencies

1.6 Response to Peace and Security Challenges

To ameliorate the peace and security issues, peacebuilding structures were inaugurated in four LGAs. However, these structures could not function effectively due to several challenges. The table below provides a reflection of the peacebuilding structures in the identified Local Government Areas and the challenges witnessed.

LGA	Peacebuilding structures	Structures Challenges
Wase	Peace Groups Peace Promoters	Effects of drugs/substance abuse Activities of shadow partners negates peace plan Power clash in Kadarko leading to divided allegiance High expectation from peace convener
Mangu	Agricultural Groups (AFAN & MACBAN) Plateau Peace Practitioners Network (PPPN) Peace Architecture Forum Women peace and security network Religious Groups (CAN, JNI) Youth Peace Ambassador Network (YPAN)	Lack of synergy/unity Funds to intervene in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities Religious /ethnic bias/sentiment
Barkin Ladi	Community Peace Architecture Forum (CPAF) Jaslap EWER Community Accountability Forum Women Peace and Security (WPS)	Lack of fund for sustainability Incapability to stepdown training to community Lack of ability to go down to interior community Lack of encouragement/incentives from governments Lack of retraining of community members
Bokkos	Community Peace Architecture Forum (CPAF) Youth Peace Network Community Peace Observers Women Peace Council Youth Peace Ambassador Network (YPAN) Mediator Forum Peace Reconciliation Committee	Logistics Training gaps: capacity building Low synergy with the local government authorities

14. Feedback from participant group work session during the 1- day Conflict Mitigation and Peace Dialogue Meeting Held In Jos, Plateau State on 19 June 2024

To ensure peace at community level, there is an urgent need to revive and strengthen these peacebuilding structures using the rights-based approach to promote positive and sustainable peace. A rights–based approach enhances the calls for inclusion not only using legal instruments but also through the work of extensive advocacy networks at the national and local levels. From participating in non-violent resistance to transforming social relations through negotiation and reconciliation (including violence de-escalation and the creation of structural capacity for peace), human rights actors and civil society organizations have been engaged in an extensive scope of activities for peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Also, these actors have played a key role in educating marginalized groups particularly women about their rights, diffusing a culture of peace and equality, and strengthening human rights principles from the bottom up. Thus, propelling women to participate in peacebuilding particularly at local communities where conflict emanates.

15. *Feedback from participant group work session during the 1- day Conflict Mitigation and Peace Dialogue Meeting Held In Jos, Plateau State on 19 June 2024*

1.7
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT

Globally, women and children bear brunt of the conflicts and wars. During these conflicts, they are often exposed to unimaginable horrific atrocities: massacres, sexual assaults such as kidnapping and sexual violence, forced marriage forced pregnancies and health issues particularly with contacting HIV /AID. Rape in many conflict prone countries has been used as a weapon of war. Although it is well known that the realities of women and girls differ from those of men and boys, in these conflicts, women and girls are largely invisible at peacebuilding tables. Their views, concerns and unique contributions are not brought into bear at peace tables having been disproportionately affected by the conflict.

Oftentimes, women are seen as victims of conflict, lacking the skills and knowledge to participate in peacebuilding, rather than as agents of change whose unique abilities when well harnessed are instrumental to building sustainable peace. In many communities, they are confined to a passive role and their impacts are neglected in the Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation processes. There is no doubt that women are not the primary perpetrators of violence but are relegated to the background in the discourse on peace and security. The contribution of women is therefore often restricted to trivial, cosmetic or logistical contributions, indicating their status as 'wives and mothers' rather than as active actors. The absence of women from structured conflict management and peacebuilding programs and processes necessitated the adoption of the **United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325.**

16. *https://www.ethicsandinternationalaffairs.org/journal/a-human-rights-approach-to-conflict-resolution*

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 adopted on October 31. 2000 is the first UN resolution that acknowledges the disproportionate effect of war and conflict on women, highlights the reality that women have traditionally been left out of peace processes and stabilization initiatives. The Resolution calls on the bodies of the United Nations and the Member States to pursue a variety of actions to increase women's representation and engagement in conflict prevention, management and resolution, and to involve them in peace-making, peacekeeping and peace-building activities in the process. It also seeks to foster respect for and preservation of women's rights, ensuring that women 's security is strengthened in situations of conflict and post-conflict. In the past twenty - four (24) years, after the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the transformative element of the resolution, paved the way for the adoption of other supporting resolutions - 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242 etc . This has strengthened the normative framework for women's participation in decision making, conflict prevention and peacebuilding; protection of women and girls' rights; and prevention of sexual violence in conflict.

The women, peace and security agenda has also broadened the discourse on peace and security and provided a stronger platform for civil society advocacy on women's rights, human rights and gender equality and their intersection with peace and security. There have been a few successes in the implementation of the **Women Peace and Security (WPS) resolutions** such as the gradual increase in the number of women participating in peace negotiations; more peace agreements integrating provisions on women's human rights and gender equality; and more security sector personnel undergoing training on the WPS resolutions including appropriate response to, and handling of, sexual and gender-based violence cases. However, over 70 Member States including Nigeria have now adopted **National Action Plans (NAPs)** on UNSCR 1325 out of the 193 member states of the United Nations

18. National Action Plan for the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and related Resolutions in Nigeria; Federal Ministry of women of Women Affairs

19. Guidelines for the Localization of Nigeria's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security published by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Nigeria December 2023

Thematic Areas of UNSCR 1325

4 Key Pillars of Women, Peace and Security

Participation

Prevention

Protection

Relief and Recovery

National Action Plan (NAP)

Nigeria launched its National Action Plan on the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on August 27th, 2013. The development of the NAP became imperative because of the price Nigerian women have paid in the long and violent conflicts that have been ravaging the country especially in the past two decades. From violent extremism within states of the North East to militancy in the Niger Delta region and pockets of communal conflicts witnessed across the country, women have continued to endure unprecedented levels of vulnerability suffering the greatest consequences as victims in these violent situations.

In the course of implementation of the first NAP (2013-2017), several gaps were observed and this formed the basis, among other reasons, to review the plan to incorporate emerging issues in Nigeria. Issues relating to violent extremism and limited consideration of post-conflict and reintegration issues, absence of crisis management and recovery strategies, ambiguous language and inadequate monitoring and evaluation architecture were highlighted as gaps in the first plan. In May 2017, Nigeria adopted the second National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2017 – 2020) with clear implementation, monitoring and evaluation strategies and reporting pathways.

However, with the rising wave of violence and security threats it became expedient to seek measures to ameliorate the impact on the most vulnerable groups. Although the government at Federal and State levels have brought resources to bear in putting forward structures and strategies to promote peace in the regions, conflicts have continued with new and emerging dynamics within communities.

Development of Plateau State Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 validation meeting

The Role of Women the Plateau State Conflict

In Plateau State, amidst this turmoil, the role of women emerges as a complex and multifaceted one. While they bear the disproportionate brunt of the violence, enduring displacement, loss, and physical and emotional harm, women also stand as pillars of resilience and strength. Their voices, often silenced in the chaos, carry the potential to become powerful instruments for peace when well projected. As peacemakers, mediators, and advocates for positive change, women have played a pivotal role in forging a path toward reconciliation and sustainable peace.

To ensure women participation in issues of peace and security in the state, the United Nations –UN Women Northern Nigeria Women Peace and Security (WPS) Programme initiated the Women Peace Mentor (WPM) Project in 2014 to support inter-community dialogue and mediation, advocacy and sensitisation initiatives, through women. More specifically, the WPM Project aims to empower women at the grassroots level through mentoring by women leaders with substantial skills and experience in peace building and conflict resolution. These women leaders were identified across four target local government areas in Plateau State: Wase, Riyom, Mangu and Jos North. In addition, lead women peace mentors were selected from the larger group of women to provide strategic direction, overall guidance, mentoring and capacity building for women and young women to be actively engaged in the mechanism of the state's peace and security architecture.

Also, in 2015 the Plateau State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MWASD) developed and launched the state's action plan on UNSCR 1325, making Plateau amongst the first three states to adopted the State Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in Nigeria. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Plan was also integrated into the state government's strategic action plan, demonstrating government's commitment to implementation. Additionally, the first local government action plan on UNSCR 1325 in Nigeria has been developed by Wase local government area (LGA) in Plateau State. Wase was one of the target LGAs for the Northern Nigeria WPS Programme. The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Nigeria has also set up a Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) structure in the state where community women are equipped with conflict management and peacebuilding skills. This has helped to strengthen women's leadership, promote gender equality and improve the protection of women and children in grassroots conflict settings

However, due to lack of funds and political will to implement the action plans on UNSCR 1325, women have not been recognised and included in the recent efforts of conflict management and peace processes. With the recurrent attacks on farming communities by herdsmen, women have taken to mobilizing protects to have their voices heard. Notably on 24th December 2023., following the attacks by herdsmen on communities in Barkin Ladi, Mangu, and Bokkos Local Government Areas the women in Bokkos LGA mobilized to stage a protest. On January 4, 2024 the women burnt down the house of their traditional ruler following the arrest of some members of the community for their alleged involvement in the recent killings in the area.

Women partnering with men to discuss issues of peace and security in Plateau State

Women need to play visible roles in peacebuilding through strengthening their capacity and adopting a rights-based approach. Building peace is challenging. It's tougher for women peacebuilders. They do not only seek to transform the conflicts plaguing their communities; they are doing so in the face of bigotry, injustice, silence, and physical violence. Women peacebuilders need to visibly impact peacebuilding beginning from their communities by contributing to the reduction of direct abuse on women and girls. Women should seek avenues to partner with men to transform and resolve conflict as mediators, trauma recovery counsellors, and conflict monitors, peacemakers etc. Also, trained women should contributed to building the capacity of other women and young women to embrace a culture of peace and deter violent conflict by acting as educators and participants in the development process. With a considerable level of inclusion of women in peacebuilding and decision making in Plateau State, peace will be promoted and sustained within communities and Nigeria at large.

1.8 CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy brief has shed light on the contemporary peace and security challenges within conflict prone Local Government Areas in Plateau State. The responses to those challenges at the community and state levels. Finding lasting solutions to the evolving challenges in the state requires a multi faceted approach, strong political commitment and perseverance from government at all levels and above all the full inclusion of women in all peace processes.

Inclusion is not only about promoting women's participation in formal spheres, but also recognizing where they have the greatest influence. Many instances of gender inclusivity have resulted from informal structures, such as the influence women have within their families, which often goes unrecognized. Men and boys in every society should be allies of women in building peace. Women need to be integrated into all levels of governance and decision-making to ensure their active participation in peacebuilding. Moreso, identified gaps in the existing responses/ peacebuilding structures need to be addressed. Accordingly, the following recommendations are provided for the consideration of national, state and local actors.

Government

- Budget for peacebuilding and develop a robust, innovative and resilient resource mobilization strategy to support the sustainable implementation of initiatives for lasting peace.
- Consolidate the gains made in the implementation of the Women Peace and Security (WPS) commitments to address the peculiar challenges of women and ensure their full participation in peacebuilding.
- Establish a comprehensive integrated framework of initiatives aimed at community policing, conflict prevention and peacebuilding to ensure coherence and targeted response to the threats witnessed within communities.
- The Local Government Councils (LGC) should ensure the sustainability of local peace structures. Partners should fully contribute to sustaining grassroots structures through involvement of the right key stakeholders.
- Action plans set up for each local government area to track progress and measure the success of peacebuilding and conflict interventions at the grassroots level.

International and Regional Partners

- Promote a bottom -up approach to peacebuilding by investing more in the indigenous actors and initiatives to promote the active participation of local authorities and structures in the peacebuilding processes.
- Align strategies to national development policies and action plans to ensure context and culture specific interventions to address the actual needs and challenges of the people.
- Increase support to Civil Society Organizations especially women led organizations through long term project funding to play their meaningful roles in peacebuilding particularly in the implementation of the WPS Agenda.

Civil Society Organizations

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WEST AFRICA NETWORK FOR PEACEBUILDING NIGERIA

West Africa Network for Peacebuilding Nigeria (WANEP-Nigeria) was established out of necessity to provide an organized platform for collaborative peacebuilding for conflict transformation and development in Nigeria by indigenous Non Governmental Organizations with diverse capacities and interest in human rights, conflict transformation and good governance. WANEP-Nigeria operations are structured along the geo political constellation of Nigeria and targets grassroots ownership of peacebuilding initiatives through its member organizations in all the thirty six (36) States of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Membership of WANEP-Nigeria, pursuant to constitutional provision is for organizations with 40% conflict transformation and peacebuilding initiatives. Some of these organizations however have other areas of competence other than peacebuilding. WANEP-Nigeria has over 200 member organizations spread across the six geopolitical zones of the country. Intervention programs of the Network are divided into five basic thematic areas: Women in Peacebuilding; Conflict Prevention, Active Non Violence and Peace Education; Democracy and Good Governance; Research and Documentation.

URGENT ACTION FUND AFRICA

Established in 2001, Urgent Action Fund Africa is a pan-African and Feminist Fund that supports African Women's Human Rights Defenders (AWHRDs), their organisations, collectives and movements to take actions that sustain their work and themselves before, during and after urgent situations, and have resourced more than 5,200 grants with a geographical presence in Africa's 54 countries.. Urgent Action Fund-Africa provides financial support for strategic interventions that take advantage of opportunities to advance women's human rights. Such opportunities arise when an unexpected event – positive or negative – creates a situation in which rapid intervention can significantly impact.