IMPACT OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE NIGERIAN AIR FORCE ON NATIONAL SECURITY

BY

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Abstract
Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a critical strategy for promoting inclusivity within security institutions, yet its implementation and impact on national security remain subject to debate. This study examines the awareness, implementation, and perceived effects of gender mainstreaming policies within the Nigerian Air Force (NAF). The study adopts the Feminist Security Theory, which argues that inclusive security frameworks enhance operational efficiency, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Using a structured survey, data were collected from NAF personnel to assess their perceptions of gender inclusion, its impact on national security, and barriers to its implementation. Findings indicate a high level of awareness regarding gender mainstreaming policies, with a majority of respondents acknowledging improvements in leadership opportunities for women and operational effectiveness. However, challenges such as resistance to policy adoption, inadequate mentorship, and cultural biases continue to hinder full implementation. The study concludes that while gender mainstreaming enhances security effectiveness by fostering diverse perspectives and reducing workplace conflicts, its success depends on policy enforcement, leadership commitment, and institutional reforms. Recommendations include strengthening policy implementation, providing gender-sensitive training, and promoting female leadership within security institutions to enhance national security outcomes.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, National Security, Nigerian Air Force, Institutional Barriers,

Introduction

Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a critical strategy for promoting gender equality across various sectors, including the military. The concept, introduced at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, aims to integrate gender perspectives into policies, programs, and institutions to ensure equitable participation and outcomes for all genders (United Nations, 1995). In the security sector, gender mainstreaming is particularly significant, as it fosters diversity, enhances operational effectiveness, and aligns with international frameworks such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace, and Security (UN, 2000).

In Nigeria, the integration of gender mainstreaming into the military has been an evolving process. The Nigerian Air Force (NAF), like other branches of the armed forces, historically

operated within a patriarchal structure that limited women's roles primarily to administrative, medical, and support functions (Agbalajobi, 2021). However, in recent years, gender policies have facilitated increased female participation in aviation, engineering, and even combat roles. Despite these advancements, challenges such as cultural biases, institutional resistance, and inadequate policy enforcement continue to hinder full gender integration within the NAF (Adamu & Iliyasu, 2022).

One of the key issues in assessing the impact of gender mainstreaming in the NAF is the representation of women in leadership positions. While women have been admitted into various specialized military roles, they remain underrepresented in senior command positions. Currently, the highest rank attained by a woman in the NAF is Air Commodore, and all 11 commands are led by men (Okeke, 2023). This gender imbalance raises concerns about whether gender mainstreaming policies are merely symbolic or if they contribute meaningfully to institutional reforms that enhance inclusivity and operational efficiency.

The broader implications of gender mainstreaming in the military extend to national security. Studies have shown that increased female participation in security forces can improve intelligence gathering, conflict resolution, and overall mission effectiveness (Hudson et al., 2020). Conversely, a failure to implement gender-inclusive policies effectively may perpetuate institutional inefficiencies and limit the full utilization of available human resources in national defence strategies. Given Nigeria's persistent security challenges including terrorism, insurgency, and banditry—it is crucial to examine how gender inclusivity in the NAF contributes to national security outcomes (Eze & Adejoh, 2021).

This study aims to assess the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies in the NAF, and evaluate their broader impact on national security. By critically examining policy frameworks, institutional practices, and security implications, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender equality in military institutions and its role in strengthening Nigeria's defence capabilities.

Conceptual Clarification

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a strategic approach aimed at incorporating gender perspectives into policymaking, planning, and implementation processes to achieve gender equality (United Nations, 1995). The concept was first introduced in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and was later reinforced by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN, 2000). The United Nations defines gender mainstreaming as "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, in all areas and at all levels" (UN Women, 2021).

In the military sector, gender mainstreaming seeks to eliminate structural barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership positions and participating in combat operations (Agbalajobi, 2021). The Nigerian government has incorporated gender mainstreaming strategies within the armed forces, yet full implementation remains limited due to cultural biases, institutional resistance, and the slow pace of policy enforcement (Eze & Adejoh, 2021). This

paper conceived gender mainstreaming as an effort geared towards including the women in security role in the Nigerian Airforce.

National Security

National security refers to the safeguarding of a nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and citizens from external and internal threats. Traditionally, national security has been understood in military terms, focusing on defence against foreign aggression and internal insurgencies (Buzan, 1991). However, contemporary perspectives emphasize a broader definition that includes political stability, economic security, and social cohesion (Williams, 2018).

The effectiveness of national security measures depends on the inclusivity and diversity of security institutions. Research suggests that integrating women into national security frameworks can enhance intelligence gathering, counterterrorism operations, and conflict resolution (Hudson et al., 2020). In Nigeria, where security challenges such as Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts persist, gender-sensitive security policies can contribute to a more holistic approach to national defence (Adamu & Iliyasu, 2022).

Empirical Review

Stanciu (2019) argues that contemporary conflicts necessitate the utilization of a diverse range of resources and skills in current military operations to ensure long-term international peace and security. Since 1961, NATO has recognized that integrating a gender perspective among security providers is crucial for organizational resilience in the face of numerous international security challenges. This integration is also seen as a measure of performance within the political and military domains, utilizing human resources to their fullest potential. With the endorsement of UNSCR 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" in 2000, NATO has progressively adopted policies, strategies, and action plans to promote and implement gender equality within Alliance structures and member or partner states' Armed Forces. Moreover, NATO, alongside its strategic partners, has developed mechanisms to comprehensively apply gender diversity, aiming to enhance operational efficiency and military capabilities. Emphasizing the importance of collaboration between advancements in the weapons industry, military technologies, and inclusive utilization of human resources, NATO has transformed into a modern Alliance and a significant international advocate for integrating gender perspectives into security and defence.

Kemi et al. (2016) highlight the pervasive issue of gender inequality in Nigeria, where women have historically been subjected to social control and dominated by men. This situation is perpetuated by cultural stereotypes, the misuse of religious and traditional practices, and the dominance of men in educational, political, and social spheres. Gender equality is a pressing concern in Nigeria, particularly among women, who view equality between men and women as fair and just. Achieving gender equality is not only a matter of human rights but is also seen as essential for sustainable development and national security in Nigeria. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, using primary data collected through administered questionnaires and secondary data gathered from newspapers and journals. The research aimed

to understand the major causes of gender inequality in Nigeria. The study also suggested strategies to ensure gender equality in all sectors in Nigeria.

Asklof (2018) investigates the impact of pre-deployment gender training on the knowledge and attitudes regarding gender among military personnel in peace support operations (PSOs). The study hypothesizes that such training leads to increased knowledge levels and more positive attitudes towards gender mainstreaming in PSOs. Data is collected through a survey among participants of gender training in the Swedish Armed Forces, analyzed using a difference in means tests on knowledge and attitudes, and a list experiment. The results show a significant effect on knowledge levels and some support for attitude change, although there may be some influence from social desirability bias. The study suggests a need for greater integration of gender perspectives into general training and everyday service of PSO personnel.

Gjørv and Kleppe (2016) explore the significance of gender perspectives in military operations, questioning whether "gender" is merely a political buzzword or if it embodies a purpose and role in enhancing security for both the operation and the civilian environment, thereby increasing mission efficiency. This chapter discusses the relevance of gender analysis in operational planning and execution, as well as its broader implications for security, aiming to inform best military practices toward a positive outcome. Despite the endorsement of central claims in UN and NATO policy by member states, the chapter identifies challenges in policy implementation. Rather than providing a checklist on gender, the chapter encourages analytical thinking about the civil-military interface and the diverse security perceptions within it.

Carr (2020) delves into the complexities surrounding the inclusion of women in military forces, addressing key aspects that influence this integration. Firstly, the research considers the nature of modern warfare, highlighting the shift towards high-stakes conflicts and the need for diverse capabilities within military units. Secondly, it examines physiological differences between genders and how these might impact military performance, acknowledging that traditional views on physical strength and endurance should be reevaluated in light of modern warfare's diverse demands. Moreover, Carr's work delves into the role of tradition and hypermasculine culture within militaries, recognizing these as potential barriers to effective integration. By studying the experiences of the US, Israel, and Sweden, the research aims to identify specific contributions women make to military effectiveness, challenging the notion that their inclusion is merely a social experiment. By aligning the integration of women with both feminist priorities and national security interests, Carr argues for a reevaluation of how gender is perceived in military contexts. The study asserts that optimized incorporation of women can lead to more cohesive, robust, and capable forces, ultimately enhancing national security. This perspective is crucial in challenging outdated gender assumptions and aligning military institutions with the modern imperative for gender equality.

The literature on gender mainstreaming and national security outcomes provides valuable insights but also highlights several gaps. Stanciu (2019) emphasizes NATO's adoption of gender perspectives to enhance operational efficiency and resilience but does not delve deeply into how these strategies directly impact national security outcomes in diverse contexts. Kemi et al. (2016)

discuss gender inequality broadly in Nigeria, suggesting that gender equality is crucial for national security but lack specific analysis on how gender mainstreaming in military forces translates to tangible security improvements. Asklof (2018) provides evidence of positive changes in knowledge and attitudes due to gender training but does not connect these changes directly to national security outcomes. Gjørv and Kleppe (2016) and Marsili (2023) explore gender perspectives in military operations and emerging technologies but focus more on theoretical and broad operational implications rather than specific national security impacts. Carr (2020) argues that integrating women enhances military effectiveness and national security but does not address how gender mainstreaming affects specific national security outcomes or challenges within particular military contexts. Therefore, a significant literature gap exists in linking gender mainstreaming efforts directly to measurable national security outcomes, particularly in the context of varying national and operational settings.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Security Theory

Feminist Security Theory (FST) provides the theoretical foundation for assessing the impact of gender mainstreaming in the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) on national security. Developed by scholars such as Tickner (1992) and Hudson (2005), FST challenges traditional security perspectives that prioritise military strength while neglecting gender dynamics. The theory argues that national security should not be limited to state-centric and militaristic approaches but should also incorporate human security by recognising the role of women in security institutions. It asserts that the exclusion of women from military structures leads to a narrow and less effective security framework. By advocating for gender-inclusive policies, FST highlights the importance of women's participation in decision-making, intelligence gathering, and conflict resolution, which enhances operational effectiveness and strategic security outcomes.

In the context of the NAF, applying FST demonstrates that gender mainstreaming is not merely a policy requirement but a strategic necessity for improving national security. Empirical studies have shown that women in military roles contribute significantly to intelligence operations, peacekeeping missions, and humanitarian efforts, thereby strengthening security frameworks (Aderinto, 2019). However, institutional barriers such as cultural biases and limited leadership opportunities hinder their full participation. By integrating FST, this study examines how gender inclusion in the NAF enhances diversity in security strategies, improves counterterrorism and intelligence efforts, and promotes gender-sensitive approaches to conflict resolution. Thus, FST provides a critical lens through which the role of gender mainstreaming in strengthening Nigeria’s national security can be evaluated.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design, using quantitative approach to assess gender mainstreaming in the Nigerian Air Force (NAF). A descriptive research approach was employed to examine policy implementation, its impact on operational efficiency, and the challenges encountered. The target population consisted of 7,197 military and civilian personnel drawn from the NAF headquarters and the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA)**.** The sample size

of 365 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, ensuring statistical adequacy. However, 360 responses were valid for analysis. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation across gender, rank, and civilian/military status**,** enhancing the generalizability of the findings. A **s**tructured questionnaire was developed to capture key aspects of gender mainstreaming, including policy implementation, perceived impact, and institutional challenges. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms**,** with trained research assistants facilitating distribution to ensure broad participation. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) employed for data processing and interpretation.

Result

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	213	59.1
Female	147	40.9
Total	**360**	**100**
Age Group	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
26-35	16	4.5
36-45	106	29.6
46-55	188	52.3
56 and above	49	13.6
Total	**360**	**100**
Military Rank	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Senior Officer	251	69.7
Junior Officer	50	13.9
Non Commissioned Officers	50	13.9
Warrant officers	9	2.6
Total	**360**	**100**
Years in Service	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
0-5 years	9	2.6
6-10 years	33	9.2
11-15 years	25	6.9
16-20 years	25	6.9
21 years & above	268	74.4
Total	**360**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The demographic distribution of respondents reveals that 59.1% were male and 40.9% were female, indicating a gender gap within the Nigerian Air Force. The dominant age group

was 46-55 years (52.3%), followed by 36-45 years (29.6%), suggesting that most respondents were in mid-to-late career stages. In terms of rank, senior officers constituted the majority (69.7%), while junior officers and non-commissioned officers each accounted for 13.9%, and warrant officers made up only 2.6%. Regarding years of service, a significant 74.4% had served for over 21 years, highlighting a highly experienced respondent pool, while those with 0-10 years of service comprised only 11.8%. These figures suggest that perspectives on gender mainstreaming and its impact on national security were largely shaped by senior personnel with extensive service experience in the NAF.

Table 2

Awareness and Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming Policies

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)
Gender mainstreaming policies are well-publicized within the NAF.	235 (65.3%)	81 (22.5%)	44 (12.2%)
Women are given equal opportunities for leadership roles.	209 (58.1%)	109 (30.2%)	42 (11.7%)
Gender policies have improved operational efficiency.	225 (62.5%)	100 (27.8%)	35 (9.7%)
There is sufficient training on gender sensitivity in the NAF.	198 (55.0%)	126 (35.0%)	36 (10.0%)

Source; Field Survey, 2025

The results indicate that a majority (65.3%) of respondents agreed that gender mainstreaming policies are well-publicized within the NAF, while 22.5% disagreed, and 12.2% were neutral, suggesting that awareness is relatively high but not universal. Similarly, 58.1% agreed that women are given equal opportunities for leadership roles, while 30.2% disagreed, highlighting some concerns about leadership inclusivity. Additionally, 62.5% of respondents believed gender policies have improved operational efficiency, though 27.8% disagreed, indicating some skepticism about their direct impact. Regarding gender sensitivity training, 55.0% agreed that sufficient training exists, but 35.0% disagreed, revealing gaps that may hinder effective policy implementation. These findings suggest that while gender mainstreaming efforts are recognized, further efforts are needed to enhance awareness, leadership inclusion, and training programs within the NAF.

Table 3

Perceived Impact of Gender Mainstreaming on National Security

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)
Gender inclusion enhances decision-making.	144 (40.0%)	163 (45.3%)	31 (8.6%)	11 (3.1%)	11 (3.0%)

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)
Increased female participation improves intelligence operations.	180 (50.0%)	110 (30.5%)	39 (10.8%)	17 (4.7%)	14 (4.0%)
Gender mainstreaming reduces workplace conflicts.	152 (42.2%)	128 (35.6%)	54 (15.0%)	19 (5.3%)	7 (1.9%)
Gender-balanced teams enhance operational effectiveness.	198 (55.0%)	108 (30.0%)	36 (10.0%)	9 (2.5%)	9 (2.5%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The majority of respondents (85.3%) either strongly agreed or agreed that gender inclusion enhances decision-making, with only 11.7% expressing disagreement or neutrality, indicating a strong consensus on the positive impact of diversity in leadership. Similarly, 80.5% believed that increased female participation improves intelligence operations, while 15.5% disagreed or remained neutral, suggesting that gender balance contributes to strategic and operational improvements. Furthermore, 77.8% agreed that gender mainstreaming reduces workplace conflicts, while 20.3% disagreed or remained neutral, implying that gender-sensitive policies enhance workplace cohesion. Additionally, 85.0% believed that gender-balanced teams enhance operational effectiveness, with minimal disagreement (5.0%), reinforcing the perception that diverse teams improve military efficiency. These results highlight the perceived benefits of gender mainstreaming in enhancing decision-making, intelligence operations, and overall national security outcomes.

Table 4
Challenges in Implementing Gender Mainstreaming in NAF

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Resistance to policy adoption	120	33.3
Limited mentorship for women	100	27.8
Inadequate policy enforcement	80	22.2
Cultural and social biases	60	16.7

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The findings reveal that resistance to policy adoption (33.3%) is the most significant barrier to gender mainstreaming in the NAF, indicating that traditional military norms still pose a challenge to full implementation. Limited mentorship for women (27.8%) also emerged as a major issue, suggesting that the absence of structured mentorship programs may hinder career progression for female personnel. Inadequate policy enforcement (22.2%) highlights gaps between policy formulation and execution, implying that implementation mechanisms need

strengthening. Additionally, cultural and social biases (16.7%) further restrict gender inclusivity, reflecting the deep-seated societal norms that influence military structures. These challenges suggest the need for stronger policy enforcement, mentorship programs, and cultural reorientation efforts to fully integrate gender mainstreaming into the NAF.

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate a significant level of awareness regarding gender mainstreaming policies within the NAF. Majority of respondents acknowledged that these policies are well-publicized and have contributed to operational efficiency. However, concerns persist regarding their actual implementation, as a notable proportion of respondents expressed skepticism about the extent to which women are given equal opportunities for leadership roles and the adequacy of gender sensitivity training. These findings align with previous research that highlights the gap between policy formulation and implementation in security institutions (True, 2013; Hudson, 2016). Feminist Security Theory (FST) asserts that while gender inclusion policies exist, deeply ingrained institutional and cultural norms often hinder their effective execution (Tickner, 2001). This disparity between awareness and practice reinforces arguments by Davies and True (2019), who emphasize that gender mainstreaming efforts often struggle against resistance from male-dominated security structures.

The study also reveals that gender mainstreaming is perceived to have a positive impact on national security. Respondents largely agreed that gender inclusion enhances decision-making, improves intelligence operations, and strengthens operational effectiveness. These findings support feminist security perspectives, which argue that diverse security teams contribute to better conflict resolution and institutional performance (Hudson et al., 2012). Research by Karim and Beardsley (2017) similarly highlights that the inclusion of women in security agencies leads to more effective intelligence gathering and greater trust between security forces and the communities they serve. However, the persistence of biases against gender inclusion suggests that structural inequalities still limit the full benefits of these policies. This aligns with findings from Enloe (2016), who argues that gender-based stereotypes continue to undermine women's roles in security sectors. Addressing these biases requires stronger institutional commitment and the dismantling of patriarchal structures that hinder gender integration.

Despite the recognized benefits, several challenges continue to hinder the full implementation of gender mainstreaming in the NAF. Resistance to policy adoption, limited mentorship for women, and inadequate policy enforcement emerged as major obstacles, reflecting broader systemic and cultural barriers. These findings echo research by Olsson and Gizelis (2015), who identified similar structural challenges in military institutions attempting to implement gender-inclusive reforms. Additionally, social biases and traditional perceptions of gender roles further contribute to these challenges, reinforcing the argument that gender inequalities in security institutions are shaped by both organizational and societal norms (Basini & Ryan, 2016). Feminist Security Theory argues that meaningful gender inclusion requires not only policy frameworks but also cultural reorientation and enforcement mechanisms (Tickner & True, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study's findings highlight the complexities surrounding gender mainstreaming within the NAF and its implications for national security. While there is considerable awareness and recognition of gender mainstreaming policies, significant structural and cultural barriers persist, including resistance to policy adoption, inadequate mentorship for women, and inconsistent enforcement. These challenges show the interplay between institutional frameworks, societal norms, and organisational culture in shaping gender inclusivity within the security sector. Addressing these gaps requires a comprehensive approach that enhances policy implementation, fosters institutional support, and promotes gender-sensitive leadership. By integrating gender perspectives more effectively, security institutions can optimise their operational capacity and decision-making processes, ultimately contributing to a more robust national security framework.

Based on these insights, several recommendations are proposed to enhance gender mainstreaming in the NAF. First, strengthening policy enforcement is essential to ensure that gender-inclusive frameworks are not only established but effectively implemented and monitored. Additionally, targeted training programmes should be developed to improve gender sensitivity, leadership skills, and mentorship opportunities for women in the security sector. Efforts should also be directed towards addressing deep-rooted cultural and institutional biases through awareness campaigns and organisational reforms that foster an inclusive and supportive environment.

Furthermore, increasing female representation in decision-making roles within the security apparatus is crucial in driving more equitable policies and enhancing operational efficiency. Affirmative action measures should be considered to facilitate the promotion of women into leadership positions. Finally, continuous research and periodic evaluation of gender mainstreaming policies will be necessary to assess their impact and refine strategies for improving gender inclusivity. By implementing these recommendations, the NAF can strengthen its commitment to gender mainstreaming, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and effective security system.

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