Women Peacebuilding Efforts and Prospects for Inter-Religious Harmony in Nigeria the Case of Dadin Kowa and GGSS Soba, in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper responds to the following questions; what has been the contribution of women to promote peace in Northern Nigeria? What has made this contribution possible? What obstacles hinder women from realising their full potential in peacebuilding? What strategies need to be undertaken to ensure that women's full participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation is effective and sustainable? Through interviews and observations, this paper found that at the grassroots level, women's various initiatives have helped in rebuilding trust among families and reconciling former enemies. A case in point is the role that women in Dadin Kowa in Jos South LGA of Plateau State and girls of Government Girls Secondary School (GGSS) in Soba LGA of Kaduna State Nigeria played in maintaining peace in the protracted conflict in Northern Nigeria. However, the paper demonstrated that women's contribution to peacebuilding is still hampered by constraints such as abject poverty, gender-based violence and, limited motivation and facilitation of women initiatives. Therefore, the paper recommends that women in leadership positions such as cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, private sector operators, civil society leaders, researchers and others should be encouraged and facilitated to work together in different fora and forge close working relationships with rural women in the areas of promoting peace and reconciliation through different initiatives.

Keywords: Women, Peacebuilding. Inter-Religious, Harmony, Dadin Kowa, GGSS Soba,

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed recurrent crises across northern Nigeria, in both urban and rural areas. Thousands of lives have been lost in these violent conflicts, and have been set back. The violence has mainly been along religious lines; there are considerable political interests at stake. Jos, the state capital and a major northern city with a population of some one million inhabitants, is the epicentre of much of the insecurity in Plateau State and has been the site of some of the worst violence. Higazi (2011) said mass killings and destruction occurred in Jos in 2001, 2002, 2008 and 2010. The violence also affected other parts of the high plateau, in rural areas outside of Jos - particularly in 2001-2 and 2010, when hundreds of people were killed in villages, in their fields, or while tending cattle.

Since the end of 2010, security has further deteriorated in Jos because of terror attacks and suicide bombings against churches and security targets by suspected militants of Boko Haram, the Islamic group responsible for an unprecedented wave of terrorist attacks in the north. Thousands have been killed, hundreds of thousands have been displaced internally and billions of Naira of property has been destroyed. Thus far, responses from local and national authorities have proven mostly ineffective. They have come in three ways. First, several judicial commissions of inquiry have been appointed to "get to the root of this crisis" and recommend, a "Lasting solution". However, authorities have been slow in publishing reports and acting on their recommendations. Tough public speeches have not been translated into tangible political action against instigators and perpetrators: none of the suspects named by the various commissions has been prosecuted, and impunity continues to feed violence (African Report, 2012).

The second is police and military action, which has had little success. Security forces not only fail to share intelligence information among them but they are also suspected of taking sides in the conflict. The indigene/setters question on the other hand requires both national and local solutions but constitutional provisions by its ambiguity over the terms "indigene" and "residency" have not clarified issues that could only be resolved through constitutional means.

In the absence of a possible solution in place, this article examines the unique potential of women on the Plateau and Kaduna State towards peacebuilding with the view to devising workable peace. In this case, the efforts of women in Dadin

Kowa and the heroic role played by girls at GGSS Soba to protect the lives of their fellow students in the post-2011 crisis will be examined. Arguing that enhancing the capacity of women, and strengthening community-based groups might achieve societal harmony.

Gender Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The term gender is applied to the cultural aspect of male or female roles, in other words, the behaviour, personality and other social attributes that are expected of males and females, and these social attributes become the basis of masculine and feminine roles (Buswell, 1989). Gender refers to the socially constructed rather than the physical or biological roles ascribed to women and men. Gender roles vary according to socio-economic, political and cultural contexts and are also affected by other factors such as age, race, class and ethnicity.

Gender roles are learnt and are, therefore, changeable. For example, many societies ascribe the role of homemaker and caregiver to women, while men are seen as breadwinners and protectors. For clarity, throughout this article, the term "woman" will be referred to or defined as a social category (gender) and not in biological terms or sex. Defining women only by their biological roles is problematic and gives rise to gender inequalities and the oppression of women. On the other hand, deconstructing – from a women's perspective - their biological and economic roles at both household and community levels and how these roles are influenced by armed conflict reveals issues which give women the moral authority to claim their place of honour as agents of reconciliation and peace.

Peacebuilding

The term became prominent in UN vocabulary after Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros-Ghali used it in his paper termed Agenda for Peace, released in 1992. Initially, the concept was used to address the immediate activities required after the reduction or conclusion of conflict and referred to capacity building, reconciliation and socio-economic transformation. Others sort to broaden it to reflect a longer-term associated with early warning, conflict prevention, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, reconciliation, reconstruction and even political and economic development. Issues of governance and institutional capacity thus also fall within the remit of Peacebuilding as do concerns with broader structural issues in the international community. For this study; peacebuilding will focus on the key elements below:

1. Security
2. Governance
3. Legal rights and human rights
4. Socio-economic empowerment

There has also been considerable debate about the relationship of peacebuilding to the general field of development. Some argue that confusion between the two should be avoided and that peacebuilding refers to strategies of finite duration, as opposed to the endless processes of development. This school of thought would see peacebuilding as a strategy for two to three years. A more inclusive interpretation argues that peacebuilding cannot succeed unless it is integrated into a broader development strategy. This leads to differences in implementation, as the first school argues for sequential progress from peacebuilding to development initiatives, while the other argues that the synergies between peacekeeping and development have to be recognized and exploited if success is to be obtained. The following definitions extracted from the literature reflect these tensions.

The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) views peacebuilding as a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict in countries emerging from conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels, addressing key causes of conflict and laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development.

These measures include, for example, security sector reform, elections and human rights monitoring and institutional capacity development. (Peacebuilding Commission webpage) For the PBC, then, it is a set of functional activities/measures in the post-conflict phase. The Peacebuilding, Coordinating Committee sees peacebuilding as the effort to promote human security in societies marked by conflict. The overarching goal of peacebuilding is to strengthen the capacity of societies to manage conflict without violence, as a means to achieve sustainable human security. This is a broad conceptualization, linking peacebuilding to human security, places peacebuilding within any period of the conflict cycle.

Peacebuilding can further be seen as the development of constructive personal, group, and political relationships across ethnic, religious, class, national and racial boundaries. It aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent ways and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict. Conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution and transformation, and post-conflict reconciliation are all part of peacebuilding (Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies), Here peacebuilding is conceived of as the reconstruction of a set of relationships, and having an end goal of structural transformation. (UN Report on human security and peacebuilding in Africa, 2009)

For Earl Conteh-Morgan the task of peacebuilding is to eliminate the mindset that compelled people to distrust and question their socio-political and psychological environment and emphasis should be on combating the structural and cultural sources of insecurity. (Conteh-Morgan, 2005). Here peacebuilding is viewed as a process of resocialization and, for Conteh-Morgan, this process must take into account indigenous knowledge and practices. For this study, peacebuilding is fundamentally a political process that seeks to realign relationships and the distribution of power and resources. Peacebuilding, largely viewed as a set of actions, processes and institutional building that should take place in the post-conflict reconstruction phase in order to prevent a country from sliding back into conflict, emphasizes local ownership, civil society engagement and community buy-in.

Gender and Peacebuilding Studies in Northern Nigeria

Access based on gender all over northern Nigeria varies due to various idiosyncrasies. This work discusses peacebuilding initiatives in northern Nigeria from a gender perspective and is particularly concerned with exploring the level of engagement of women. The two areas studied were Dadin Kowa in Jos, Plateau State and school girls in GGSS Soba (Zaria) in Kaduna State. The study looked into the peacebuilding initiatives within these two groups and the impact of these efforts on their communities. It dealt mainly with married women, Dadin Kowa was relatively difficult to access in terms of field-based interviews, thereby encouraging the alternative of creating a desktop survey from secondary literature and reports.

On the other hand, that of Soba was derived from field-based interviews and narratives from staff and students of Government Girls' Secondary School Soba and a few desk reviews. The work draws inspiration partly from the experiences of the Rwandan women involved in the peacebuilding efforts after the genocides. Due to the trauma and other factors, access was also not convenient, and both field and desk data were used. However, there emerged limitations, most especially as it concerned that of Dadin Kowa because it was not based on primary interviews with those directly involved.

Why Focus on Women?

Although some contemporary work on economic theories of conflict shows that feasibility rather than motivation has driven recent social instability in Africa, there is a consensus that high levels of inequality can, if unchecked, ferment internal conflict (Cramer, 2005). Gender inequality, as measured by female participation in the labour force and fertility has been closely associated with intrastate conflict. Frances Stewart argued that poverty and inequality were root causes of human vulnerability and that the absence of pervasive and chronic insecurity was fundamental to people's sense of wellbeing. This was a more accurate measure of

development than simple indices of per-capital income. Indeed, she also argued that lack of security impeded economic growth both through the physical and intra-survival strategies. Imbalanced development and inequality in turn led to entrapment of realizing human potential and thus development in any meaningful sense. (Stewart,2004)

Caprioli analyses the association between gender inequality and intrastate conflict; and violence in dispute settlement, and finds that countries characterized by gender inequality are more likely to be involved in violent intrastate disputes. (Caprioli, 2005). Despite substantial evidence that equality might contribute to peace and reconciliation or conflict prevention, Nigeria ranks 118 of 134 countries in the gender equality index suggesting that efforts at peacebuilding have to take on board gender equality issues as well (BC. Report on gender in Nigeria, 2012). There are strong reasons why women in Northern Nigeria should be in the peace process:

1. The crises had a disproportionately strong impact on women, as widows, and as heads of households and caretakers of orphans. That is the position of women as victims and participants in the conflicts and their unique post-conflict needs (Krause2011).

2. Their long experiences in their role as peacemakers; women in the family as mothers; wives and sisters where they prefer problem-solving through open communication, honest discussions of differences and dialogue among all concerned parties. They desire that the concerns of all conflicting parties be met - a win/win situation -a family model, which seeks fairness and reconciliation rather than victory and retribution. (Caprioli, 2005).

3. Furthermore, as bearers of life, women can offer a special perspective and experience which will help to overcome prevailing life-destroying methods of dealing with human problems and conflicts. Since military conflicts and diplomacy, which have traditionally been exclusively orchestrated by men, have failed to be a reliable system to safeguard peace, the inclusion of women in all stages of the peace process becomes imperative. (UNECA/African centre for women, 1996).

4. As the first agents of socialisation, women are natural teachers of peace education and are ideal for instilling into their children such values: respect for others; the peaceful solution of conflicts and problems; sharing partnerships; tolerance; a sense of justice; equity; and equality of the sexes, all of which are qualities of sustainable peace.

Dadin Kowa Women Peacebuilding Post-2008

Despite the tragic unprecedented destruction of lives, values of humanity, and property on the Plateau, the government has in the last decade embarked upon a determined path of social transformation aimed at reversing the negative trends highlighted above and rebuilding a united, reconciled people with little success. Dadin Kowa, on the other hand, has remained a peaceful community thanks to the efforts of women in the area.

The community of Dadin Kowa - located in Jos South Local Government Area- has remained peaceful to date. Several mixed communities surround the settlement; some have seen sporadic killings (such as Rayfield) and violent clashes (such as Anglo Jos). The majority of Dadin Kowa's population is Christian, although there is a significant Muslim minority. The population is mixed in terms of economic and social status, with large houses on the outskirts and crammed streets of poor settlements in its Centre.

Women played a major role in keeping peace in the community. After the devastating 2008 crisis, more than 200 women came together with support from Damietta Peace Initiatives (DPI) to voice their fears regarding potential future violence. They met and discussed issues and everyday challenges against the background of the ongoing crisis. (Krause, 2011). Many Christian families had fled to Dadin Kowa from violence-affected areas. Women, like their Rwandan counterparts, had lost their husbands and children, their houses, and their businesses. They brought with them their grief as well as stories of atrocities and loss. The influx of displaced persons increased tensions. Many women worried that their community could soon also be affected by violence. After the gathering, the women regularly met in several smaller groups to address problems and establish dialogue with each other.

The women's groups largely managed their regular meetings on their own after several of them had received short-term training from DPI. When violence broke out again in January 2010, these women went to their religious leaders and pleaded with them to forbid any violence and to set up measures of prevention. Pastors and imams met together with several elders and agreed on a "peace declaration" that was read out to the community.

Elders organized local youth into mixed vigilante groups to guard the settlement against outside attackers. A local pastor pleaded with youth groups from neighbouring settlements who came to attack Muslims in Dadin Kowa and averted violence. Although peaceful to date, Dadin Kowa remains volatile. Some of the women could not face each other for weeks and months after the Kuru Kurama and Dogo Nahauwa massacres. Everyday tensions were evident. For example, both sides held grievances over

loudspeakers during prayer times at the mosques and churches. A Christian pastor admitted that Muslim residents had sent soldiers to ask the church not to use its loudspeakers during Muslim early morning prayers. The pastor had refused on the ground that the same early morning time would represent a core Christian prayer time and could not be violated (Krause, 2011). Other efforts that were not documented but holds some prospects for inter-religious harmony in Northern Nigeria include the initiatives of GGSS Soba girls as shown below.

GGSS Soba Girls Peacebuilding Efforts Post-2011 Election Crisis in Northern Nigeria

Government Girls Secondary School Soba is located in Soba local government Area of Kaduna State. The community was peaceful until the 2011 post-election crisis that engulfed most of the states in Northern Nigeria. The majority of Soba's population is Muslim although there is some significant Christian minority. The school is located on the outskirts and its girls' school is comprised of both Christian and Muslim staff and students.

When violence broke out in April 2011 after the presidential elections, the staff of the school decided that they would not allow anything to happen to either the staff or students. The principal who resides in Zaria, some twenty minutes' drive from Soba had called to inquire about the situation in Soba. She pleaded with them to forbid any violence and to undertake measures of violence prevention. The staff of the school got the girls who were in their final year and preparing for their exams to the dormitory area where they felt the girls would be safe. One interviewee stated that we pleaded with them not to hurt the students but they refused. But these girls defiled all the threats and the counterpart added that "the mob continued to press their demands until when thought things were getting out of hand, the principal got security agents to come to their rescue, suggesting, some prospects for inter-religious harmony in Nigeria.

Source: Authors

Presentation of Findings

The presentation is organized thematically following the systemic analysis of the research themes as addressed by research and in-depth interviews.

Since the main objectives of this study were to bring to light what women have contributed to peacebuilding and conciliation, the challenges they have encountered and the strategies to strengthen their roles in the process have been presented. The view of charting out the way forward, interviews centred on the following questions:

1. What has been the contribution of women in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation?
2. What were the reasons behind the success above?
3. What challenges were encountered?
4. What should be done to address the above challenges?

Traditionally, it is believed that it is the duty of men to restore and maintain security however in the last ten years, these trends have changed and this has further increased the self-confidence among women that they can do what men can also do. This is part of the new responsibilities women have come to assume after the recurrent conflict in Jos and religious crises in Northern Nigeria as a whole. They have come to fully accept the responsibility of peacebuilding. It is worth noting that what has been highlighted in the two cases is not an isolated event.

The research brought to light the fact that in all situations, women were the first to think of forming associations in order to break isolation and mistrust between families and individuals. Both in Dadin Kowa and Soba, they took the initiative to protect their fellow students or community members as in the case of Dadin Kowa.

The study at Soba showed how Muslim girl were willing to sacrifice their lives for their Christian counterparts suggesting hope for inter-religious harmony in Nigeria. Other respondents in Soba attributed this unique effort by these girls to the role of women as life nurturers and life-givers and socialization processes.

Dadin Kowa women took full responsibility for facing the challenge of the post-conflict period and put their efforts together to ensure the survival of their families towards peace and reconciliation. This suggests that as bearers of life, women can offer a special perspective on human problems and conflicts. It is imperative to know that not only military solutions and diplomacy are required to safeguard peace, but the inclusion of women at all stages of the peace process is also necessary.

All the respondents irrespective of age, class, and gender, testified that women have played a big role in peacebuilding. The reasons that were put forward by different respondents emphasized the importance of how women are prepared from early childhood to ensure the togetherness of families. They are prepared or socialized to look beyond their interests and serve and suffer for the general good of the community.

Factors Inhibiting Women's Full Participation in Peacebuilding

Women have achieved or contributed a lot in peacebuilding or reconciliation but a lot of challenges remain to be overcome for them to tap into their full potential in order to become agents of lasting peace. The challenges identified may be grouped under different categories, which are attributed to women themselves and their environment. In broad terms, the challenges are highlighted below.

Poor Coordination, Networking and Monitoring System of Women's Initiatives

Throughout the country, women have come together or acted individually to initiate activities that are either channels of peace and reconciliation or contribute directly to the process of reconciling different sections of the community. Most of these initiatives are started by women themselves who are handicapped in many areas. For these initiatives to grow and become sustainable, they need to be well nurtured, supported, coordinated and replicated. However, their efforts are frustrated by the inability of the leadership to recognize, encourage and give visibility to the newly established ones, and the lack of opportunities to network with better-established and more experienced associations performing similar activities.

Lack of Education and Limited Skills Among Women in Nigeria

Socio-education-wise, women are disadvantaged in all areas compared to men. Nigerian women and girls have limited access to education compared to men and boys. A majority of the illiterate members of the community, especially, women do not attend school and lack the confidence to contribute their ideas of peace. In addition, the lack of access to and control over resources is considered to be the main source of women's poverty. Consequently, women lack access to loans and other means of investment. The situation is even made worse by having a large number of dependents to cater for and some of the basic facilities they acquired after these crises have depreciated and require urgent repair. For example, some of the houses are in dire need of repair.

Social and Cultural Context

Gender-based discrimination and subsequent inequalities have been exacerbated by changes in the economic and social structures that were ushered in by the advent of colonial rule. The abrupt shift from subsistence to a monetary economy based on paid employment and a formal education system weakened women's position relative to that of men (Alahira, 2008). In particular, it weakened their bargaining position on matters concerning their access to, and control over resources and the degree of their level of participation in the development process.

Human Rights and Gender-Based Violence

In addition to women's marginalization from economic opportunities, certain legal measures in Nigeria are discriminatory against women and others do not exist yet while some are known but not understood. While the Government has acknowledged the existence of discriminatory practices against women sustained by discriminatory legislations, policies and societal and cultural agents, it is silent in many respects on the measures it has taken to address these.

There is a lack of good laws to unequivocally protect women's rights in Nigeria. The 1999 Federal Constitution of Nigeria has clauses that discriminate against women. In section 29 sub-section 4(b), the 1999 Federal Constitution of Nigeria endorses child marriage when it proclaims that every woman who is married shall be regarded as an adult. The penal code endorses wife battery when it proclaims that wives maybe corrected provided grievous harm is not inflected (section 55 sub-sections 1(d) of the penal code, carp 89, (laws of the federal of Nigeria (LFN), 1963 applicable in Northern Nigeria). In the Criminal Code, the defilement of a boy is a crime punishable by seven years imprisonment, while the defilement of a girl is only two years imprisonment (Nigerian Criminal Code 1948). All these suggest a deliberate attempt by those in power to maintain the current power structure.

Women in Decision-Making

Historically, women's participation in politics and decision-making in Nigeria has been insignificant, specifically in high echelons including the pre-colonial period. Although women in Nigeria played an important role in the country's governance through the institution of the queen's mother. After the destructive conflicts, there was a great need to mobilize and guide the population to reconstruct its lives as well as their communities and country. The achievement of this however depends on who makes the decisions in the country. Only 9% of those who stood for elections in Nigeria's April 2011 National Assembly elections were women. It is a key area in which women's empowerment has faltered since democratization.

The April 2011 elections saw women lose some of the ground they had begun to claw back after1999. This is below the global average and well behind South Africa and Rwanda. The lack of women in decision-making positions may be one explanation for Nigeria's low investment in sectors that are crucial to human development outcomes, such as health and education. Women are underrepresented in all political decision-making bodies and their representation has not increased since the inception of democratic rule. (BC. Report on gender in Nigeria, 2012.

Projects for Inter-Religious Harmony

This brief overview of the conflict and post-conflict environments in Plateau State and Northern Nigeria as a whole reveals the continued fragility of a number of communities and the tenuousness of peace processes and stability. However, in the case of the Dadin Kowa community, women went out of their way to forgive their "enemies" to work with members of the other religion as one pillar of reconciliation. This is a good model that can be emulated in other places and also serves as a lesson to men. The challenge that remains is to make this known widely. Reconciliation works best where people share a common activity or resource and reconciliation takes place nationally. It takes place through mutual support and in line with people's common cultural realities.

Women have a strong potential for educating their children and imparting to them positive cultural values that enhance peace and reconciliation. In Dadin Kowa, women have come together and worked towards reconciliation; their children have spontaneously followed their examples women have a big role in providing basic education and upbringing for children to embrace the culture of peace. This forms the basis of women working towards and promoting sustainable peace. The heroic act of girls in GGSS Soba suggests that there is a prospect for inter-religious peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria despite the religious intolerance witnessed in the past decade.

What then can be done to harness these great potentials? While not suggesting a complete replication; the Nigerian government can learn from their Rwandan counterparts. The Government of Rwanda demonstrated its will to give women the trust and responsibility of rebuilding the nation by appointing them to all positions of leadership and responsibility in society. For example, women are serving in the executive, legislative and judiciary arms of the government. Research shows that and taking major decisions at community, local, national and international levels.to ensure that women are given to fully participate in decision-making in different organs.

The government has to put in place a legal framework facilitating national women's councils to provide a forum through which women exchange views on national issues for the overall development of the country. Through these councils, women can make input into national policies and programmes. These should include Vision 2020, PRSP, the decentralization policy, the national Land Bill, the land policy, the Succession law, the traditional participatory system of justice (Gacaca courts) and many other areas of critical importance to peacebuilding including a new constitution. (Mutamba et al, 2005).

Although the National Gender Policy set a target of 35% as a benchmark towards gender parity in Nigeria, much work is still required. Given the complexity and cross-cutting nature of peace, reconciliation and gender, the following should be done:

1. The government should set up structures in different departments, and key government ministries responsible for advancing gender equality.
2. Women in leadership positions such as cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, private sector operators, civil society leaders, researchers and others should be encouraged and facilitated to work together in different fora and forge close working relationships with rural women in the areas of promoting peace and reconciliation through different initiatives.
3. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and related civil society organisations should work closely to use culture as an instrument of peace and reconciliation among Nigerians. Women should be targeted specially as the main actors in transmitting cultural values that foster peaceful coexistence.
4. Local authorities should be sensitized on gender as a tool of development. The government should facilitate these authorities to access resources and tools to enable these authorities to identify women as agents of peace and reconciliation in communities and build on the experience they already have.
5. In-depth research on the role of women in peacebuilding and reconciliation should be undertaken to provide more information that will guide future inter-policy changes in the area of peace and reconciliation.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, women's contribution to peacebuilding and reconciliation is quite significant although it has not been acknowledged and documented. The grassroots women at Dadin Kowa took their full responsibility to face the challenge of the post-conflict period and put their efforts together to ensure the survival of their families and determined not to see their community slide back but instead move forward towards lasting peace and reconciliation. This yielded positive results because the community is one of the most peaceful whose population is mixed despite the Muslim/Christian divide which characterized the post-conflict settlements in and around Jos.

GGSS Soba girls demonstrated that women could do so much to promote peace even at the expense of their lives. This is largely attributed to the traditional role of women as peacemakers. However, great hurdles remain to be overcome if women's role in this process is to be maximized. Women's visibility in peacebuilding programmes remains limited mainly as the result of the negative gender stereotypes that still characterize the Nigerian society which is patriarchal in structure.

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