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**ROLE OF FEMALE MEDIATORS IN AFRICAN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NIGERIA AND SUDAN**

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**Abstract**

This study examines and compares the roles, contributions, challenges, and successes of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Nigeria and Sudan, focusing on their respective socio-political and conflict contexts. It investigates how women participate in peace processes, the structural and cultural barriers they face, and the differences in their mediation roles across the two countries. The paper adopts a qualitative comparative methodology relying on mixed method, comprising of secondary sources of data collection, including academic literature, policy reports, and documents from international organizations, and integrates findings from primary data through focus group discussions (FGDs). The analysis highlights the indigenous and informal strategies women have employed in both countries to resolve conflicts, often in the absence of formal state support. In Sudan, women played a pivotal role during the 2018–2019 revolution, yet their involvement in post-revolution governance and formal peace negotiations remains limited. On the other hand, Nigeria has established institutional mechanisms such as the National Action Plan for implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, though the effectiveness of these initiatives is hampered by poor implementation at the grassroots level. Despite shared challenges such as entrenched patriarchy and limited funding for women-led initiatives, Sudanese women's engagement in transnational feminist networks and revolutionary movements has catalyzed a broader precedent for women's inclusion in mediation. The study concludes by advocating for the institutionalization of women's roles in formal peace processes, the strengthening of national Women, Peace and Security (WPS) frameworks, and the empowerment of grassroots women's organizations to enhance sustainable peacebuilding in both contexts.

***Keywords: Women's Mediation, Peacebuilding, Structural Barriers, Comparative Analysis***

**Introduction**

Africa has for long been a homeland to various complex and protracted conflicts often based in a mixture of history, politics, ethnicity and socio-economic reasons. From civil wars, insurgencies

to communal clashes, the conflict environment of the continent is complex. Although peace processes are often initiated by both national and international personalities, the contribution of women, and more particularly as mediators, has not been given due attention. Most of the value of an inclusive peacebuilding has been brought to limelight by the African Union (AU) and by the United Nations (UN) with UNSCR 1325 (2000) having set a global goal to enhance women's contribution to peace and security. Despite this policy background, the real portrayal of the women in mediation turns minimal. A UN women report (2020) shows that only 13% of negotiators and 6% of mediators in formal peace process globally were women, which is a figure that falls even further in many parts of Africa (UN women, 2020).

Across Africa, numerous personal anecdotes and documented cases have demonstrated that conflict resolution efforts are significantly more successful when women are meaningfully involved in mediation processes. A compelling example is that of Liberia in the 1990s, where the country was ravaged by a brutal civil war. It was the tireless efforts of the 'Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace' (a coalition of Christian and Muslim women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds) that played a pivotal role in ending the conflict. Their united activism further paved the way for the historic election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female president. Similarly, in Burundi, under the facilitation of Nelson Mandela during the 1996 peace negotiations, the deliberate inclusion of women through the first 'All-Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference' showcased how integrating diverse female voices can shape sustainable visions for national reconstruction. These tell one thing: inclusion is not a luxury but a necessity in peace processes.

In Nigeria and Sudan, two countries bedeviled with perpetual conflicts, women have played important, even though informal, roles in mediation and conflict resolution. In Nigeria, women have led peacebuilding struggles in communities against a background of disproportionate impacts of Boko Haram insurgency, herder-farmer clashes, and Niger Delta militancy on women and children. Grassroots mediation among other things have been spearheaded by the Federation of Muslim women's associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) (Abdullahi & Schraml, 2023). Similar to this the Sudanese women who played a key role in Sudan revolution and in the bargaining process that resulted in transitional government. Sudanese women have used their role as mothers, community leaders, and activists to the structural and cultural barriers to affect dialogue and reconciliation. Remarkably, the Sudanese Women in Civic and Political Groups coalition, fought

to secure a 40% female presence in the post-revolution transitional government (Abdelaziz & Elhaj, 2020).

However, institutional exclusion, the patriarchal norms, as well as security threats remain the factors that hinder female mediators to fully join formal peace processes. In Nigeria, traditional patriarchal systems nonetheless reserve leadership in public discussion from women while in the background, effectively, they lead in conflict prevention at the grass root. Women from the Middle Belt have been pivotal in early warning systems and local peace pacts, according to research by the International Crisis Group (2021), but they are invisible in official peace talks. In Sudan, although women activism brought them some political benefits after 2019, they were side-lined since from the negotiation and security arrangements. This paradox (of being instrumental while being marginalized) should prompt analysis of the structural and cultural pressure that has a negative effect on women's effectiveness and prominence as mediators.

This paper discusses and compare the position of female mediators in Nigeria and Sudan, describing the mechanisms that allow women to affect the processes of conflict resolution in the two African countries. Through observation of their formal and informal actions, the work aspires to reveal not only barriers but the possibilities for women in a mediation position. The comparative approach opens a window through which to understand not only specific country contexts but also larger regional and cultural developments in the gendered peacebuilding terrain of Africa.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How do women in Nigeria and Sudan participate in peacebuilding and conflict mediation?
2. What are the socio-political factors that influence their roles in these processes?
3. How do the contributions of female mediators differ between Nigeria and Sudan within their respective conflict and political contexts?

### **Research Objectives:**

1. To examine the various ways in which women participate in peacebuilding and conflict mediation in Nigeria and Sudan.
2. To identify and analyze the socio-political factors that influence the roles and effectiveness of female mediators in both countries.

3. To compare the contributions of female mediators in Nigeria and Sudan, highlighting how differing conflict and political contexts shape their impact.

## Literature Review

### Women in Peace Processes Globally

The role that women play in peace processes worldwide has received growing attention in the world of international policy and academic discussion in the last two decades. The years 2000 witnessed a turning point in legitimising the roles of women in peace and security when the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) was adopted. The resolution recognized women’s role not as victims of conflict, but as central actors for peace, and their effective inclusion at all levels of decision making in peace prevention, resolution and post peace scenario. It further became cemented after subsequent Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda resolutions like UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889, 2242 which highlighted concerns such as sexual violence in war and issues of gender sensitive peacekeeping. In spite of the normative frameworks; implementation has been far-lagging behind with women still being underrepresented in formal negotiations and peace processes, globally.

**Figure 1: Existing Gaps in Women, Peace and Security**



Source: Peace is Loud (2019).

Experiential research consistently demonstrates that when women participate in peace processes, they get more long-lasting and all-encompassing agreements. For example, peace agreements resulting from women's engagement are 35% more likely to survive at least 15 years, highlighting the worth of women's contribution to prostituting peace (O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, & Paffenholz, 2015). Involvement of women usually carries greater societal concerns to the negotiation table and these includes issues of healthcare, education and gender-based violence that is ignored in male dominated conversations. Their mere presence is also positive in terms of making a peace process more legitimate since very often women are the ones who represent grassroots networks and civil society movements. This connection to communities enables them to cross gaps and promote reconciliation in the ways that most elite male negotiators cannot do.

In spite of these advantages, the level of women's involvement in peace processes surprising low. Women are grossly underrepresented, of course, as the UN Women report of 2020 shows: only 13 percent of the negotiators, and 6 percent of the mediators and signatories were female in major peace processes between 1992 and 2019 (UN Women, 2020). Several structural and cultural factors contribute to this marginalization. These include patriarchal norms, limited access to political power, security concerns, and exclusion from informal networks that shape high-level negotiations. Moreover, even when women are included, they are often relegated to tokenistic or observer roles rather than being given substantial influence in the decision-making process. The challenges are particularly acute in conflict-affected societies where gender roles are rigid and the political landscape is dominated by militarized male elites.

Nonetheless, there are noteworthy examples of women making significant contributions to peace processes. In Liberia, Leymah Gbowee mobilized women across religious and ethnic divides through the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement, playing a crucial role in ending the civil war and paving the way for democratic elections. This grassroots activism contributed to the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first elected female head of state. In Colombia, women actively participated in the peace negotiations between the government and the FARC guerrilla movement, advocating for the inclusion of gender provisions in the final peace accord. These case studies demonstrate that, when women are meaningfully involved, peace processes are more likely to address the root causes of conflict and promote inclusive recovery.

International organizations and NGOs have taken steps to increase women's participation through training, funding, and the establishment of women's networks for peacebuilding. The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, the African Union's FemWise-Africa, and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders are examples of platforms that aim to enhance women's capacity and visibility in peace efforts. These initiatives help overcome some barriers by providing mentorship, access to decision-makers, and technical support. However, their impact is often constrained by limited political will among state actors and entrenched gender biases in peace architecture. Therefore, while such networks are valuable, they cannot substitute for the systemic reforms needed to embed gender parity in peace processes.

In Nigeria, women have long been actively involved in mediation of conflict and peacebuilding. Before the westernization of diplomacy practices, women did exercise authority in the societies of Nigeria in dispute matters by occupying the traditional and spiritual roles. For instance, among the Yorubas, indeed some such women as the Iyalode had prominent positions in the political and social order, acting as well as mediators of communal conflicts and shapers of policy framework. Likewise in the Igbo society, the Umuada (sons and daughters of the lineage) acted as an autonomous unit which intervened in marriage disputes, inter-family rifts and even larger community disagreements. These old structures empowered women to become mediators, arbiters and peace keepers long before the contemporary state was born.

When the colonial ruling order emerged, and patriarchal political systems were formalized, there was a slow erosion of women's authority in public life. However, Nigerian women adjusted by creating spaces through religious and community associated institutions. In the north of the country, Muslim women have always structured themselves via religious associations so as to determine social and political results. Non-violent dispute resolution has been central in organizations such as FOMWAN (Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria). Lately, Nigerian women have been at the fore front of peacemaking during the Boko Haram insurgency. Women led civil society organizations, like the women without walls initiative and women peace and security network, has carried out direct community mediation, re-integration of former fighters and civilians and the protection of civilians.

In the Niger Delta area, women have, traditionally, practiced non- violent resistance to also try to bring armed militants, oil companies, and government forces to the negotiating table. For example,

the 2002 women's protest against ChevronTexaco in Escravos had women occupying oil terminals, to claim corporate responsibility and peace. These acts of protest often doubled as negotiation strategies, forcing stakeholders to the table without bloodshed. Research suggests that the moral authority of women, often tied to their maternal identity, is a strategic tool used to legitimize their involvement in conflict resolution in highly patriarchal societies (Ikejiani-Clark, 2009). This has given them unique leverage in community-level peace processes.

Sudan, like Nigeria, has a long history of women acting as informal mediators and conflict managers, particularly within traditional societies. In rural Sudanese communities, women have historically participated in tribal reconciliation rituals, where their roles as mothers, elders, and caregivers enabled them to promote dialogue and forgiveness. These community-led processes were often essential in resolving local disputes related to land, cattle, and inter-tribal tensions. In Darfur, where ethnic conflict has been especially severe, women have led grassroots peace dialogues, sometimes through zar ceremonies (spiritual rituals) and community storytelling practices that facilitate reconciliation.

The civil war and subsequent secession of South Sudan elevated the visibility of women as peace actors, especially in international discourses. The Sudanese Women's Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP), formed in the 1990s, is an example of how women mobilized to mediate dialogue across conflict lines during the Second Sudanese Civil War. Their advocacy was instrumental in shaping discussions during the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. In more recent history, during the 2019 Sudanese revolution, women were central actors in mobilizing protests and advocating for democratic transition. The slogan "Kandaka" (meaning Nubian queen) became a rallying cry that symbolized women's leadership and resistance. However, although women made up around 70% of protestors during the revolution, they were largely sidelined during the formal negotiations for the transitional government (Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2019).

Despite marginalization from formal political platforms, Sudanese women continue to influence local peacebuilding through community organizations, professional unions, and grassroots advocacy. Women-led initiatives in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, such as Women's Protection Networks, have facilitated mediation between ethnic groups and between civilians and security forces. In regions like Blue Nile and South Kordofan, women peace activists have engaged in confidence-building measures that predate state involvement. These examples reflect a deep-

seated tradition of women's informal mediation, though often disconnected from national-level processes.

In both Nigeria and Sudan, religious and cultural identities play a double-edged role. On one hand, they constrain women's formal political participation; on the other hand, they provide legitimacy for community-level peacebuilding. Women frequently deploy cultural values—such as the role of "mother of the nation" or religious piety; as tools to negotiate spaces in male-dominated peace processes. This duality allows them to influence outcomes while avoiding direct confrontation with entrenched patriarchal structures. Such a strategy, often termed "strategic essentialism", enables women to gain entry into negotiation spaces by amplifying socially acceptable gender norms while subtly pushing boundaries.

In essence, existing literature has documented numerous individual and collective efforts by women in both Nigeria and Sudan, yet much of this research tends to focus on isolated case studies. For instance, while scholars have examined the role of Nigerian women in the Boko Haram crisis or Sudanese women in the 2019 revolution, few studies provide a broader synthesis that connects these efforts across time and space. There is also a tendency to treat women's roles as supplementary to mainstream conflict resolution, rather than central to the peacebuilding architecture. As a result, their strategic innovations, such as using non-traditional methods of mediation, remain under-theorized in both academic and policy discourse.

### **Women's Participation in Conflict Mediation in Nigeria: Historical Evolution, Contemporary Roles, and Structural Barriers**

The role of women in conflict mediation in Nigeria is a long-lived phenomenon arising in pre-colonial times, which is still developing in the modern state's complicated socio-political system. Women in Nigeria's past had a great deal of authority, political and spiritual, and their roles would frequently evolve in resolving conflict. In Yoruba societies and indeed most pre-colonial African cultures, women like the Iyalode performed political roles as the check-and-balance of male leadership in the community and the voice of reason in the community, as well. They used their social status to intervene and arbitrate between inter-communal tensions and held leaders accountable. On the southeastern regions, the Umuada, or "daughters of the lineage" constituted an independent female collective that undertook responsibility for regulating conflicts between families and within kinship networks. These institutions enabled the women to exert significant

power in peace building in which the roles of the spirits and mothers were the foundation. These indigenous structures were therefore disrupted by colonial administration through centralisation of power in male dominated institution hence institutionalizing current gender hierarchies.

The undermining of the usual female agency within a colonial and postcolonial administration notwithstanding, Nigerian women have remained actively involved in peace dialogues, particularly at the bottom level. Neither formal nor informal mechanisms of conflict resolution have been left out during times of civil strife and insurgency especially in the Middle Belt, Niger Delta and North-East, where women intervened. For instance, in the Niger Delta, women's peace movements have had arguably central roles in the negotiation of ceasefires and dialogues between militants and the state. Women's capacity for organized, non-violent resistance became highlighted around the globe due to the 2002 occupation of ChevronTexaco's oil terminal led by Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Ilaje women; not only environmental and human rights abuses but these abuses as well.

In the context of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's North-East, women have taken on increasingly visible and strategic roles in conflict mediation. While men often dominate formal peace negotiations, women have emerged as key players in informal reconciliation, trauma healing, and reintegration processes. Women-led civil society organizations, such as the Women Without Walls Initiative (WOWWI) and Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), have facilitated dialogue between displaced populations and local authorities, promoted the reintegration of former fighters, and lobbied for gender-sensitive security policies. The Borno Women Development Initiative (BOWDI) is one such organization that has pioneered efforts in tracking abductees, providing psychosocial support to survivors, and engaging with security actors to protect vulnerable communities. According to UN Women (2020), Nigerian women have also participated in national-level policy platforms related to the Women, Peace and Security agenda, notably contributing to the National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

However, structural and cultural barriers continue to hinder women's full participation in formal mediation and peacebuilding processes in Nigeria. Patriarchal societal norms remain a fundamental obstacle, especially in the northern states where Sharia law operates in parallel with civil law. This dual legal framework often restricts women's access to justice, public office, and community leadership roles. In political spheres, women's underrepresentation is stark; they held

only 6.7% of national legislative seats as of 2023, one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. This lack of political visibility undermines their influence in high-level peace negotiations, where decisions are frequently shaped by elite male actors and security institutions. Moreover, security risks like abductions and sexual harassment pose significant deterrents to women's participation, particularly in regions still affected by active violence.

Lack of viable sources of financing and institutional support to women led peace efforts is another vital challenge. Although international donors have invested in gender-focused programming in Nigeria most initiatives are ad hoc, donor driven and at the mercy of changing donor priorities. This makes it hard for grass roots organizations' operations to be sustained or successfully scaled or to promote long term policy change. Nigeria's government inconsistent use of its national action plan on Women, peace and security signals a wider gap between declared policies and practical steps. A lack of budgetary support, and failure to address regional variations in implementation is characteristic of many of the programs started under the NAP, with most activities focused within the urban centers or the Federal Capital Territory as opposed to the conflict-affected areas where most activities are required.

Besides, the space for digital advocacy and youth mobilization is novel for Nigerian women peacebuilders. The online social media, such as, Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have helped female activists communicate across ethnical and regional barriers, transmit accounts of human rights violations as well as to coordinate peace advocacy campaigns. During the #EndSARS protests in 2020, women's groups like the Feminist Coalition provided funding, legal support, and organizational capacity, showcasing their ability to lead non-violent movements in a highly volatile context. While the protests were not a traditional armed conflict, the state's militarized response and the broader struggle for democratic accountability positioned women at the center of contemporary peace and justice advocacy.

Many international and regional organizations have also played important roles in amplifying the voices of Nigerian women in conflict mediation. Entities such as UN Women and the African Union's FemWise-Africa have supported training programs, provided mediation toolkits, and facilitated platforms for experience sharing. Through these programs, Nigerian women have gained technical expertise in negotiation, conflict analysis, and diplomacy. However, the impact of such programs is often limited by the absence of follow-through mechanisms, political buy-in

from national authorities, and the lack of formal recognition for women's contributions in peace processes. There remains a disconnect between capacity building and actual access to decision-making forums.

### **Women's Agency in Conflict Mediation and Peacebuilding in Sudan: Historical Contributions, Contemporary Roles, and Structural Constraints**

Sudanese women's agency in conflict mediation and peacebuilding has long historical dimensions in relation to the larger socio-historical articulations of nationalism, colonial legacies, militarized governance, and gendered activism. In pre-colonial societies in Sudan, women exercised quite a lot of socio-cultural power as keepers of communal values, oral historians and conflict arbiters especially in intra-clan and ethnic circles. For example, the Nuba, Beja and Dinka communities could identify women as significant intermediaries of the resolution of familial and inter-group differences on the basis of their supposed detachment and symbolic maternal authority. During the Mahdist period (1881–1898), although men controlled the military campaigns, such women as Sayyida Mahdiyya were powerful in counselling leaders and preserving community unity despite the war. Nevertheless, the British colonial rule 1899-1956 enacted legal and administrative systems which sidelined indigenous systems of governance and reduced women's role in formal political processes.

After independence in 1956, women activism in Sudan rallied up especially through education and civil society organization. Sudanese Women's Union (SWU) founded in 1952, was among the first women Organization in Africa to associate gender equality with national emancipation. Women were frequently marginalised in peace negotiations during both First (1955-1972) and Second (1983-2005) Sudanese civil war, and yet, they continued to play important roles in humanitarian relief, local negotiation and community reconciliation. Their roles were especially pronounced in IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps where the women had critical roles to play in managing disagreements, offering facilitation of sharing of resources, and spreading inter-ethnic deliberations. Nevertheless, official peace processes including the Addis Ababa Agreement (1972), and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA, 2005), among others, have largely marginalized women; with front line experiences of displace, violence and social unrest, yet the same were not included.

Sudanese revolution of 2018–2019 became a turning point in women’s visibility in political activism and conflict resolution. Women were about 70% of the protest movement that toppled long-time ruler Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 (Al-Nagar & Tønnessen 2020). They led the front in demonstrations, grassroots mobilization and civil disobedience against both authoritarianism and patriarchal social norms. Great personalities such as Alaa Salah known as “Nubian queen” became the world’s symbols of female leadership in resistance campaigns. In spite of their decisive role women presence in the post revolution Sovereign Council and the peace negotiation teams were minimal. Only two of the 11 members appointed to the Council in August 2019 were women, a disconnection between women’s roles in regime change and their subsequent absence from formal decision-making.

Gender provisions including that of 40% quota for women’s participation in peace process and governance structures were part of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) that was signed in October 2020 between the transitional government of Sudan and several armed opposition groups. And yet, implementation has been weak and undermined by political instability, lack of institutional capacity, and male-dominated armed group’s opposition. Women, despite receiving some appointments, at the grassroots level, are still under represented at nation-level platforms for mediation. Further, the military resurgence after the coup in October 2021 also hampered more the civic space of women peacebuilders who are bullied, detained, or driven abroad from Myanmar. Suspension of transitional justice mechanisms and time lags in constitutional reforms have put a block on the gains that were to be achieved in integration of women in peace architecture.

In reaction to such lapses, Sudanese women have increasingly sought to use civil society and grassroots means to claim their roles in conflict mediations. Organizations such as the No to Women’s Oppression Initiative, SIHA Network, and Zenab for Women in Development have engaged in dialogue facilitation, community healing, and human rights documentation in conflict-affected regions such as Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. These groups often operate in difficult environments marked by ethnic fragmentation, militarized masculinity, and humanitarian crises. In Darfur, for instance, women-led networks have mediated disputes over access to water and grazing lands between displaced communities and local militias. Their approach often integrates cultural rituals, storytelling, and trauma-informed practices, which resonate with community norms and foster inclusive reconciliation.

Importantly, Sudanese women's peacebuilding practices are shaped by the intersections of ethnicity and religion. In regions such as South Kordofan and the Nuba Mountains, Christian and indigenous African women face additional layers of marginalization but also bring unique experiences to conflict mediation. Their work often challenges both racialized state violence and intra-community patriarchy, pushing for broader inclusion across identity divides. Similarly, women from nomadic or pastoralist backgrounds, such as the Misseriya and Rizeigat, have developed cross-border peace initiatives in coordination with women from neighbouring South Sudanese communities, thus contributing to regional peacebuilding beyond national boundaries. These efforts highlight the transnational dimension of women's peace work in Sudan, which is often under-reported in official narratives.

A number of structural and cultural barriers work against women's access to formal mediation roles despite such efforts. The continuity of the personal status laws on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence discredits gender equality, especially aspects of mobility, property rights and public authority. Armed groups and tribal leaders also extend patriarchal norms by viewing women's leadership as challenging the traditional hierarchies. In accordance with a 2021 report by UN Women, merely 11 per cent of the peace negotiation team members in Sudan were women and most are represented symbolically but not substantively. The sustainability of the women-led peace initiatives is further pounded by financial insecurity and lack of donor coordination; particularly for the organisations working in remote, or war ridden regions. Many rely on short term funding cycles which serve emergency needs, at the expense of long term structural change.

However, Sudanese women's seek of new ways of engagement, especially through digital platforms, and regional coalitions, continues. Social media has emerged as an important mechanism for recording violence, organising advocacy and popularising opinion. Feminist networks online have increased their influence in determining the discourse on peace, justice, and gender equality: Sudanese Feminist Collective. These are platforms, which at once, function as archives and as spaces for political imagination; women on these platforms envision differing structures of governance based on an equity and inclusivity. In addition, exposure of Sudanese women to international forums like FemWise-Africa and the African Union's Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation has helped improve their technical skills and their advocacy capacities even though integration in domestic policy is a work in progress.

The Sudanese case also highlights the need to bring transitional justice to the fore as a gendered process. A lot of the atrocities that were perpetrated during the Darfur conflict have not been addressed: sexual violence and crimes of gender are still not addressed. Women survivors and activists have continued to demand the accountability mechanisms which will ground their experiences and provide for restitution. The Special Court for Darfur, which was proposed in the JPA, has yet to materialize, and efforts to collaborate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) have been limited.

### **Scholarly Gaps on Comparative Analysis**

There is a noticeable gap in the literature when it comes to comparative analyses of women's roles in peace processes across different African contexts. Most scholarship remains highly contextual and country-specific, thereby missing opportunities to extract regional patterns, shared challenges, and transferrable best practices. While Nigeria and Sudan have parallel histories of conflict and rich traditions of female mediation, few studies systematically analyze how these experiences converge or diverge.

Moreover, little attention is paid to how international frameworks such as UNSCR 1325 are localized in different national contexts. Comparative research could explore how external support for women's inclusion in peacebuilding is adapted or resisted within different cultural and political environments. For instance, while Nigeria has developed a National Action Plan (NAP) for UNSCR 1325, Sudan has yet to fully operationalize one.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory considered most relevant for this study is postcolonial feminist theory. This theory emerges from the intersection of postcolonial theory and feminist thought, and it critically examines how colonial histories, race, gender, and global hierarchies intersect to shape the lives and agency of women in formerly colonized societies. It was most notably advanced by scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), and Lila Abu-Lughod (2001), who critiqued both Western feminism's universalist claims and the neglect of women's lived realities in the Global South. The core premise of postcolonial feminist theory is that women's experiences are not homogenous, and that historical legacies of imperialism, global capitalism, and entrenched patriarchy must be accounted for when analysing gendered roles in society; including in peacebuilding and mediation.

Postcolonial feminist theory is particularly suitable for exploring female agency in conflict mediation in African contexts like Nigeria and Sudan, where both colonial and postcolonial state formations have shaped the socio-political terrain. The theory emphasizes contextualized understandings of power and resistance, resisting the imposition of Western-centric frameworks that often fail to recognize the nuances of African women's political engagement. In both countries, traditional forms of female authority; such as the Iyalode and Umuada in Nigeria or female clan mediators among Sudanese ethnic groups, were eroded by colonial governance structures that centralized power within male-dominated bureaucracies. Postcolonial feminist theory thus allows the study to critique how formal peacebuilding structures have historically marginalized women, while also recognizing the informal and culturally embedded strategies women employ to exercise influence and foster reconciliation.

A key assumption of this theoretical framework is that gender cannot be separated from other axes of identity and oppression, such as ethnicity, class, religion, and historical marginalization. In Nigeria and Sudan, this intersectional approach is critical for understanding why women's participation in formal mediation remains limited despite active involvement in grassroots peace processes. The theory helps uncover how patriarchal institutions, whether legitimized by religious doctrine (such as Sharia law in Northern Nigeria and Islamic jurisprudence in Sudan) or traditional customs, restrict women's access to leadership and formal decision-making. Moreover, it interrogates the role of international development and peacebuilding agendas, which sometimes tokenize women's inclusion without addressing the structural inequalities that inhibit meaningful participation. Thus, postcolonial feminist theory challenges both local patriarchy and global development discourses, urging scholars and policymakers to engage with women as political agents rather than passive victims.

Despite its strengths, postcolonial feminist theory has been critiqued for its conceptual abstraction and limited engagement with empirical data, especially in contexts requiring policy-oriented recommendations (Narayan, 1997). Critics argue that the theory sometimes risks romanticizing grassroots resistance without accounting for pragmatic constraints or differences among women. However, when coupled with empirical research, as in this study, which incorporates focus group discussions and document analysis, its explanatory power is significantly enhanced. Applied here, postcolonial feminist theory provides a robust framework for comparing how Nigerian and Sudanese women navigate the intersection of local tradition, national politics, and international

norms in their peacebuilding efforts. It offers the necessary analytical tools to interpret the data not just descriptively, but through a critical lens that foregrounds power, history, and voice, thus grounding the study's findings in a globally relevant theoretical conversation.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study approach to investigate the roles, challenges, and contributions of female mediators in the conflict resolution processes of Nigeria and Sudan. This methodological choice is grounded in the need to capture the depth and complexity of women's mediation roles, which often manifest through informal and culturally embedded practices that resist quantification. Through the comparing of the two distinct national contexts; Nigeria with its federal democratic structure and Sudan in its transitional post-conflict phase, the research aims to uncover how differing political systems and socio-cultural dynamics influence women's involvement in peacebuilding.

The research draws on both secondary and primary sources of data. Secondary data were obtained through documentary analysis, using a purposive sampling strategy to identify and select relevant texts. Key documents included academic journal articles, policy papers, NGO reports, international organization publications, and news media coverage. The selection criteria emphasized materials that specifically address women's involvement in mediation and peacebuilding in the two countries. Priority was given to sources offering diverse perspectives, ensuring that both local voices and international viewpoints were represented. This allowed the research to construct a context-sensitive narrative.

In addition to document analysis, the study incorporated primary data collection through focus group discussions (FGDs). In total, 46 participants contributed to the study (23 each from Nigeria and Sudan) through focus group discussions and online survey responses. These discussions were conducted with female mediators and civil society leaders in Nigeria and Sudan to obtain firsthand perspectives on their experiences in conflict mediation. Participants were identified through snowball sampling, which enabled the inclusion of individuals deeply embedded in grassroots peace efforts. The FGDs provided valuable qualitative insights into the everyday realities, strategies, and obstacles faced by women working on the front lines of peace processes; perspectives that are often absent in formal documentation.

For data analysis, this study employed thematic analysis to interpret both the documentary and primary data. Themes were derived inductively, allowing the findings to emerge organically from the data rather than being imposed in advance. The coding framework focused on these core dimensions: access to peace processes, the typology of mediation roles, challenges encountered, contributions to peace outcomes, and engagement with national and international policy frameworks. This analytical structure enabled a detailed comparison of how women in both countries navigate mediation roles and the structural forces that shape their involvement.

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step framework: familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. Coding was done manually and reviewed iteratively to refine emerging categories. Documents and FGD transcripts were coded independently by two researchers to enhance reliability, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. The comparative analysis of Nigeria and Sudan was guided by a cross-case matrix that allowed identification of both commonalities and divergences in women's mediation roles and influencing factors.

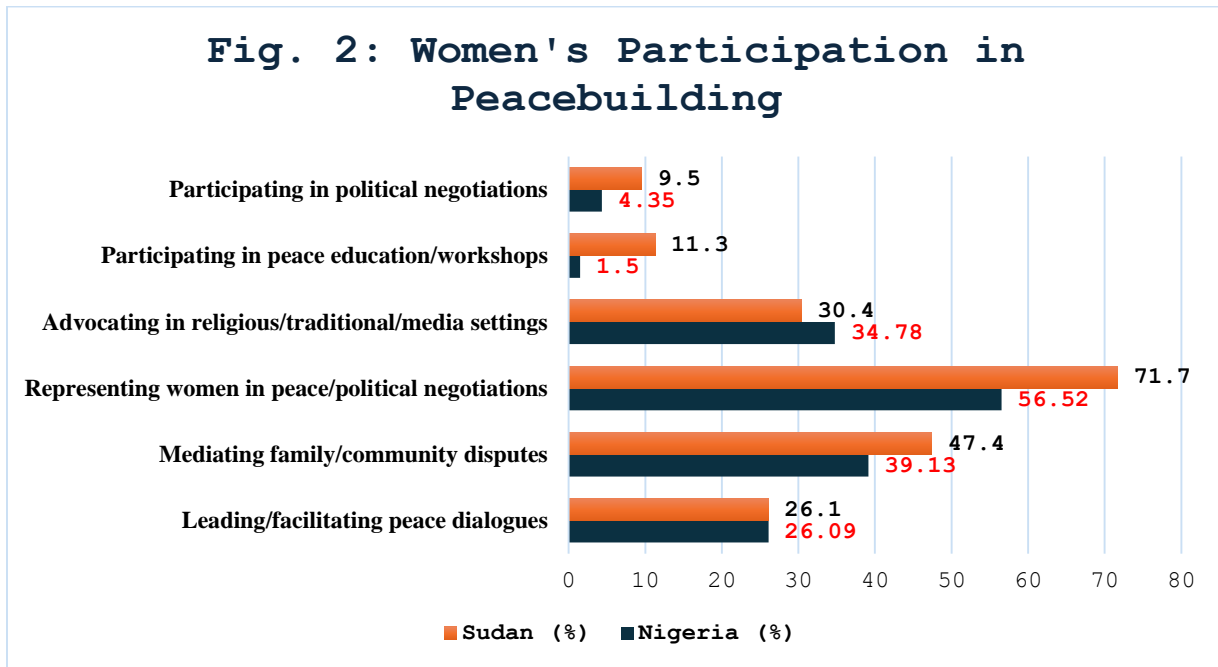
An important component of the methodology is policy analysis, particularly the assessment of national adaptations of international frameworks such as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). The study examined how policies like Nigeria's National Action Plan and Sudan's transitional governance documents address, or fail to address, the practical inclusion of women in formal peace processes. This analysis helped contextualize the extent to which global commitments are being operationalized on the ground.

However, the study acknowledges several limitations and potential biases, particularly concerning the use of secondary data. The reliance on existing reports may introduce bias, especially when data are shaped by donor agendas, political sensitivities, or limited local representation. Also, the availability and reliability of data were not uniform across both countries, which may affect the depth of comparative analysis. While focus group discussions helped to offset some of these limitations by offering direct accounts from women mediators, the socio-political environment may have influenced the openness of some participants.

## Results

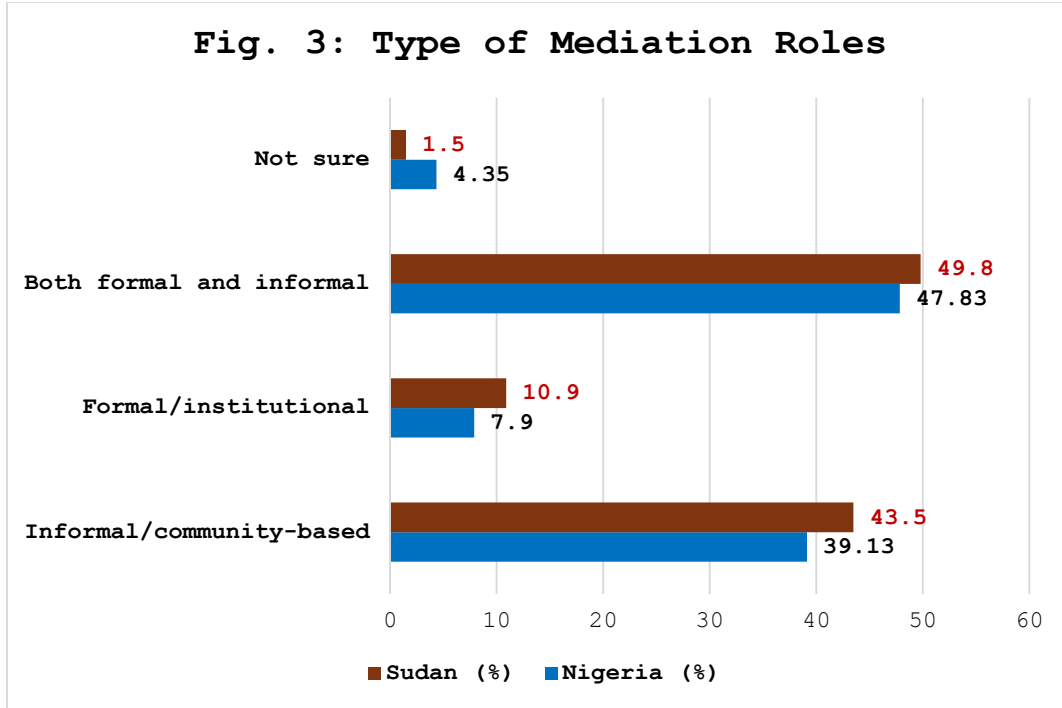
This section presents and discusses the result of the field survey conducted with female mediators and civil society leaders in Nigeria and Sudan to obtain firsthand perspectives on their experiences in conflict mediation. This was done in line with this study’s research objectives.

### 1. Ways Women Participate in Peacebuilding and Conflict Mediation in Nigeria and Sudan



**Source:** Author’s Field Survey, 2025

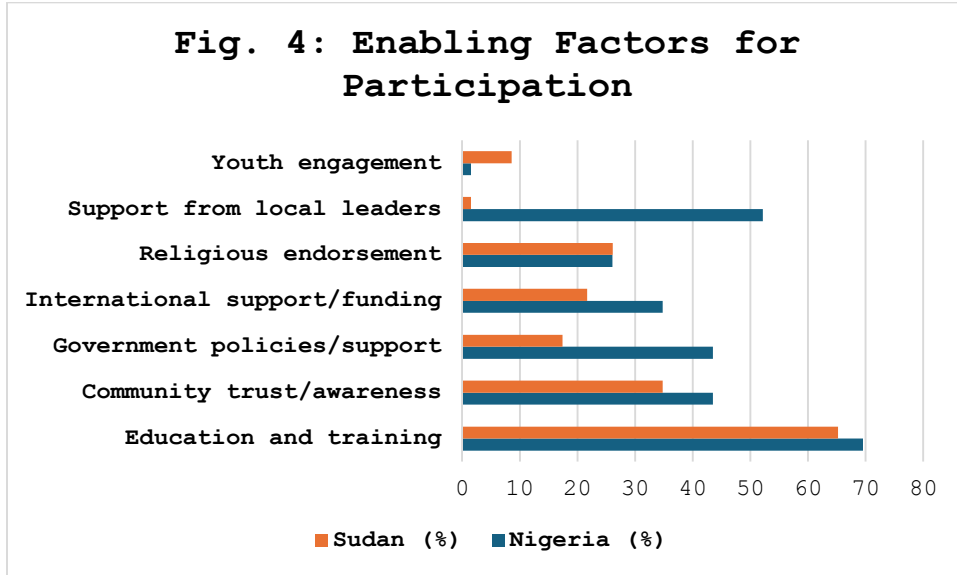
Figure 2 illustrates that both Nigeria and Sudan show notable engagement of women in peacebuilding, though the patterns differ slightly. Sudan shows higher involvement in representing women in political and peace negotiations (71.7%) compared to Nigeria (56.52%), highlighting a potentially stronger formal inclusion in Sudan. However, Nigeria has a slight edge in mediating community disputes. Interestingly, participation in educational workshops is far more common in Sudan (11.3%) than in Nigeria (1.5%), suggesting more structured peace education programs there. These results reflect both countries’ evolving roles for women, with Sudan leaning slightly more into formal political arenas while Nigeria maintains strength in grassroots and community-based roles.



**Source:** Author’s Field Survey, 2025

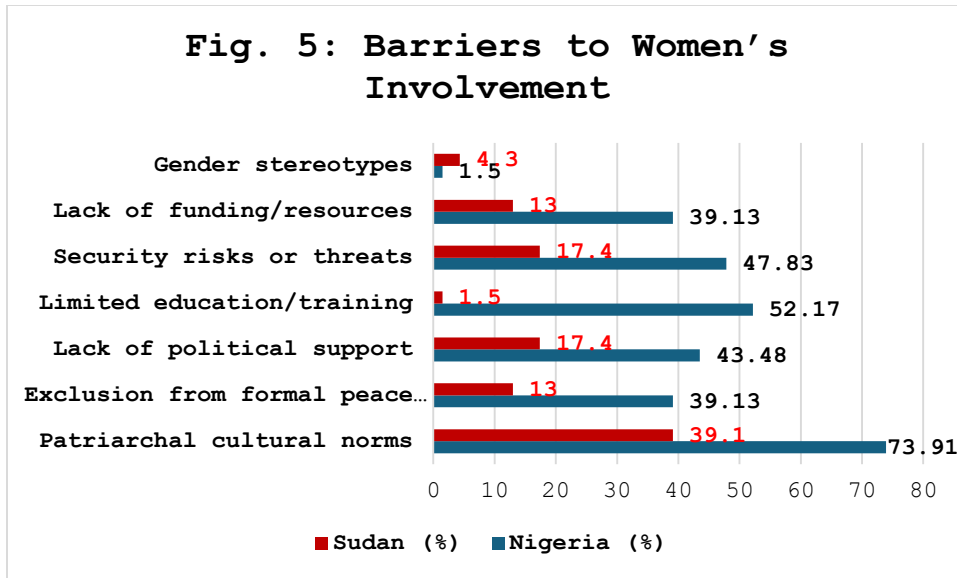
To further identify the manner at which women participate in peacebuilding and conflict mediation in Nigeria and Sudan, questions were asked regarding the type of mediating roles played by them. From the figure 3 above, it is clear that in both Nigeria and Sudan, women predominantly straddle both formal and informal mediation roles, with nearly half of respondents in both countries indicating so (47.83% in Nigeria and 49.8% in Sudan). Informal/community-based mediation remains a significant pathway for women in both contexts, reinforcing how much of women's conflict resolution happens at the grassroots level. However, Sudan shows a slightly higher engagement in formal roles (10.9%) compared to Nigeria (7.9%), suggesting incremental progress in institutional recognition. The low percentage of respondents who were unsure reflects a reasonably clear perception of women's mediation roles within these societies.

## 2. Socio-Political Factors that Influence the Roles and Effectiveness of Female Mediators in Nigeria and Sudan



**Source:** Author’s Field Survey, 2025

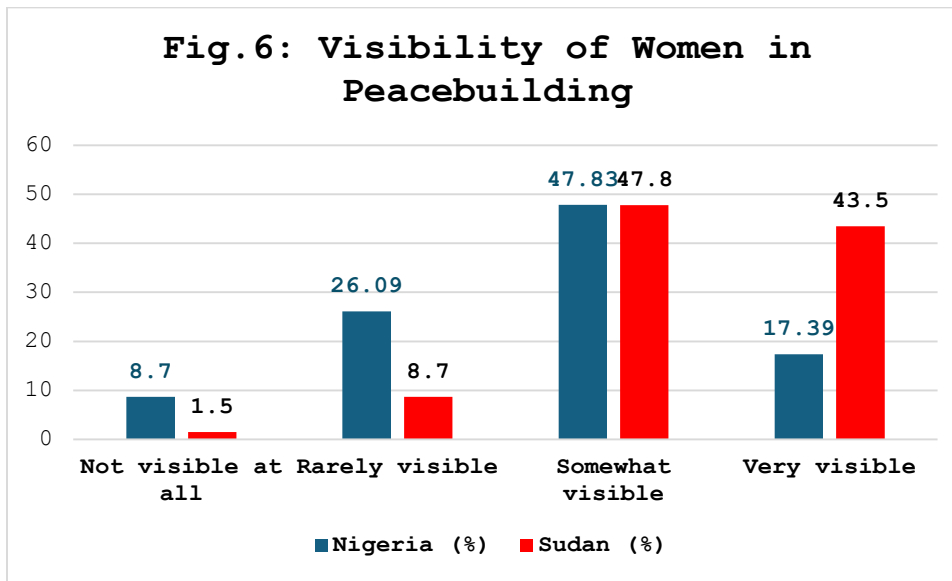
Education and training stand out as the most significant enabling factor in both Nigeria (69.57%) and Sudan (65.2%), underscoring a shared understanding that capacity-building is key to empowering women in peace processes. Support from local leaders is much more pronounced in Nigeria (52.17%) than Sudan (1.5%), pointing to a possible gap in grassroots political will in Sudan. Conversely, youth engagement, while low overall, is slightly higher in Sudan. Government support is another area where Nigeria outpaces Sudan significantly, reflecting perhaps more explicit national policies or action plans targeting gender inclusion. Overall, Nigeria appears to have more systemic support mechanisms, while Sudan’s progress may lean more on education and informal networks.



Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025

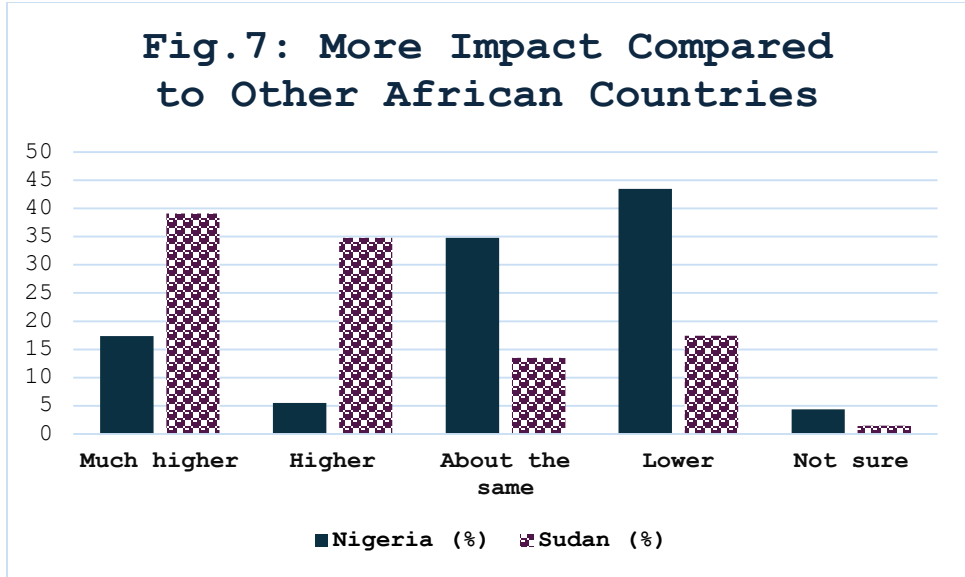
The biggest takeaway from the above figure 5 is the overwhelming barrier posed by patriarchal norms, particularly in Nigeria where nearly three-quarters of respondents (73.91%) cited it, compared to 39.1% in Sudan. This disparity highlights a potentially deeper entrenchment of cultural resistance in Nigeria. Limited education and training, along with security risks, also appear more pressing in Nigeria. Meanwhile, gender stereotypes were cited more frequently in Sudan than in Nigeria, albeit still low overall. These findings indicate that while both countries face similar structural barriers, Nigeria's obstacles appear more deeply rooted and systemic, calling for targeted cultural and institutional shifts to open space for female mediators.

### 3. Contributions of Female Mediators in Nigeria and Sudan, highlighting how differing Conflict and Political Contexts shape their Impact



**Source:** Author’s Field Survey, 2025

Visibility of women in peacebuilding efforts is markedly higher in Sudan, with 43.5% rating them as “very visible” compared to just 17.39% in Nigeria. In both countries, the “somewhat visible” category dominates, suggesting moderate public awareness or involvement. The fact that 8.7% in Nigeria found women “not visible at all” compared to just 1.5% in Sudan further reflects this contrast. The chart suggests that Sudanese female mediators may enjoy greater public engagement or recognition, which could be a function of both their formal roles and higher participation in educational campaigns and political talks.



Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2025

When asked to rate the impact of their female mediators compared to other African countries, respondents in Sudan gave a much more optimistic view. About 39.1% of Sudanese participants believe the impact is “much higher,” and another 34.8% see it as “higher,” suggesting a strong sense of progress or pride. In Nigeria, however, 43.48% of respondents felt their mediators had a “lower” impact, with only 17.39% saying “much higher.” This points to a perception gap that may reflect differing levels of institutional support, visibility, or even societal valuation of women’s contributions in conflict resolution. Sudan appears to project greater confidence in its female mediators' regional standing.

### Discussion

This study set out to explore and compare the roles, visibility, and effectiveness of female mediators in conflict resolution within Nigeria and Sudan. The research has shown that while women in both countries are involved in peacebuilding, the circumstances and methods for their involvement are quite different. Most community conflict mediation cases in Nigeria involve women in informal, local ways through grassroots networks and local trust mechanisms. Unlike its counterpart, Sudan demonstrates that women play a bigger role in formal peace or political negotiations and peace education efforts. Yet, formal roles for women in peace processes are higher in Sudan while informal ways of involving women are still most common in both countries.

In line with the second objective of identifying the socio-political factors that influence women roles in peace processes in both Nigeria and Sudan, findings of this study highlight the conditions that are important for women to do well as mediators. Participants in both nations recognised that education and training help women become more involved in mediation, corroborating global studies as identified in the literature review that capacity-building is vital for women's meaningful engagement. The contribution from local leaders in giving female voices more support in mediation was however much greater in Nigeria. On the other hand, Sudanese women reported far less support from government and community institutions than men. Despite having more women at peace negotiations, Sudan is lacking female support and new policies that support lasting impact. These obstacles directly show that gender inequality still exists in many societies.

Meanwhile, Nigerian society was revealed to be especially resistant to women taking leadership in situations of conflict. There are cultural and political limits in Sudan, but they are somewhat less severe. Respondents in Sudan gave high marks to their mediators for being widely seen and considered important, but Nigerian respondents seemed less positive about whether their mediators were impactful. This may reflect practical integration of women in Sudan's peace initiatives, most likely supported by recent post-conflict transformations in the country.

## **Conclusion**

This study comparatively highlights the significant role played by women in resolving disputes and supporting peace in Nigeria and Sudan. Women in these two countries are active in mediating on formal and informal grounds. Their participation spans from grassroots community mediation to involvement in national peace dialogues as well as political negotiations, even though the degree and form of this participation differ. The roles of Sudanese women are more prominent and visible in structured, high-level mediation platforms, while Nigerian women demonstrate stronger influence at the grassroots and community level.

The socio-political factors shaping female mediation differ across the two countries. Education and training stand out as critical enabling factors in both contexts, but the presence or absence of institutional and community support greatly influences effectiveness. Nigeria benefits from higher local leader support, while Sudanese women face less exclusion from formal talks. However, both countries continue to grapple with patriarchal cultural norms, security threats, and limited political

backing, which restrict women's access to more influential and decision-making roles in peacebuilding.

On a final note, perceptions of impact and visibility reinforce the divergent experiences of women mediators in the two nations. Sudanese respondents report greater national and continental visibility of female mediators, which may possibly reflect a more prominent role in transitional justice and formal negotiations. Nigerian respondents, while acknowledging women's local efforts, perceive less influence at national or cross-border levels. These findings confirm that while progress has been made, there is still a critical need for policy enforcement and cultural transformation to elevate the role of women in African peacebuilding in a more sustainable and balanced manner.

### **Recommendations**

1. National Governments of both Nigeria and Sudan should institutionalize gender-sensitive peace policies that mandate the inclusion of women at all levels of peace processes. Sudan must uphold and implement the 40% quota in the Juba Peace Agreement, while Nigeria must go beyond policy rhetoric to ensure women's inclusion in peace councils, security task forces, and transitional justice mechanisms.
2. Local and Traditional Leaders (especially in Nigeria) must be actively engaged and sensitized to support women's roles in community mediation. Their endorsement is key to legitimizing and enhancing the effectiveness of women-led peace initiatives at the grassroots level.
3. Civil Society Organizations and women's networks should strengthen cross-border learning exchanges between Nigerian and Sudanese female mediators. These platforms can facilitate shared strategies, amplify success stories, and empower women with the tools needed to navigate the unique political terrains in which they operate.
4. Nigeria's NAP on UNSCR 1325 should be adequately resourced and monitored for impact, especially at local levels. Sudan should develop and implement a comprehensive NAP that integrates regional diversity and addresses the specific vulnerabilities of marginalized women, including those in conflict-prone regions like Darfur and South Kordofan.

5. Donors and governments should provide sustained, flexible funding to women-led civil society organizations. These organizations are often the first responders in conflict situations and possess deep knowledge of local dynamics.
6. Nigerian and Sudanese women peacebuilders should be encouraged to work together through platforms such as FemWise-Africa and ECOWAS/AU peace and security organs. This can build shared strategies and foster solidarity on inclusive peacebuilding.
7. Both Nigeria and Sudan must ensure that women involved in peace work are protected from intimidation, violence, and reprisals. Security sector reform should include training for gender sensitivity, and special legal protections should be enacted for female human rights defenders and mediators.

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