

Women and Peacebuilding in the Lake Chad Basin: Lessons from Insurgency and Recovery in Borno State and North-East Nigeria

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Abstract

The Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin has generated one of the most devastating humanitarian and women in North-East Nigeria have been disproportionately affected by conflict through displacement, abduction, sexual violence and widowhood. This article examines the role of women in peacebuilding and recovery efforts in Borno State and the wider North-East region of Nigeria, with particular emphasis on their contributions to community reconciliation, reintegration of returnees, livelihood restoration, trauma healing, and social cohesion. The study is anchored on Human Security Theory and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, which provide a framework for understanding the multidimensional nature of security and the importance of women's participation in peace processes. The study adopts a qualitative review methodology based on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, reports from international organizations, development agencies, and non-governmental organizations published between 2010 and 2026. Using thematic analysis, the study synthesizes existing evidence on women's experiences and contributions within conflict-affected communities in the Lake Chad Basin. Findings reveal that women occupy a dual position as both victims of insurgency and agents of peace. Beyond their experiences of violence and displacement, women have played indispensable roles in sustaining community resilience, facilitating reconciliation, supporting reintegration processes, rebuilding local economies, and providing psychosocial support to survivors. However, women's participation in peace building continues to be constrained by patriarchal norms, securitized recovery approaches, inadequate funding, social stigma, and persistent insecurity.

Keywords: Women, Peacebuilding, Boko Haram, Lake Chad Basin, Recovery, Reintegration, Reconciliation, Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

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I. Introduction

Armed conflict in the Lake Chad Basin has profoundly reshaped state-society relations, livelihoods, and security governance over the past decade and a half. The rise of Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria from 2009 onward and the later emergence of splinter factions intensified regional instability affecting Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon (International Crisis Group, 2021). Among Nigerian states, Borno State became the epicentre of violence, mass displacement, and humanitarian distress (Oluwadare, 2016).

The insurgency commonly associated with Boko Haram emerged from local grievances linked to governance failures, poverty, unemployment, weak public services, and ideological radicalization in North-East Nigeria (Thurston, 2017). Following the 2009 crackdown and death of founder Mohammed Yusuf, the movement escalated into sustained violence targeting civilians, security institutions, schools, religious centers, and markets (Alkali, 2019).

By the mid-2010s, large territories in Borno State fell under insurgent control. Mass abductions, including the globally recognized Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping in 2014, amplified attention to the gendered dimensions of the crisis. Millions were displaced internally or across borders (IOM, 2024).

While conventional security analyses often prioritize military operations, territorial control, and counterterrorism outcomes, conflict recovery is equally dependent on rebuilding trust, repairing social networks, restoring livelihoods, and reintegrating fractured communities. These are domains in which women frequently play central but underrecognized roles (UN Women, 2022). Across North-East Nigeria, women have organized food support systems, mediated family disputes, sustained informal markets, and supported children affected by war.

Yet policy narratives remain contradictory. Women are alternately framed as passive victims needing protection, as potential security risks due to forced or coerced association with insurgents, or as symbolic

participants in peace forums. Such framings obscure women's agency and the practical knowledge they bring to stabilization processes (Ní Aoláin, Haynes, & Cahn, 2018).

Therefore, this article examined the contribution of women to post-insurgency peacebuilding in Borno State through a secondary-data review approach.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Context: Insurgency and Recovery in the Lake Chad Basin

The Lake Chad Basin, comprising parts of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, has experienced one of Africa's most devastating security and humanitarian crises over the last two decades. Historically, the region served as an important center of trade, agriculture, and pastoral livelihoods (Yahaya, et al., 2025). However, weak governance, poverty and violent extremism gradually transformed the basin into a hotspot of insurgency and instability (Ní Aoláin & Cahn, 2018).

Scholars generally trace the roots of insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin to longstanding structural inequalities and governance failures. According to Oluwadare (2016), the Boko Haram insurgency evolved from deep socioeconomic frustrations in northern Nigeria, where unemployment, illiteracy, corruption, and poor governance created fertile ground for radicalization. The founder of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, capitalized on widespread public dissatisfaction with state institutions and presented the movement as an alternative social and religious order (Oluwadare, 2016).

Empirical studies indicate that the insurgency rapidly expanded beyond Nigeria into neighboring states within the Lake Chad Basin due to porous borders and weak regional security coordination. Foyou (2018) observed that Boko Haram's activities increasingly affected border communities in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, leading to widespread insecurity and displacement. The insurgents exploited difficult terrains such as the Sambisa Forest and islands within Lake Chad to establish operational bases. This transnational expansion demonstrated the inability of individual states to effectively address the crisis independently (Foyou, 2018). Tayimlong (2020) further argued that underdevelopment, inadequate infrastructure, and socioeconomic deprivation across the Lake Chad Basin contributed significantly to the persistence of insurgency.

The humanitarian consequences of the insurgency have received considerable scholarly attention. Awosusi (2017) noted that Boko Haram violence produced one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, resulting in thousands of deaths, widespread destruction of infrastructure, and massive displacement. The conflict destroyed educational infrastructures, markets, and agricultural systems, severely undermining human security (Ayesha, 2020). Women and children were particularly vulnerable, facing abduction, sexual violence, forced marriage, and recruitment into armed groups (Awosusi, 2017). The Global Centre for R2P (2026) consistently reported disruptions to education across the region, with millions of children denied access to schooling due to insecurity.

Several empirical studies also examine the counterinsurgency efforts. The formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), involving Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin, marked a significant shift toward collective security cooperation (Yahaya, et al., 2025). Scholars argue that the MNJTF achieved some military successes by reclaiming territories previously controlled by Boko Haram (Tayimlong, 2020).

According to the United Nations Coordinated Support to People Affected by Disaster and Conflict (2019), community resilience and local peacebuilding mechanisms have also emerged as significant themes in recent literature. Studies indicate that local communities developed coping mechanisms through informal security arrangements, social solidarity networks, and community-based rehabilitation programs. Women's groups, youth associations, religious leaders, and civil society organizations have contributed to reconciliation and reintegration processes for displaced persons and former combatants (Eugene & Armand, 2020). Scholars argue that locally driven recovery initiatives are essential for rebuilding trust and social cohesion in conflict-affected communities.

Finally, the historical context of insurgency and recovery in the Lake Chad Basin reflects the interaction between governance failures, socioeconomic deprivation, environmental stress, and violent extremism. Empirical literature demonstrates that Boko Haram emerged within conditions of poverty, marginalization, and weak state capacity, later evolving into a transnational insurgency with devastating humanitarian consequences.

2.2 Women as Victims and Agents of Peace in North-East Nigeria

The literature on insurgency in North-East Nigeria consistently identifies women as among the most affected populations in the conflict associated with Boko Haram insurgency. Studies by Amnesty International (2018), Human Rights Watch (2014), and UN Women (2022) document widespread experiences of abduction, forced marriage, sexual violence, widowhood, forced displacement, and economic deprivation among women in Borno State and the wider Lake Chad Basin region. These studies frame women primarily within humanitarian and protection discourses, emphasizing their vulnerability to conflict-related abuses. Early scholarship focused heavily on the victimization of women and girls, particularly after the Chibok schoolgirls' abduction, which drew

global attention to gendered violence in North-East Nigeria (Nyelade, 2025). Such approaches largely portrayed women as passive victims requiring rescue and protection from violent extremism.

However, more recent literature challenges this narrow framing and increasingly recognizes women as active agents of peacebuilding and social resilience. Feminist scholars argue that reducing women to victims ignores their strategic contributions to survival and community reconstruction (Tickner, 2001; Enloe, 2014). Across internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, host communities, and resettlement areas, women emerged as providers of household stability, organizers of food distribution systems, caregivers for vulnerable children, and informal mediators within fragmented communities (World Bank, 2020). Women's associations and faith-based networks also became important platforms for mutual support and social cohesion.

A major theme in the literature concerns women's "everyday peacebuilding" roles. Scholars such as Cockburn (2010) argue that peacebuilding should not only be understood through formal negotiations and elite political settlements but also through daily survival practices that sustain social order during and after conflict. In North-East Nigeria, women rebuilt petty trade networks, coordinated informal savings groups, and mediated family disputes caused by displacement and trauma. These contributions are often absent from formal policy narratives because they occur outside official institutions and peace processes.

Debates within the literature center on whether women should be viewed primarily through victimhood or agency frameworks. Sjoberg, (2013) caution against romanticizing women as naturally peaceful actors, arguing that women's experiences during conflict are heterogeneous and shaped by class, religion, ethnicity, and coercive conditions. Ní Aoláin and Cahn (2018) further note that some women participated in insurgent activities either voluntarily or under coercion, thereby complicating simplistic binaries between victims and perpetrators.

The literature therefore reflects a gradual shift from humanitarian-centered analyses toward more nuanced understandings of women's multidimensional roles in conflict and peacebuilding. Nonetheless, scholars agree that women's informal contributions remain insufficiently recognized within official recovery and security frameworks in the Lake Chad Basin.

2.3 The Role Women in Post-Boko Haram Peacebuilding in Borno State

The literature on post-Boko Haram peacebuilding in Borno State highlights women's critical but often underappreciated contributions to recovery and stabilization processes. Existing studies argue that peacebuilding in North-East Nigeria extends beyond military operations to include social reconstruction, reintegration, economic recovery, and psychosocial healing (International Crisis Group, 2021). Within these processes, women have emerged as central actors at household, community, and grassroots institutional levels.

One dominant theme within the literature is the role of women in sustaining community resilience during state fragility. Research by UNDP (2021) and Mercy Corps (2020) shows that women frequently filled governance and welfare gaps left by weak institutions during and after insurgency. In many displaced communities, women coordinated access to food, water, shelter, and healthcare while simultaneously supporting vulnerable populations such as widows, orphaned children, and survivors of violence. George and Shepherd (2016) argue that these caregiving functions contributed significantly to social stabilization and reduced the risks of communal tensions and renewed violence.

Another recurring theme concerns women's participation in local peace initiatives and informal mediation structures. Women's groups, traditional women leaders, and faith-based organizations facilitated dialogue between displaced persons, returnees, and host communities. These grassroots interventions often complemented formal state-led recovery programmes which tended to focus heavily on counterterrorism and reconstruction infrastructure (UN Women, 2022). Some scholars argue that women's social proximity to households and communities enabled them to build trust more effectively than formal institutions.

However, debates persist regarding the extent of women's influence within formal peacebuilding structures. While international policy frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda advocate women's inclusion, studies indicate that women in Borno State remain underrepresented in formal security governance and post-conflict decision-making bodies (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2019). Critics argue that many peacebuilding programmes include women symbolically rather than substantively, limiting their actual influence over policy priorities and resource allocation.

The literature also critiques the securitized nature of many post-conflict recovery interventions. Some scholars argue that state-led recovery efforts prioritize deradicalization, surveillance, and military stabilization while neglecting community healing, social justice, and gender-sensitive recovery (Matfess, 2017). In response, feminist scholars advocate for more localized and community-driven approaches that recognize women's lived experiences and grassroots peacebuilding capacities.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that women's participation is indispensable to sustainable peacebuilding in Borno State, yet institutional barriers continue to restrict the full recognition and integration of women's contributions within formal recovery frameworks.

2.4 The Role Women in Community Reconciliation

Community reconciliation constitutes one of the most important themes in the literature on post-insurgency recovery in North-East Nigeria. Scholars generally agree that insurgency created deep social fragmentation characterized by mistrust, trauma, revenge sentiments, and community polarization (International Crisis Group, 2021). Communities that experienced killings, abductions, and destruction often struggle to coexist peacefully with returnees, former insurgent associates, and survivors of captivity. Within this context, women have emerged as significant mediators and facilitators of reconciliation processes.

A major theme in the literature is the role of women in rebuilding social trust through informal mechanisms. Studies by Mercy Corps (2020) and UNDP (2021) show that women frequently use markets, schools, religious gatherings, and neighborhood associations as spaces for dialogue and relationship rebuilding. Women's social and caregiving roles often place them at the center of household and communal interactions, allowing them to influence attitudes toward forgiveness, coexistence, and reintegration. Scholars argue that women's mediation strategies are often less confrontational and more community-oriented than formal justice approaches.

Another important theme concerns the intersection between reconciliation and trauma healing. Researchers note that women not only facilitate dialogue but also provide emotional support to survivors through widows' associations, faith groups, and peer counseling structures (UNFPA, 2021). These informal psychosocial networks contribute to rebuilding trust and reducing social tensions among conflict-affected populations.

However, the literature reveals debates regarding the balance between reconciliation and justice. Some scholars argue that reconciliation initiatives in North-East Nigeria risk prioritizing social harmony over accountability for atrocities committed during insurgency (Matfess, 2017). Survivors may feel pressured to forgive perpetrators despite unresolved trauma and lack of compensation. Critics further caution that reconciliation programmes sometimes overlook gender-specific experiences of violence and fail to adequately address women's demands for justice.

Another debate concerns whether informal reconciliation mechanisms are sufficient for long-term peacebuilding. While grassroots approaches are culturally embedded and locally legitimate, some scholars argue that they require stronger institutional support to remain sustainable (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2019). Others contend that state-led reconciliation programmes often fail because they neglect local customs, religious values, and community participation.

The literature therefore suggests that community reconciliation in Borno State is most effective when formal recovery programmes complement rather than replace women-led grassroots peace initiatives.

2.5 The Role Women in Reintegration of Returnees

The reintegration of returnees, including former abductees, ex-combatants, defectors, and displaced persons, has become a major focus within post-conflict literature on North-East Nigeria. Scholars widely agree that reintegration extends beyond physical return to include psychological acceptance, social belonging, and economic reinsertion into communities (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Women play particularly influential roles in shaping these processes because they often manage household relationships, caregiving responsibilities, and community interactions.

One dominant theme within the literature is women's role as gatekeepers of social acceptance. Research indicates that mothers, wives, female elders, and women's associations significantly influence whether returnees are welcomed, stigmatized, or isolated within communities (UN Women, 2022). Through mediation and counseling, women often reduce tensions between survivors and returnees while promoting coexistence and forgiveness.

Another theme concerns the reintegration of women and children associated with insurgent groups. Scholars note that women returning from captivity frequently face suspicion and social exclusion due to assumptions about ideological affiliation or sexual relationships with insurgents (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). Children born during captivity may also experience stigma and discrimination. Feminist scholars argue that reintegration policies often fail to address these gendered experiences adequately.

The literature also debates the effectiveness of state-led deradicalization and reintegration programmes. Supporters argue that such initiatives are necessary for reducing insecurity and encouraging defections from insurgent groups. Critics, however, contend that many programmes prioritize security objectives over community healing and survivor-centered justice (International Crisis Group, 2021). Women survivors in particular may feel excluded from reintegration planning processes despite being directly affected by insurgent violence.

Scholars further critique the lack of long-term support mechanisms for reintegrated populations. While short-term humanitarian assistance is common, sustainable reintegration requires access to livelihoods, education, psychosocial services, and community acceptance. Women's participation is therefore viewed as essential to successful reintegration outcomes because of their central role in maintaining family and community cohesion.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that reintegration is both a social and political process in which women play indispensable yet insufficiently acknowledged roles.

2.6 The Role Women in Livelihood Recovery

Livelihood recovery remains a major theme within post-conflict scholarship on North-East Nigeria because insurgency severely disrupted agriculture, commerce, labor markets, and household economies (World Bank, 2020). The destruction of farms, markets, roads, and businesses created widespread poverty and food insecurity across Borno State and neighboring areas. Within this context, women assumed increasing responsibility for household survival and economic recovery.

One major theme in the literature concerns women's dominance in informal economic sectors. Studies by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021) and UNDP (2021) indicate that women engage extensively in food vending, tailoring, agro-processing, petty trading, and small-scale farming. Scholars argue that women's economic activities contribute directly to household resilience because women are more likely to invest income in food security, healthcare, and children's welfare.

Another important theme involves women-led cooperatives and savings groups. Community-based associations provide women with access to informal credit, shared resources, and collective economic support systems. Researchers note that such initiatives strengthen social cohesion while reducing economic vulnerability among displaced and conflict-affected populations.

Debates within the literature focus on whether donor-driven livelihood programmes produce sustainable economic empowerment. Some scholars argue that short-term humanitarian interventions often fail to address structural gender inequalities such as limited land ownership, unequal access to education, and financial exclusion (Oxfam, 2021). Others emphasize the need for localized economic recovery models that build on existing women-led market systems rather than imposing externally designed projects.

The literature also highlights tensions between humanitarian aid and long-term development planning. While emergency cash transfers and food assistance remain important, scholars argue that sustainable peacebuilding requires investment in women's economic independence and community-level production systems.

Overall, livelihood recovery literature demonstrates that women are central to rebuilding local economies in post-insurgency contexts, yet they continue to face significant structural barriers to economic empowerment.

2.7 The Role Women in Trauma Healing

The literature on trauma healing in North-East Nigeria emphasizes the profound psychological consequences of insurgency for women, children, and displaced populations. Studies by WHO (2022), UNFPA (2021), and UNICEF (2021) document widespread experiences of grief, depression, anxiety, sexual violence trauma, and emotional distress resulting from prolonged exposure to conflict. Women in particular experienced compounded trauma due to caregiving burdens, widowhood, displacement, and exposure to gender-based violence.

One major theme within the literature concerns the inadequacy of formal mental health systems in conflict-affected regions. Researchers note that access to professional psychosocial services remains limited in many communities across Borno State, particularly in rural and resettlement areas. Consequently, women-led informal support systems have emerged as critical sources of psychosocial care and emotional recovery.

Faith-based organizations, widows' associations, peer counseling groups, and women's community networks frequently provide emotional support, conflict mediation, and trauma-sharing spaces for survivors (UN Women, 2022). Scholars argue that these grassroots mechanisms are often culturally accessible and socially trusted, making them effective complements to formal mental health interventions.

However, debates persist regarding the sustainability and limitations of informal trauma-healing approaches. Critics argue that relying heavily on women's unpaid emotional labor may reinforce gender inequalities and place excessive psychological burdens on women peacebuilders themselves (Ní Aoláin et al., 2018). Others contend that community-based healing mechanisms may not adequately address severe trauma requiring specialized mental health care.

The literature also highlights disagreements regarding the integration of traditional, religious, and biomedical approaches to trauma recovery. Some scholars advocate hybrid models combining local cultural practices with professional psychosocial services, while others warn against approaches that may unintentionally silence survivors or normalize trauma.

Overall, the literature suggests that trauma healing is essential to sustainable peacebuilding in North-East Nigeria and that women remain central actors in both formal and informal recovery systems.

2.7 Challenges Limiting Women's Participation in Peacebuilding in North-East Nigeria

Despite growing recognition of women's contributions to peacebuilding in North-East Nigeria, the literature consistently identifies multiple structural barriers limiting women's effective participation. One major challenge involves patriarchal norms that restrict women's access to leadership positions and decision-making spaces (Olonisakin & Adebayo, 2019). Security institutions, traditional councils, and reconstruction committees remain heavily male-dominated, often reducing women's involvement to symbolic consultation.

Another significant challenge concerns securitized recovery models. Scholars argue that many post-conflict interventions prioritize military stabilization, surveillance, and deradicalization over social healing and gender-responsive recovery (Matfess, 2017). This security-centered approach frequently marginalizes women's grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and reduces peacebuilding to counterterrorism management.

Funding inequality also emerges as a recurring theme in the literature. Local women-led organizations often receive limited direct funding compared to international NGOs despite possessing stronger community legitimacy and contextual understanding (Oxfam, 2021). Scholars argue that donor-driven funding structures may unintentionally weaken local ownership of peacebuilding processes.

The literature further highlights stigma and social exclusion faced by women associated with insurgents, either voluntarily or through coercion. Women returning from captivity may experience discrimination, social rejection, and restricted marriage prospects (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). Such stigma undermines reintegration efforts and contributes to long-term psychological distress.

Persistent insecurity also remains a major obstacle. Renewed attacks, banditry, fear of abduction, and weak state protection continue to restrict women's mobility, economic participation, and access to peacebuilding spaces. Scholars argue that without addressing these structural barriers, women's contributions to sustainable peacebuilding will remain underutilized despite their proven significance in community recovery processes.

III. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory emerged prominently after the publication of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report in 1994. The theory challenged traditional conceptions of security that focused narrowly on territorial defense, military capability, and state sovereignty. Instead, Human Security Theory argues that true security should prioritize the protection and wellbeing of individuals rather than only the survival of the state (UNDP, 1994). The theory identifies multiple dimensions of insecurity including economic insecurity, food insecurity, health insecurity, environmental insecurity, personal insecurity, political insecurity, and community insecurity (Tickner, 2001). Thus, peace is understood not merely as the absence of armed conflict but as the presence of conditions that allow individuals to live free from fear, want, and indignity.

A key strength of Human Security Theory is its people-centered approach to security analysis. The theory recognizes that conflict affects populations in multidimensional ways beyond direct violence (Tickner, 2001). In conflict-affected societies, insecurity may persist even after military victories if communities continue to suffer from hunger, displacement, trauma, unemployment, and social exclusion. This broader conceptualization is especially useful in understanding post-insurgency recovery in Borno State and the wider North-East region. Although the Nigerian military and the Multinational Joint Task Force succeeded in reclaiming many territories previously controlled by insurgents, millions of civilians continued to face severe humanitarian conditions, including displacement, livelihood collapse, food shortages, and psychosocial trauma (World Bank, 2020).

Human Security Theory is highly relevant to this study because it explains why women's peacebuilding roles extend beyond formal political participation into community welfare and survival systems (Enloe, 2014). Women in North-East Nigeria have played central roles in ensuring household food security, caring for displaced children, rebuilding informal markets, supporting psychosocial recovery, and sustaining social networks disrupted by insurgency. These activities directly contribute to human security by reducing vulnerability and strengthening resilience at community levels. The theory therefore helps explain why sustainable peace in the Lake Chad Basin depends not only on defeating insurgent groups militarily but also on restoring education, healthcare, livelihoods, dignity, and social trust.

Furthermore, Human Security Theory provides an important framework for analyzing the failures of purely militarized approaches to conflict resolution. In many communities across Borno State, insecurity persisted despite territorial gains because reconstruction efforts did not adequately address unemployment, trauma, gender-based violence, or social exclusion (Sjoberg, 2013). The theory highlights the importance of integrating humanitarian recovery, development planning, and community participation into peacebuilding strategies.

Despite its strengths, Human Security Theory has been criticized for being overly broad and conceptually ambiguous. Scholars argue that because the theory includes numerous dimensions of insecurity, it can become difficult to determine clear policy priorities or measurement indicators (Paris, 2001). Critics also contend that the theory may lack operational precision in conflict environments where governments prioritize immediate military threats over long-term social development. In fragile states such as Nigeria, resource constraints and institutional weaknesses may limit the practical implementation of comprehensive human security policies. Nevertheless, the theory remains highly significant for understanding the multidimensional impacts of insurgency and the essential role of women in post-conflict recovery processes.

3.2 Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda emerged from the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000. The resolution recognized for the first time that women are disproportionately affected by armed conflict and that their participation is essential to the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction (United Nations, 2000). Subsequent resolutions expanded the agenda to include protection from sexual violence, women's leadership in peace processes, gender mainstreaming in security institutions, and accountability for conflict-related abuses.

The WPS Agenda is built on four major pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. These pillars collectively seek to ensure that women are included in all aspects of peace and security governance. In response to the global framework, Nigeria developed National Action Plans (NAPs) to guide implementation of UNSCR 1325 at federal and state levels. However, implementation remains inconsistent, especially in conflict-affected regions such as Borno State where humanitarian and security pressures are most severe (UN Women, 2023).

One of the major strengths of the WPS Agenda is that it institutionalizes women's inclusion within international peace and security frameworks. Unlike other approaches that treated women's participation as optional, the WPS framework establishes women's involvement as a legitimate requirement for sustainable peacebuilding. The agenda has contributed significantly to increasing awareness of sexual and gender-based violence, promoting women's leadership, and encouraging donor support for gender-sensitive recovery programmes.

In relation to this study, the WPS Agenda provides a practical and policy-oriented framework for understanding women's peacebuilding roles in post-Boko Haram recovery efforts. Women in North-East Nigeria have participated in community mediation, early warning networks, trauma counseling and reconciliation. The WPS framework helps explain why these contributions are critical to achieving durable peace. It also highlights the importance of integrating women into local security governance, humanitarian planning, and recovery institutions.

The theory further explains the policy gaps that continue to undermine women's participation in peacebuilding across the Lake Chad Basin. Although Nigeria has adopted the WPS framework formally, women remain underrepresented in high-level security decision-making, peace negotiations, and reconstruction planning. Many women-led grassroots organizations also struggle with inadequate funding and limited institutional support.

Despite its contributions, the WPS Agenda has attracted criticism. Some scholars argue that implementation has often become symbolic or tokenistic, with governments adopting policies without meaningful structural change (Cohn, 2008). Critics also note that the agenda is sometimes dominated by elite urban women, thereby marginalizing rural women and grassroots actors who are directly affected by conflict. Nevertheless, the WPS Agenda remains one of the most influential global frameworks for promoting gender-responsive peacebuilding and understanding women's strategic role in post-conflict recovery.

IV. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative review design using secondary data. Sources include:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles (2010–2026)
- Reports from United Nations agencies
- Nigerian federal and state policy documents
- Reports from NGOs and think tanks
- Media and field assessments triangulated cautiously

Selection criteria focused on relevance to women, peacebuilding, insurgency recovery, Borno State, and the Lake Chad Basin. A thematic synthesis was used to identify recurring patterns: mediation, livelihoods, reintegration, trauma healing, governance, and barriers.

As a review paper, the study does not claim new primary field data but generates analytical insight through synthesis across fragmented evidence.

V. Findings and Discussion: A Thematic Analysis of Women and Peacebuilding in the Lake Chad Basin

The reviewed literature reveals that women occupy a paradoxical position within the conflict and post-conflict landscape of North-East Nigeria. While they are among the populations most severely affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, they have simultaneously emerged as indispensable actors in peacebuilding, recovery, and community resilience.

The thematic review reveals that women occupy a dual position within the conflict and post-conflict landscape of Borno State and North-East Nigeria: they are both victims of insurgency and critical agents of peacebuilding. Early literature largely portrayed women as vulnerable populations affected by abduction, sexual

violence, forced marriage, displacement, widowhood, and economic deprivation. This perspective was reinforced by international attention to incidents such as the Chibok schoolgirls' abduction and broader reports on gender-based violence.

The review further demonstrates that women have played indispensable roles in post-Boko Haram peacebuilding efforts. Women have contributed significantly to social reconstruction, community and stabilization particularly in areas where state institutions have been weakened by prolonged conflict.

It was also revealed that international frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda emphasize women's participation in formal peace processes, much of women's impact has occurred through informal and grassroots mechanisms. Community associations, religious networks, women's groups, and traditional support structures have often proven more effective in building trust and addressing local tensions than formal institutional arrangements.

Economic recovery is identified as another critical component of peacebuilding. Women have become central actors in rebuilding local economies through petty trading, agriculture, tailoring, food processing, and other informal economic activities. Although humanitarian interventions often focus on short-term assistance such as food aid and cash transfers, scholars emphasize the importance of long-term investments in women's economic empowerment. Persistent barriers such as limited access to land, credit, education, and markets continue to undermine women's economic potential and constrain sustainable recovery.

The literature also highlights trauma healing as an essential but often neglected dimension of peacebuilding. Women not only experience severe psychological trauma but also provide emotional and psychosocial support through faith-based organizations and widows' associations. While these informal mechanisms are culturally accessible and widely trusted, scholars argue that they should complement rather than replace formal mental health services.

Finally, the review identifies persistent structural barriers, such as patriarchal norms, securitized recovery approaches, funding inequalities, social stigma, and ongoing insecurity that continue to limit women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding.

VI. Conclusion

The study conclude that women in North-East Nigeria occupy complex and multifaceted positions within the conflict and post-conflict environment. While they have experienced severe forms of violence, displacement, and socioeconomic hardship, they have also emerged as critical agents of peace, resilience, and recovery. Their contributions to community survival, livelihood recovery, and social cohesion challenge simplistic portrayals of women as passive victims. The growing body of scholarship on women's agency underscores the need for peacebuilding policies and programmes that recognize women as strategic partners in conflict recovery and sustainable development. Future research should focus on documenting women's grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and examining how these contributions can be better integrated into formal peace and security frameworks.

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