

## **An Assessment of the Impact of Gender Equality on Nonviolence Change**

**Chioma Vivienne Nwokoro, PhD**

Eastern Palm University  
Imo State, Nigeria

**Felix O. Chima, PhD**

Prairie View A&M University  
United States of America

**Imelda Okoye**

University of Port Harcourt  
Rivers State, Nigeria

**Caroline Alfred**

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education  
Rivers State, Nigeria

**Ositadinma I. Ukwuoma**

National Open University of Nigeria, Owerri Center  
Imo State, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

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*Peacebuilding is essential for ensuring survival and sustainability of the human race. Recent studies have come to show that peacebuilding processes through nonviolence initiatives are more likely to succeed in conflict prone societies. However, few studies have examined the link between nonviolence change and gender equality. Through systematic review of literature, this research study examines the impact of gender equality in nonviolence and peace building initiatives in conflict prone societies. Specifically, the paper examines the characteristic role women can play in reducing conflict through nonviolence means, and argues that due to their feminine qualities and caregiving nature women have the potentials for peacebuilding during or after communal conflicts. It analyzes the gender dimensions of conflict and highlights how gender relations and distinct notions of masculinity constrain the mobilization of women in nonviolent peacebuilding processes. The paper recommends the application of a theory of change and policy shift that will utilize data on the present informed roles of women in nonviolence processes. The paper also calls for a nuanced evaluation of 'resistors' or 'resistant factors' - especially the impact of masculine cultures and dominance that hinder women's active engagement in nonviolence and peace building processes in the grassroots.*

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**Keywords:** Nonviolence change, gender equality, peacebuilding, feminism, gender analysis

### **Introduction**

Recent researches on peace building has shown that states with high levels of gender equality are less likely to suffer armed conflict (Caprioli, 2005; Melander, 2005) and more likely to build peace after wars (Gizelis, 2009; Tripp, 2015).

When gender is discussed it is often with regards to women. Women issues are mostly discussed in gender related topic, because of women's vulnerable constitution (Krause, 2019). Thus, when discussing conflict and violence in relation to gender, most studies look at how women are affected in the process. With the increasing preference for nonviolent campaigns over violent campaigns in the world today, a gender perspective of nonviolence and peacebuilding efforts will therefore examine conflict impact, its magnitude and women's roles in affecting nonviolence change and peacebuilding (Melander, 2005). Women have come to play vital role in mobilization of peace in communities; however, they have not received adequate representation in literature and policy (Parkinson, 2013). Some civil war researches show that women provided non-combat supports to men during wars, such as in attending to wounded soldiers, providing medicine, food and water, and burying of the dead (Parkinson, 2013; Dinshak, 2008; Human Rights watch, 2013). Krause (2019) noted that during the conflict in Jos Plateau state Nigeria, women's logistical work enabled diversion of deadliest massacres because women organized the cooking for hundreds of men when they assembled from different villages for coordinated attacks). In some cases, women have supported fighters by taking in men who had fought when they needed to hide from security forces (Ettang and Okem, 2016; Higazi, 2008).

In addition, some feminist studies suggest that women are biologically less prone to violence than men (Parkinson, 2013; Ettang and Okem, 2016; Boulding, 2000; Enloe, 2005). They hold that women's position in society, which has often entailed primary responsibility for nurturing, caregiving and the affective side of human life, has made women more committed to life-sustaining activity (Dinshak, 2008). Other scholars hold that women are carrier of values of life-affirmation and compassion, hence less prone to violence (Higazi, 2008; Dinshak, 2008; Krause, 2019). However, the masculinity of conflict has declined any possible way of holding this truth (Krause, 2019). The masculine version of peace building has also diminished any relevant role women may come to play in preventing conflict in their community, because conflict and peace-making is only attributed to men's purview (Krause, 2019). While women may encourage and participate in the process of peace building, the prevalence of violent masculinity prior to fighting also leaves limited space for female leadership and alternative masculinities. For instance, in the case of various religious conflicts in middle belt region of Nigeria, Krause (2019) reported that some women activists that played vital roles in violence-prone communities were not engaged in the leadership or other strategies for prevention efforts, because it was forbidden. This deterred most of these women from further getting involved in peace work, and this has resulted to more violence and conflict in these areas. For this reason, we see women not actively opposing the mobilization of their men for fighting because they may not know how to organize resistance collectively. Also, they may be too intimidated to publicly speak out or feel responsible for violence prevention (Dinshak, 2008).

This study intends to make input in knowledge by evaluating the extent to which gender equality can affect peace building processes in conflict prone communities. Through systematic review of literature, this paper will examine the impact of male dominance and masculinity ideology in relegating women's engagement in peace building processes and assess the role of women in nonviolence and peacebuilding initiatives.

### **The Concept of Gender Equality**

Gender equality means the absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in opportunities, allocation of resources or benefits, and access to services. However, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Although there has been progress over the last decades in closing some gender disparity gaps, however, discriminatory laws and social norms remain pervasive. Women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of political leadership, and 1 in 5 women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 report experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner within a 12-month period (UN Women, 2011). Gender equality examines how differences in power relations result in differential risks, exposures, vulnerabilities, and outcomes for men and women. Gender-integrated approaches treat women and men's relative social, political, economic, educational, and health status as interrelated, intersectional, and interdependent but also changeable.

When we discuss gender equality it is necessary to identify the gender (which can either be female or male) that is marginalized or suppressed. This particular issue has raised questions, such as why should gender issue be directed only towards women and not men? Why women are considered more relevant in topical issue relating to gender? This is because throughout the globe women have been considered as the weaker sex and have been marginalized because of this connotation. Moreover, throughout history, women have faced intense discrimination—from lack of legal rights and very little independence from their husbands, to being thought as inferior to men and so on.

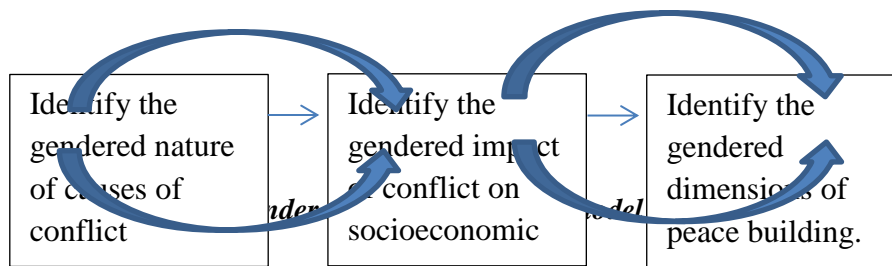
In many societies, women have long been viewed as less than fully human. Thus, this is why women are usually considered as the more vulnerable sex when we discuss gender equality. Further, the Women, Girls, and Gender Equality Framework of the UN (2008) posit interrelated pathways to achieving gender equality as follows:

- Reduced inequalities between men and women in access to and control over social and economic assets and resources
- Increased capacity to make decisions free of coercion or the threat of violence
- Increased adoption of gender norms that value men and women equally
- More equal participation of women and men as decision-makers and shapers of their societies
- Reduced gender-based disparities in men and women’s rights and status.

## 2.2 Gender Analysis of Conflict and Violence

The feminization of conflict discusses the different positions and roles of men and women in conflict and nonviolence processes. The World Bank Social Development Papers (2006:2) on gender mainstreaming in conflict suggested three important ways gender can be used as a lens for analyzing conflict:

- a. Identify the gendered nature of causes of conflict. The promotion of hyper masculinity together with violence (weapons) as the image of ‘manhood’ can be indicative of social forces influencing men. One indicator of potential for violence is high male youth unemployment and restiveness, which can be easily manipulated politically if linked to unfulfilled expectations.
- b. Identify the gendered impact of conflict on socioeconomic and emotional composition of women. For example, an increase in violence against women, which affects their ability to engage in development related activities, reduces productivity and impacts their livelihood. In the aftermath of war, women-headed households can be particularly vulnerable in situations where women have no rights to inherit land or property. Restrictions of movement, random arrests of their men (husbands and sons) and forced recruitment into militias or state armies can cause long-term mental health and emotional trauma for women
- c. Identify the gendered dimensions of peace building. As conflict escalates, spreads and continues over an extended period of time, the gender dimensions are further exacerbated. Women often become the sole care-providers for the young, the sick and the elderly. Crises force them into new roles (economic, social, and political) that they may not be equipped for and are additional to their normal domestic burdens.



Despite the significance of the gender analysis to conflict, there is still little understanding of the gender issues among conflict analysts (World Bank, 2006:2). As a result, gender variables are missing in most frameworks. Thus, the next sections to some extent provide the missing variables in this framework.

## 3.1 The Concept of Nonviolence

Nonviolence is an umbrella term for ways of life or the conducting of conflict in ways that do not permit the doing of harm to humans (Weber, 2008). For some it provides a coherent and principled philosophy for living in harmony with other humans as a well-integrated and grounded person, while for other it is employed pragmatically as a useful set of tactics which can be used in the fight for social justice (Carter, 2010). Nonviolence might be described as a direct substitute for violent behavior where it implies deliberate restraint from expected violence, in a context of contention between two or more adversaries (Semelin, 1993). The positional advantage of the term nonviolence is the emphasis on conscious and active opposition to violence. This means the conscious deterrence from appearance of violence and insurgency.

Since the overthrow of Marcos in the Philippines and the major upheavals in Eastern Europe along with the rise of activist and particularly peace-related social movements, nonviolence and nonviolent action as a method of political change has become increasingly viewed as an important process for social transformation (Carter, 2010). In recent times, nonviolent methods especially in conflict prone areas have been considered as a preference tool for social protest and revolutionary social and political change (Sharp, 2012; Roberts, 2010). There are movements which were particularly influenced by the philosophy of nonviolence such as Mahatma Gandhi's leadership of successful decades-long nonviolent struggle against rule in India, Martin Luther King's and James Bevel's adoption of Gandhi's nonviolent methods in their campaigns to win civil rights for African Americans, and Cesar Chavez campaigns of nonviolence in the 1960s to protest the treatment of farm workers in California (Ackerman and Duvall, 2001). Other examples include, the 1989 'Velvet Revolution' in Czechoslovakia that saw the overthrow of the Communist government is considered one of the most important of the largely nonviolent Revolutions of 1989 (Walter, 2010). There is also the nonviolent campaign of Leyman Gbowee and the women of Liberia were able to achieve peace after a 14-year civil war (Gbowee and Mithers, 2011).

Nonviolence ideology focus on the commitment to increased social justice for social transformation through peaceful means (Lederach, 1995:15). In fact, the discipline of conflict management and resolution emerged from historical peace movements and social justice activism (Dukes 1999: 169). However, over the years there has been division between the 'revolutionary' and 'resolutionary' camps, which seem to have grown in mutual ignorance. The developed their own distinct sets of activists and practitioners, theories and scholars, interpretative frames and ranges of techniques, which successfully popularized the peace concept globally (Lederach, 1995). However, despite its growing recognition in development discourse, nonviolence principle is still considered a weak agenda in very masculine societies and preexisting acute power asymmetries (Dudouet, 2006). Although the power of nonviolent resistance does seem weak and inefficient in the face of acute power asymmetries, it has proven to be a very strategic tool in the hand of marginalized groups such as women to redress structural imbalance and claim rights to justice or self-determination (Dudouet, 2006). That's why a pertinent question which has not been analyzed extensively so far, and which this article seeks to address, is to which context and under which conditions women can contribute to successful and sustainable conflict transformation processes.

#### **4.1 The Fate of Women during Conflict**

It is common fact that conflict affects men and women differently. As part of the changes that societies undergo during conflict, gender roles and identities may also change (Povey, 2003). Women may take up fighting directly, or they may take on new economic and social roles in the community due to challenges or aftermath effects of conflict. In most situations, conflict reduces women's agency and autonomy or free choice (Petesch, 2011). The dynamics of conflict equally shapes roles women and men will play in society, and most of the times negative impacts emerge from these changes in roles. On the one hand women's economic situation can worsen due to loss of their husbands during conflicts and the burden of decision-making in the household can emerge (Justino et al., 2012; Povey, 2003; Petesch, 2011). Potentially these changes can be the basis for enhanced agency of women in the private and public sphere, but where there is no support; they can easily wallow in poverty, starvation and even death with other members of their families. Where they are lucky, some civil society organizations have enabled women to develop a public voice that they had not had before, which is particularly critical in fragile contexts where they are often excluded from formal politics. Displacement is a common tragedy of conflict for women and girls during conflict and this can have a profound effect on women ranging from poverty, hunger, rape, victimizations, psychological trauma and death (Povey, 2003).

Furthermore, the disruption in social order that results from conflict can exacerbate existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities or some cases create new ones. These include: greater time poverty; increased domestic, sexual and physical violence; related stigma and social exclusion (including lack of access to basic services), and a re-assertion of patriarchal orders as conflict subsides. Moreover, the political environment in developing societies facilitate gender inequality - where violence may remain prevalent and decision-making occurs in informal and closed-door spaces which typically exclude women.

Therefore, factors to be considered that affect the prospects and opportunities for gender-positive change in developing countries : the causes and type of conflict; the features of pre-conflict gender relations; the nature of new gender economic and social roles that women take; women's status in terms of ethnicity, class, religion and how they are positioned in relation to political decision-making; the nature and resilience of social norms of patriarchy; and finally, the direction that the emerging political settlement is likely to take (Ni Aolain, 2012; O'Rourke, 2013; Rubio-Marin, 2006; Valji, 2012).

For this it is important to have a clear understanding about how the wider balance of political, social and economic power resulting from conflict and the transition process itself affects gender relations, and which can in turn be redefined through the advancement of a gender equality agenda.

### **5.1 Women, Hegemonic Masculinity and Nonviolence Practice**

Given their vulnerability to conflict, it is justifiable that women would supposedly want to avoid occurrence of any form of violence and work hard to overcome them (Enloe, 2005). Recent researches have shown that women will have more interest in nonviolent forms of conflict resolution in the family and the community (Boulding, 2000; Enloe, 2005). Some of them substantiate the argument that the male dominance and leadership often allow intolerance for differences which results in poor societal relations (Hudson et al., 2009:26). Others have shown that societies where women are given more liberty are less likely to experience repeated conflicts (Caprioli, 2005; Hudson et al., 2009; Melander, 2005). What is substantiated is that where gender equality is rejected more hostile attitudes toward minority groups like women are more profound (Melander, 2005).

Although recent research is sharing upcoming idea on the benefits of gender equality in control of violence (Forsberg and Olsson, 2016; Karim and Hill, 2018), the lack of specification of local level gender dimensions of conflict and peacebuilding remains an important gap in literature. To this end some authors like Hudson et al (2009:26) have opined that "if gendered violence can be undermined at its taproot—domestic violence within the home—the effects, as we have shown with violent patriarchy, should cascade outward to affect many social phenomena, including state security and behavior". This implies that the adjustment of the impact of gender imbalance in conflict resolution should be facilitated. In the helm of affairs is the implication of hegemonic masculinity in extending gender imbalances toward peacebuilding processes. This issue has limited many efforts towards engaging women in local based nonviolence processes for conflict management.

Scholars who study gender relations and social change point at the influence of hegemonic masculinity in diminishing women's active role in nonviolence initiatives in the grassroots (Duncanson, 2015; Enloe, 1983; Goldstein, 2001; Tickner, 2001). Connell (2005) opined that masculinities can be understood as the configuration of patriarchal norms and practices that maintains hegemonies of gender inequalities. Thus, feminists will view masculinity as hegemonic cultural ideals which men use to negotiate and renegotiate their dominance in the society (Higate, 2003). Unfortunately, this ideal has come to downgrade women's efforts or potentials in the process of social transformation and nonviolence change (Howe and Uvin, 2009). Masculine ideologies view conflict as men's purview, which makes it a taboo for women to be involved in (Krause, 2019). However, women's peace activism has recorded various successes in the past, for instance, nonviolent campaigns of Leyman Gbowee and the women of Liberia were able to achieve peace after 14-years of civil war (Gbowee and Mithers, 2011).

Women's movement for social change takes on distinct forms of collective mobilization around the notion of 'the care of motherhood', 'sacredness of womanhood' and 'peaceful women' (Berry, 2018). With these notions, women tend to pacify violent situations and effortlessly bring back humanity in the face of violent crisis (Goldstein, 2001). These are the peaceful attributes that women have which are very effective for conflict management. Due to their male ego, men tend to find it difficult to yield to their opponents, however, women can come in-between to plead for their men and control the situation by resisting violence and mildly yielding to their opponents (Cohen, 2013). Moreover, their tenderness and soft nature allow women to use social practices not equally available to men for settling conflicts peacefully. For example, women may conduct diplomacy roles that de-escalate communal relations even where male leaders may not officially condone it.

In most instances, women manage to 'cope' by developing new skills, taking a lead in peace-building, economic recovery and reconciliation activities after war or during conflicts (Worldbank, 2006:2). On the other hand, men's involvements in warfare have negative impacts on their ability to engage in civil life or become economically productive (Worldbank, 2006:2; Cohen, 2013).

Most male war veterans are too traumatized and unwilling to revert to normal traditional lifestyles in rural areas, and thus can become potential threats to violence and sources of instability (Worldbank, 2006:2). Given their experiences in fighting, they can easily be recruited by criminal elements (drug and human trafficking rings) that offer more lucrative jobs in already war-torn economies. Thus, it is not an overstatement to say that the integration of gender equality with relations to the important role of women in peacebuilding and nonviolence social transformation is very much relevant in any conflict management initiative.

### **6.1 Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper looked at the role of gender equality in nonviolence initiatives for peace building. It was able to show what works to substantively integrate gender in peacebuilding in fragile and conflict contexts, and how gender responsive approaches specifically contribute to peacebuilding. When we look closely at women's experiences in conflict (i.e. the disadvantages) we will understand why it will be of their best interest to maintain peace or work towards maintenance of peace in their societies. The reviewed literatures showed that gender relations tend to shape communal violence, nonviolence, and post violence prevention when local agencies are gendered. The critical assessment of literature equally revealed that most developing societies engender masculine ideologies which tend to relegate the role women in instating peace or advancing nonviolent movements for peace in their communities. These masculine ideologies have also stifled the voice of women and vital engagement in peace building processes. However, from a feminist perspective, the paper argued that women's roles where they have been utilized have yielded many successes in peacebuilding processes. The psychological, economical, moral and natural roles women can play in settling conflicts in their societies through peaceful means cannot be underestimated. However, building sustainable peace in conflicted areas in grassroots demands the dismantling of male dominance and masculinity that tend to exacerbate conflict and distort gender equality. This paper has substantiated that whatever context it is implied, gender equality tends to bring balance in the understanding of the equal contribution of men and women in advancing development of the society. Gender equality initiative in peacebuilding and nonviolent social transformation should aim to establish not just the contribution of both gender in peacebuilding processes, but the continuation of the recognition of women in the processes, ethics and practice of nonviolent peace building. Therefore, this study makes recommendations for a theory of change and policy shift that will facilitate gender equality in peacebuilding processes and initiatives in national, state and grassroots levels as follow:

- There is requirement for the embeddedness of gender-equality goals through redefinition of the rules of social, political and economic engagement. These are important to capitalize when the opportunities of gender equality become threatened in the society
- There is need to work with a range of stakeholders (including gender advocates and decision-makers) to address the key points and processes of peacebuilding and to facilitate gender equality and women's empowerment. Thus, the conduct and attitudes, and all forms of "resistance" to gender equality in societies as well as belief systems require institutional (formal and informal) and political change.
- Working with non-state actors, civil society and informal institutions especially in the grassroots level, may be the most effective entry-point for addressing gender-based inequalities and discriminatory social norms, and renegotiating women's public and private roles in nonviolent peace movements
- The theory of change that can inform programme design, intervention choice and implementation should be harnessed for progressing gender equality in peace building initiatives
- Address how gender inequality intersect with wider dynamics of social, political and economic change in transitional settings and involve spheres of change relevant to peacebuilding and operate from a gender perspective. This includes dealing with the legacies of conflict, political voice and governance and deliverance of core state functions through gender lenses.

These recommendations are necessary to achieve change in peacebuilding that advances gender equality objectives. The importance of adapting a theory of change to context specific opportunities and constraint towards women is critical. Moreover, there is need to revisit and test underlying interventions and how they contribute to intended change processes and outputs.

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