

Role of African Women in Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Reconciliation & Rehabilitation

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How to cite this paper: Yogo, H. N., & Zamba, A. D. (2025). Role of African Women in Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Reconciliation & Rehabilitation. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 13, 485-515.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2025.131030>

Received: December 20, 2024

Accepted: January 28, 2025

Published: January 31, 2025

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Abstract

This paper studies the roles of women in post-conflict demobilization, emphasizing their contributions to security and peace building in Africa, with a specific focus on the crisis in Cameroon. It reviews historical and current issues affecting women during and after conflicts, including marginalization and violence. In addition, this paper explores a wide range of reviewed theses on the subject in question, journals, articles, magazines (Human Rights Watch/Africa/Cameroon 2016-2019), occasional papers, in-depth interviews with those on the fields (20 female colleagues in different security roles who were purposefully chosen for the study), reports from CHRDA (Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa) and other International Development Agencies. Our findings are based on primary experiences after haven been in the field for years, working hand in globe with the government of Nigeria under the auspices of both international and national alliances in the security sector to harness a safer society for Africa as a whole and the world at large. Nonetheless, working with secondary source from journals, books, articles and internet publications have been of greater assistance. It is unfortunate that we are yet to learn and implement better and more practical policies towards protecting our women and children as appealed by the United Nations Council Resolution. Take a closer look at what is ongoing in Cameroon, where thousands of women and children remain the majority as casualties in discrimination, hostilities and marginalisation. After a comprehensive analysis of my experiences in the security sector, I salute the sacrifices of well-meaning organisations like WAELE, who is soled determined in promoting and ensuring that, there are policies which governs and pushes forth sustainable peace for women, with the aim of providing a greater effort to financially support a broader spectrum of local actors who work in the gender dimension. On the same note, we are

recommending quality and immediate actions from the United Nations, African Union, European Union, Amnesty International, Plan International as well as other large scale donor countries to keep making progressive impacts in better creating spheres where our women and children will always feel more empowered, safer and protected.

Keywords

Post-Conflict, Security, Demobilization, Women's Role, IDPs, The Cameroons, Africa

1. Introduction

Based on situational reports, reoccurrences of world's events both in post and contemporary times, it has been concluded that, our women and children make up the majority of those who are most vulnerable as they're the least prepared before, during and after the burst out of crises like civil wars, genocides, conflict upheavals or violent conflicts. This is pitiable because women and children have hardly been recorded either as war instigators, perpetrators nor violence provokers; still they are the most affected.

Theoretical findings by some scholars stated that; women and children are the most vulnerable and deeply affected during violent conflicts of which they did not partook in its creation (Agbalajobi, 2012).

Meanwhile, scholars have added that women suffer the most from the aftermath of conflict and social fragmentation in countries recovering from crises and devastations. Since 2016, women, children and the old have been burnt, killed, raped and sexually abused by both the military and the separatist fighters in the Cameroons (Yogo, 2021; CHRDA, 2019). Unfortunately, what happened in Rwanda is repeating itself in the Cameroons and we are not doing enough to bring the ugly situation under security control.

During the ongoing crisis in the Cameroons, the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) in the 24th months following the escalation of the crisis, conducted fact-finding missions and carried out interviews in the affected regions with women and girls in relation to gender-based violence and sexual assault, including interviews with detained women and young girls. Their report findings showed that, more than 75 percent of women interviewed had experienced physical or sexual violence. Military and security forces have mistreated over 175 female IDPs and sexually exploited female refugees travelling without national identity cards in exchange for letting the women through security checkpoints. Since in the North West region, the governor established a curfew of 6 p.m., which affects women involved in informal businesses. The curfew did encouraged corrupt and sexually exploitative practices, such as women being asked for sex in exchange for permission to travel past roadblocks and security checks after curfew.

CHRDA has reported that female students at the University of Buea were molested and physically assaulted by state forces. At least one female student was raped on November 28, 2016, in Buea by a police officer. No concrete steps have been taken to identify or hold accountable the perpetrators. Physical insecurity, sexual assault, and loss of lives are not the only consequences for women in this context. Women also bear the brunt of the economic hardship and food insecurity caused by the crisis, for themselves and their children. In most rural communities in the Cameroons, women are mainly involved in subsistence agriculture and informal businesses to earn a livelihood and sustain their families. Women farmers are already vulnerable because they generally have little or no legal access to land title and often rely on their husbands' or sons' help for physically challenging tasks like clearing land. However, the killing and arbitrary arrests of men and boys in these rural communities have left women with little to no assistance or support, exposing them to every forms of possible hurts, harms and insecurity which require immediate call for actions (CHRDA, 2019).

It is also on record that at least 100,000 people were killed in Burundi, which included many women, children, and elderly, who were often slaughtered in an extremely brutal fashion (Mpangala, 2004). This is the reason why it is argued that in Africa, women and children are the “violated during the violation, the victims of the victimisation and the captured of the captives” during periods of violent conflict (Alaga, 2010). Interestingly, research has shown that in spite of the suffering women face before, during and after times of civil war, they have played and continues to play crucial roles in post-conflict peace building. For instance, after the 1991 violent conflict in (Wajir), Kenya, leading to more than 1,200 deaths, Wajir women as a part of their peace building efforts established the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC).

Other bodies like the religious denominations alongside Human Rights organisations like CHRDA are playing instrumental roles through mediations, facts finding and support of all kinds at different levels to promote some degree of global awareness as to the unbelievable reality on grounds in the Cameroon; a scenario not different from intentional cold blooded genocide. When we go back to the history of South Africa, during the post-apartheid period, we read how local women were determined and took up initiatives in picking up all kinds of jobs all as a way out to provide them with menial incomes to help them develop their devastated communities, build security structures to enhance peace building. Other women in Cameroon are going out of their ways in opening their homes to many, providing shelter to orphans, caring for genocide survivors and encouraging other women to withdraw their children from fighting. While other women groups have taken to the streets to stage a ceasefire march, calling on those fighting to drop their weapons and engage in a peace talk and mutual negotiations. In the same light, during the Liberian Peace Talks, women held hostage the parties participating at the negotiations table. Their aim was to stop the parties involved from walking away when importance matters were

being brought to light during the critical discussion, as a result delaying the attainment of a negotiated settlement (Alaga, 2010). Then came 2014, whereby in Guinea Bissau, the national army was deployed to calm down protesters. But the local women's groups went ahead to launch an advocacy campaign, which led to the subsequent dialogue between the stakeholders involved in ensuring peace. It is not so encouraging that, despite all the efforts put in by women across Africa to be heard, there is still less African women's voices and full participation in policy makings, decisions taking which affect them. There have been debates on the fact that, most societies lay more value on men and masculinity as compared to women and femininity during peace talks on certain security measures (Manjrika, 2005). And like we may have equally read or worthy to note is the fact that, on Pg 64 'The Journal of Pan African Studies, vol.8, no.9, December 2015; in a bid to acknowledge the roles played by women and their current involvement in post-conflict peace building, stated why the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was designed in 2000. Upon the creation of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, the UNSCR did recognise the sole importance of women's experiences in conflict to its peace, demobilization, reconstruction, rehabilitation and security mandates; as a result, advancing the fundament rights of women in conflict resolution and peace processes. Nonetheless, if we take a look at the ongoing genocide in the Cameroons, which started jokingly in 2016 and has escalated to this deteriorating stage, then we may have probing questions as whether the UNSCR1325 is making progress in achieving its purpose of establishment and creation. Like we said earlier on, we would be exploring the role of women in post-conflict situations in regards to demobilization and security; thus looking at the experiences of the women in the Cameroons.

Based on our main objective, the following essay comprised of paragraphs explaining the concept of security, a brief history about the Cameroons, sharing a clearer picture of the unfolding violence against women, children and the elderly. The roles being played by women, women's groups, and other bodies; a review of the UNSCR 1325 on women's total inclusion in peace building and security and the sad reality on grounds. Propositions for women, women's groups, international agencies and actors who are willing to promote, evaluate and affirm that, what is being written on papers would be actualised with little or no hindrances for the wellness of our women and children. There is an urgent need for such bodies like the European Union (EU), Africa Union (AU), United Nations (UN), Amnesty International (AI), Plan International (PI) to not only provide a consistence long term of financial assistance for the survival of women's peace and security alert ventures but to ensure that, things are done rightly (Abu-Saba,1999). For there is a high need for the championing of women's rights movements, including gender no violence projects, breaking the silence and walking the talk as well as gender empowerment and a balanced political participation for all African women irrespective of their social status (Agbalajobi, 2012).

2. Empirical Approach and Methodology

We set out to work in October 2019 and by March 2020, we were able to sample both qualitative and quantitative data for this presentation from a wide range of reviewed theses on the subject in question, journals, articles, magazines (Human Rights Watch/Africa/Cameroon 2016-2019), occasional papers, in-depth interviews with those on the fields, reports from CHRDA (Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa) and other International Development Agencies. We took the initiatives to rely on CHRDA's unfolding reports against Human Rights in Cameroon, a case of carnage so to say. This equally gave us an upper hand in reviewing internet publications, for the obvious reasons, that the internet has been rated as one of the easiest ways of data collection for all works of lives in our time. We did not fail to rule out the bottlenecks on relying on internet publications. That was why we extended our research in conducting in-depth interviews with those in the fields for firsthand information, to help us balance our findings and avoid any forms of prejudices or bias in our analysis and facts presentations. In sum, we used to start collecting data for this presentation from 15th December 2019 to 24th March 2020 in exploring the roles played by women in terms of security in the Cameroons in the ongoing crisis as well as exploring what more women can do in the nearest post era. Experiences in the North of Nigeria where we have lived, worked and experienced such gaps, has led us with no option than to look into the nearest future and prepared the next generation as to what would be required of them. No one suffers the tragedy of wars outbreak the most like women, children and the elderly. Thus, we see the indisputable needs to step in on time to avoid more casualties and victims. Sociologically speaking, traumatised and insecure groups of women and children are not a thing to bargain for (Yogo, 2012). No society should be allowed to neglect the cries of such. A point we would want to emphasis more in our presentation. With or without the fundamental needs of life in any community, the safety of women, children and the elderly must be prioritized. For a core unchangeable and irreversible truth like, we were all born by women, we were all once children and we all are elders. So, it is debatable that we stay mute on the state of security regarding this category of people. Neglecting the security and welfare of women, children, and the elderly exacerbates societal harm and creates long-lasting consequences for the community. Indeed, we all can be victims of same sorts at any point in time. Cameroon had been celebrated for years as most peaceful country in Africa before the genesis of the crisis took another turn in 2016. Cameroonians from all works of lives had no idea, how ugly a war zone could look like till they became victims themselves. Imagine a woman, being raped, mutilated, killed and her naked body parts being dragged in the streets in mud, with her head being cut off, slaughtered like a piece of meat. This is what we are talking about. Sure, you will agree with us now, that after the presentation of our paper at this WAELE's African Summit, we should not leave here, until a strong NO message to send to the Cameroons, calling on Absolute Negotiations and Feasible Measures with an Active Evaluation Team on Standby to improve on

the state of security of women in the Cameroons.

3. Contextualization of Terms

According to the designing of the UNSCR 1325 on women's total inclusion in peace building and security mandate, we cannot separate women's total inclusion in peace building and their states of security for they go hand in globe. Haven laid this foundation; we would want to review some definitions of terms and contextualizing them in our presentation as relevant as possible. Hence, we shall be taking on peace building, security and its different dimension, demobilization, IDPs and a brief history of the Cameroons.

The word *secure* did surfaced in the English language around the 16th century. It is a word derived from the Latin word *securus*, which means freedom from anxiety. That is freedom from fear which could mean the fear of the known and unknown. It could also be defined as either freedom from, or resilience against, potential harm or other unwanted coercive change caused by others. In our context, beneficiaries that are referents of security may be of persons and social groups who are vulnerable. Like in our case here, we are referring to women, children and the elderly. A security referent is the focus of a security policy or discourse; for example, a referent may be a potential beneficiary (or victim) of a security policy or system. Security referents may be persons or social groups, objects, institutions, ecosystems, or any other phenomenon vulnerable to unwanted change by the forces of its environment. The referent in question may combine many referents, in the same way that, for example, a nation state is composed of many individual citizens. The security context is the relationships between a security referent and its environment. From this perspective, security and insecurity depend first on whether the environment is beneficial or hostile to the referent, and also how capable is the referent of responding to its/their environment in order to survive and thrive. The means by which a referent provides for security (or is provided for) vary widely. They include, for example:

- Coercive capabilities, including the capacity to project coercive power into the environment (e.g. aircraft carrier, handgun, firearms);
- Protective systems (e.g. lock, fence, wall, antivirus software, air defence system, armour);
- Warning systems (e.g. alarm, radar);
- Diplomatic and social action intended to prevent insecurity from developing (e.g. conflict prevention and transformation strategies); and
- Policy intended to develop the lasting economic, physical, ecological and other conditions of security (e.g. economic reform, ecological protection, progressive demilitarization, militarization).

Any action intended to provide security may have multiple effects. For example, an action may have wide benefit, enhancing security for several or all security referents in the context; alternatively, the action may be effective only temporarily, or benefit one referent at the expense of another, or be entirely ineffective or

counterproductive. It is important to remark that, we cannot talk about the role of women in security without making reference to human and national security and understanding what it entails. Human security is an emerging paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities whose proponents challenge the traditional notion of national security by arguing that the proper referent for security should be at the human rather than national level. Human security reveals a people-centred and multi-disciplinary understanding of security involves a number of research fields, including development studies, international relations, strategic studies, and human rights. The United Nations Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report is considered a milestone publication in the field of human security, with its argument that insuring "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" for all persons is the best path to tackle the problem of global insecurity.

Critics of the concept argue that its vagueness undermines its effectiveness, that it has become little more than a vehicle for activists wishing to promote certain causes, and that it does not help the research community understand what security means or help decision makers to formulate good policies. Alternatively, other scholars have argued that the concept of human security should be broadened to encompass military security: "In other words, if this thing called 'human security' has the concept of 'the human' embedded at the heart of it, then let us address the question of the human condition directly. Thus understood, human security would no longer be the vague amorphous add-on to harder edged areas of security such as military security or state security." In order for human security to challenge global inequalities, there has to be cooperation between a country's foreign policy and its approach to global health. However, the interest of the state has continued to overshadow the interest of the people. For instance, Canada's foreign policy, "three Ds", has been criticized for emphasizing defense more than development. National security or national defense is the security and defense of a nation state, including its citizens, economy, and institutions, which is regarded as a duty of government. Originally conceived as protection against military attack, national security is now widely understood to include also non-military dimensions, including the security from terrorism, minimization of crime, economic security, energy security, environmental security, food security, cyber-security etc. Similarly, national security risks include, in addition to the actions of other nation states, action by violent non-state actors, by narcotic cartels, and by multinational corporations, and also the effects of natural disasters. Governments rely on a range of measures, including political, economic, and military power, as well as diplomacy, to safeguard the security of a nation-state. They may also act to build the conditions of security regionally and internationally by reducing transnational causes of insecurity, such as climate change, economic inequality, political exclusion, and nuclear proliferation. Going further to explore the dimensions of national security, we learn that, potential causes of national insecurity include actions by other states (e.g. military or cyber-attack), violent non-state actors (e.g. terrorist attack), organised criminal groups such as narcotic cartels, and also the

effects of natural disasters (e.g. flooding, earthquakes). Systemic drivers of insecurity, which may be transnational, include climate change, economic inequality and marginalisation, political exclusion, and militarisation. In view of the wide range of risks, the security of a nation state has several dimensions, including economic security, energy security, physical security, environmental security, food security, border security, and cyber security. These dimensions correlate closely with elements of national power. Increasingly, governments organise their security policies into a national security strategy (NSS); as of 2017, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States are among the states to have done so. Some states also appoint a National Security Council to oversee the strategy and/or a National Security Advisor. Although states differ in their approach, with some beginning to prioritise non-military action to tackle systemic drivers of insecurity, various forms of coercive power predominate, particularly military capabilities. The scope of these capabilities has developed. Traditionally, military capabilities were mainly land- or sea-based, and in smaller countries they still are. Elsewhere, the domains of potential warfare now include the air, space, cyberspace, and psychological operations. Military capabilities designed for these domains may be used for national security, or equally for offensive purposes, for example to conquer and annex territory and resources.

3.1. Physical Security

In practice, national security is associated primarily with managing physical threats and with the military capabilities used for doing so. That is, national security is often understood as the capacity of a nation to mobilise military forces to guarantee its borders and to deter or successfully defend against physical threats including military aggression and attacks by non-state actors, such as terrorism. Most states, such as South Africa and Sweden configure their military forces mainly for territorial defence; others, such as France, Russia, the UK and the US, invest in higher-cost expeditionary capabilities, which allow their armed forces to project power and sustain military operations abroad.

3.2. Political Security

Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde and others have argued that national security depends on political security: the stability of the social order. Others, such as Paul Rogers, have added that the equitability of the international order is equally vital. Hence, political security depends on the rule of international law (including the laws of war), the effectiveness of international political institutions, as well as diplomacy and negotiation between nations and other security actors. It also depends on, among other factors, effective political inclusion of disaffected groups and the human security of the citizenry.

3.3. Economic Security

Economic security, in the context of international relations, is the ability of a nation state to maintain and develop the national economy, without which other

dimensions of national security cannot be managed. In larger countries, strategies for economic security expect to access resources and markets in other countries, and to protect their own markets at home. Developing countries may be less secure than economically advanced states due to high rates of unemployment and underpaid work.

3.4. Ecological Security

Ecological security, also known as environmental security, refers to the integrity of ecosystems and the biosphere, particularly in relation to their capacity to sustain a diversity of life-forms (including human life). The security of ecosystems has attracted greater attention as the impact of ecological damage by humans has grown. The degradation of ecosystems, including topsoil erosion, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate change, affect economic security and can precipitate mass migration, leading to increased pressure on resources elsewhere.

The scope and nature of environmental threats to national security and strategies to engage them is a subject of debate. Romm (1993) classifies the major impacts of ecological changes on national security as:

- Transnational environmental problems. These include global environmental problems such as climate change due to global warming, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity.
- Local environmental or resource pressures. These include resource scarcities leading to local conflict, such as disputes over water scarcity in the Middle East; migration into the United States caused by the failure of agriculture in Mexico; and the impact on the conflict in Syria of erosion of productive land. Environmental insecurity in Rwanda following a rise in population and dwindling availability of farmland, may also have contributed to the genocide there.
- Environmentally threatening outcomes of warfare. These include acts of war that degrade or destroy ecosystems. Examples are the Roman destruction of agriculture in Carthage; Saddam Hussein's burning of oil wells in the Gulf War; the use of Agent Orange by the UK in the Malayan Emergency and the USA in the Vietnam War for defoliating forests; and the high greenhouse gas emissions of military forces.

3.5. Security of Energy and Natural Resources

Resources include water, sources of energy, land and minerals. Availability of adequate natural resources is important for a nation to develop its industry and economic power. For example, in the Persian Gulf War of 1991, Iraq captured Kuwait partly in order to secure access to its oil wells, and one reason for the US counter-invasion was the value of the same wells to its own economy. Water resources are subject to disputes between many nations, including India and Pakistan, and in the Middle East. The interrelations between security, energy, natural resources, and their sustainability is increasingly acknowledged in national security strategies and resource security is now included among the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In the US, for example, the military has installed solar photovoltaic

micro grids on their bases in case of power outage.

3.6. Computer Security

Computer security, also known as cyber security or IT security refers to the security of computing devices such as computers and smart phones, as well as computer networks such as private and public networks, and the Internet. It concerns the protection of hardware, software, data, people, and also the procedures by which systems are accessed, and the field has growing importance due to the increasing reliance on computer systems in most societies. Since unauthorized access to critical civil and military infrastructure is now considered a major threat, cyberspace is now recognised as a domain of warfare.

3.7. Infrastructure Security

Infrastructure security is the security provided to protect infrastructure, especially critical infrastructure, such as airports, highways rail transport, hospitals, bridges, transport hubs, network communications, media, the electricity grid, dams, power plants, seaports, oil refineries, and water systems. Infrastructure security seeks to limit vulnerability of these structures and systems to sabotage, terrorism, and contamination.

Many countries have established government agencies to directly manage the security of critical infrastructure usually through the Ministry of Interior/Home Affairs, dedicated security agencies to protect facilities such as United States Federal Protective Service, and also dedicated transport police such as the British Transport Police. There are also commercial transportation security units, such as the Amtrak Police in the United States. Critical infrastructure is vital for the essential functioning of a country. Incidental or deliberate damage can have a serious impact on the economy and essential services. Some of the threats to infrastructure include:

- Terrorism: person or groups deliberately targeting critical infrastructure for political gain. In the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, the Mumbai central station and hospital were deliberately targeted, for example.
- Sabotage: person or groups such as ex-employees, anti-government groups, environmental groups. Refer to Bangkok's International Airport Seized by Protestors.
- Information warfare: private person hacking for private gain or countries initiating attacks to glean information and damage a country's cyber infrastructure. Cyber attacks on Estonia and cyber attacks during the 2008 South Ossetia war are examples.
- Natural disaster: hurricane or other natural events which damage critical infrastructure such as oil pipelines, water and power grids. See Hurricane Ike and Economic effects of Hurricane Katrina for examples.

3.8. Demobilization

From a sociological perspective we would like to look at the term demobilization

in line to our study of interest as the process of disengaging individuals or groups from a particular social or political movement. It is a process that involves the cessation of collective action and withdrawal of support or participation from the movement. In this case we are referring to the roles of women who are increasingly involved in combat or are associated with armed groups and forces as community peace-builders and or play significant roles in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes. However women seem almost never included in the planning or implementation of DDR. Interestingly, the UN and other peace building stakeholders who are concerned with the process of demobilization are setting clearer and practical structures for measuring and evaluating the active participation of women in all aspects of peace-building. The aim is a resolution which begins with the recognition of women's visibility both in national and regional levels. Despite the establishment of this Security Council resolution 1325, which has been in existence since 2000 as enacted by the UN, it hasn't recorded a success story for the women in Cameroon as reported by CHRDA, 2019. One of CHRDA's reports stated that a group of women who peacefully protested in the southwest region of Cameroon were ignored by the power be and their plight dismissed.

United Nations peace operations are the leading international partner of national institutions implementing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration initiatives, designing context-specific programmes for members of armed groups (Wessells, 1992). Through a process of removing weapons from the hands of members of armed groups, taking these combatants out of their groups and helping them to reintegrate as civilians into society, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration seeks to support ex-combatants and those associated with armed groups, so that they can become active participants in the peace process (Paris et al., 2009). Therefore, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) lays the groundwork for safeguarding and sustaining the communities to which these individuals return, while building capacity for long-term peace, security and development (Porter, 2007). Therefore, even when women are not involved with armed forces or conflicting groups, women are strongly affected by decisions made during the demobilization of men. Consequently, addressing women's political, social and economic marginalization or other forms of violence against women and the girl-child in conflict and post-conflict zones must take into consideration men's experiences and expectations. In situations where it is too early or not possible to carry out disarmament, demobilization and reintegration work the UN supports Community Violence Reduction programmes that lead to the right conditions for political processes to progress and armed groups to disband. An example of what is happening can be seen as of 2017-2018, the team of OROLSI's Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section was supporting disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes in UN Peacekeeping Operations in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Darfur (UNAMID), the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), Mali (MINUSMA), and South Sudan (UNMISS) (Sarah, 2019). Furthermore, special attention need to be

directed to girl soldiers (in Cameroon for example, most of the girls who joined the armed forces as combatants and became pregnant automatically gained the status of women) (Terretta, 2007). On this note, there is a need to better understand local interpretations of who is referred to as a girl-soldier and a woman soldier (Romm, 1993).

The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section also supports operations in UN Special Political Missions in Colombia (UNVMC), Libya (UNSMIL), Somalia (UNSOM), Syria (OSE-Syria), and Yemen (OSES-GY), the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU), the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General in Burundi (OSASG-B) and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes (OSES-G-L), Liberia (UNFPA) as well as in non-mission settings such as Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and the Republic of the Congo (Sarah et al., 2012). It is often assumed that armed men are the primary threat to post-conflict security and as a result should be the main focus of demobilization. Nevertheless, the situation is not always as assumed. The UN, 2006 reports stated that, although males (adults, youth and boys) may likely always be fully involved in most conflicts and are the first to pick up arms to form group of combatants either fighting for a course or against a course, females (adults, youth and girls) are equally likely to get involved in violence and conflict of some kind either directly or indirectly. The UN is engaging more and more often with armed groups in complex mission environments. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and community violence reduction officers have become the first UN staff deployed on the ground with the mandate and expertise to engage directly with combatants. They are therefore called upon to provide advice on how to engage with armed groups and ultimately contribute to the signing of an agreement. In spite of stereotypical beliefs, women and girls are not only peace makers; they are relevant contributors to ongoing insecurity and violence during present and post conflict (UNIDDR, 2006). These roles played by women and the girl combatants may be challenging to measure. In the case of Cameroon, the women combatants and other women and girls associated with armed forces and groups in non-fighting roles is difficult to measure. Some fought for brief periods and later returned to their families and communities, while others took up other roles as informants between groups all contributing to the existing war (CHRDA, 2019). Such women would have reintegrated and are unlikely to present themselves for demobilization. Most importantly, it is the responsibility of all demobilization planners and stakeholders to get female representatives and women's groups or women's social associations to secure their full participation at all formulation and implementation levels through the processes of demobilization.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration support to mediation processes comprises three types of activities that can be undertaken before, during and after the mediation process:

- Mediation support: deployment of experts, drafting provision of agreements, and negotiation advice.

- Analysis: mapping of armed groups and identification of entry points for programmatic engagement.
- Capacity building: strengthening the parties' ability to work constructively towards an agreement.

And according to the grounded guiding theory in this study, which postulates that male combatants are the main focus of demobilization, we stand to argue against, stating clearly that women play significant roles in maintaining and enabling armed forces and groups, in both forced and voluntary capacities. What qualifies a combatant should not be depended upon the budget of the stakeholders and planners of demobilization. For this seem to be the driving force supporting the exclusion of women in the demobilization processes and focusing mainly on the male combatants. Hence, we advocate for non-discrimination, and fair and equitable treatment, gender equality and women's participation and finally the respect for human rights,

The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section have deployed mediation support to Darfur, Central African Republic, Colombia, Mali and Yemen. In the last decade, we have seen a shift to UN interventions taking place earlier in the peace process, with operations deployed during intense conflict (Robert et al., 2019). Some of the armed groups which are unlikely to have signed a peace agreement are often involved in shadow economies and transnational criminal networks. In some cases, armed groups may even be indistinguishable from communities. In response, the UN has adapted from traditional, sequenced and individual-focused disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to a more community-focused approach, known as "Second Generation DDR". At the forefront of this is what we call Community Violence Reduction. Unfortunately, this is cannot be said the same for the Cameroons where there is an ongoing silence genocide.

3.9. Peace Building

Peace building is an activity that aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent ways and to transform the cultural & structural conditions that generate deadly or destructive conflict. It revolves around developing constructive personal, group, and political relationships across ethnic, religious, class, national, and racial boundaries. This process includes violence prevention; conflict management, resolution, or transformation; and post-conflict reconciliation or trauma healing, i.e., before, during, and after any given case of violence.

As such, peace building is a multidisciplinary, cross-sector technique or method which becomes strategic when it works over the long run and at all levels of society to establish and sustain relationships among people locally and globally—thus engendering sustainable peace. Strategic peace building activities address the root causes or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution, and stabilize society politically and socioeconomically.

The included in peace building vary depending on the situation and the agent

of peace building. Successful peace building activities create an environment supportive of self-sustaining, durable peace; reconcile opponents; prevent conflict from restarting; integrate civil society; create rule of law mechanisms; and address underlying structural and societal issues. Researchers and practitioners also increasingly find that peace building is most effective and durable when it relies upon local conceptions of peace and the underlying dynamics which foster or enable conflict.

However, the concept of peace building has been defined different by several departments, institutions, schools, agencies, scholars, etc. For instance, according to [Call and Cousens \(2007\)](#), peace building refers to those actions undertaken by international or national actors to institutionalise peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict (negative peace) and a modicum of participatory politics (as a component of positive peace) that can be sustained in the absence of an international peace operation. 65 *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.8, no.9, December 2015 Peace building also means, to preserve and to ensure enduring peace in the society, removing the root causes of the conflict and genuinely reconciling the conflicting parties ([Nwolise, 2005](#)).

[Lederach \(1997\)](#) defines peace building as the term that involves a wide range of activities and functions that precede and follow formal peace accords. Similarly, [Porter \(2007\)](#) defined peace building to involve all processes that build positive relationships, heal wounds, reconcile antagonistic differences, restore esteem, respect rights, meet basic needs, enhance equality, instil feelings of security, empower moral agency and are democratic, inclusive and just. As a follow up, peace psychologists have described peace building in terms of prevention, being proactive, problem solving, meeting human needs, and ending oppression and inequality ([Christie, 1997](#); [Wessells, 1992](#); [Abu-Saba, 1999](#)).

There has been the question as to what exactly can be considered a definition for peace building. On the same note, the definition by former UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali has received some level of global attention. He defined peace building in his Agenda for Peace as “The process by which an achieved peace is placed on durable foundations and which prevents violent conflict from recurring by dealing with the underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems responsible for the conflict” ([UN, 1992: 57](#)). Since then, the concept of peace building and its agenda have evolved significantly with the UN playing a crucial leading role. Boutros-Ghali reiterate that, peace building is the action undertaken by national or international actors to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict ([Call & Cousens, 2007](#)).

Drawing from the above assertions, this paper is also guided by the definition from [Mazurana and McKay \(1999\)](#), who argued that. Peace building refers to gender-awareness and women empowerment in political, social, economic and human rights.

These scholars re-emphasised that, peace building involves personal and group

accountability and reconciliation processes which contribute to the reduction or prevention of violence (Mazurana & McKay, 1999). Basically, two main approaches to peace building have been used in the past and are still in use in recent times to transform post-conflict countries, hence, western-conventional and indigenous approaches to peace building. The western-conventional approaches to peace building refer to the use of external bodies and systems to transform countries recovering from civil wars, violent conflicts and natural disasters. It could also be defined as the use of formal and external bodies and structures in attempting to end a conflict (Bukari, 2013).

Paris, Newman and Richmond (2009) observe that, the prevailing paradigm of western-conventional approaches to peace building; liberal peace building and liberal internationalism refers to the transformation of war shattered states into market democratic states and the holding of immediate democratic elections. Principles of western-conventional peace building include holding immediate democratic elections, promoting market liberalism, enhancing humanitarian assistance, encouraging litigation and promoting rule of law (Hoffmann, 1995). On Pg.66 in *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.8, no.9, December 2015: On the contrary, indigenous approach to peace building refers to the process of identifying the structural causes of conflict and using elements such as mediation and negotiation within African origin to promote sustainable peace.

Reviewing Udofia (2011), indigenous or traditional peace building approach centres primarily on negotiation, mediation, conciliation, pacification and appeasement. And it has been evidently supported by other scholars, stating that, traditional societies resolved conflicts through cultural, internal and external social control mechanisms. Indeed, the traditional approach to peace building seek to promote a win-win or non-zero sum game approach to peace building (Issifu, 2015a).

In the same light, Zartman (2000) emphasises that, the task of the indigenous approach to peace building is to re-establish contact between individuals, families and communities with the goal to rebuild social harmony. The efforts of women in conflict resolution and peace building are captured under the indigenous approach to peace building because, before the formalisation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, women in Africa had already played key roles in post-conflict reconstruction. More so, the Security Council Resolution 1325 was validated based on the roles and successes of women in post-conflict peace building

4. A Brief and Factual History about the Cameroons Which You Need to Know

Cameroon today is one of Africa's most diverse countries, with 250 ethnic groups and identities. According to 2018 UN figures, the population of Cameroon is 24.7 million people. English speakers represent between 4 and 5 million people living mainly in the South West and North West regions.

English and French are the two official languages under the Constitution. The

crisis in Cameroon is commonly characterized as a linguistic one, with politically marginalized Anglophones opposing the government, but language is only part of the crisis, which is deeply rooted in the local and institutional culture and history of decolonization.

After the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles split the previously German territory into British and French colonies, with the French occupying the larger territory. The two parts of the British colonies, Northern and Southern Cameroons, were part of the Federation of Nigeria, which was also administered by Britain. Both the French and English areas were under League of Nations mandates. The territories eventually became Class B United Nations Trust Territories under the Trusteeship System following the Second World War.

4.1. The Issue of Decolonization and Independence

On January 1st, 1960, the French-administered territory in Cameroon achieved independence and became the Republic of Cameroon (République du Cameroun). It became a member of the UN on September 20, 1960. Nigeria acceded to independence the same year. Southern Cameroons separated from Nigeria, but remained under British administration, independent from the French-speaking area. On February 11th, 1961, the UN sponsored a plebiscite on the Anglophone region. Anglophones were offered two options to “achieve independence,” either by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria or by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon. Full and separate independence was not offered, considerably weakening Anglophone politicians’ bargaining power with either Nigeria or Cameroon.

The Northern part of the British colonies voted to remain with the Federation of Nigeria, and the Southern region voted to join the Republic of Cameroon. The decision to join the Republic of Cameroon was given effect by the UN General Assembly Resolution 1608 (XV). Southern Cameroons had previously enjoyed a degree of autonomy, with its own Executive Council and Legislative Assembly.⁴⁷ The new State steadily asserted and centralized its power; what was then called West Cameroon was to be financed by federal funds until a different mechanism was developed, but no new mechanism transpired. As a result, the Anglophone territory became financially dependent on the federal Cameroonian government. President Ahmadou Ahidjo divided the federation into administrative regions, each of which had a federal inspector. Federal inspectors were answerable to the president, granting them more powers than the prime minister. President Ahidjo declared a one-party state and cultural and faith-based associations in the Anglophone regions were proscribed.

On May 20, 1972, a “snap” referendum was held less than two weeks after being announced, with little time for public consideration. Cameroonians voted in favour of a unitary, centralized state to replace the previous federal system. Anglophone Cameroonians argued that promises had been broken, that they had been dominated as a people economically and politically, and that their equality rights

had been violated. The Republic of Cameroon's name was changed to the United Republic of Cameroon. The star representing the Anglophone minority was removed from the national flag.

In reviewing the history of Cameroon in connection to the roles of women in security during the decolonization and independence era, the works of Meredith Terretta, 2007 gives us a vivid account of Cameroonian women's role in the radical, anti-colonial nationalist movement led by the UPC (Union des Populations du Cameroun). In which Cameroonian women across different works of life, social statuses, educational backgrounds and ethnicity in both urban and rural areas wrote numerous petitions to the UN on the premises of issues related to economic autonomy and biological and agricultural fertility. An era that positively added to the essential components of women's successful political mobilization in Africa, and contributes to the discussion of women's involvement in nationalist movement in formerly colonized territories. Some brave activities of the women included: defying arrest, where courageous woman like Elisabeth Mapondjou from the 3rd ward of Nkongsamba in the western region of Cameroon harbouring UPC freedom fighters in the course of their parade. Another young married woman who followed the likes of Madame Mapondjou was Therese Mewa, she disguised herself and carried UPC documents and petitions to the UN under her dress, smuggling them across the Anglo-French boundary, to facilitate access to the British territory. Another role was exhibited by the trans-local women traders commonly nationally known as the Buyam-sellams, these group of women are conversant with the route map of both territories and as such were well informed on how to hid firearms in sacks of groundnuts, beans and smuggled them across the Nigeria border near Calabar in Cross River State of Nigeria, which was a colony under the British rule. Moreover, other young women joined the ranks of male youths in the Armée de libération nationale du Kamerun (ALNK), the UPC's liberation army formed in the Bamileke region in 1957, as spies, informants, and fighters. UPC exiles awarded scholarships to women for military training in North Africa and Peking. For example, Gertrude Omog learned to parachute from planes (Terretta, 2007).

4.2. The Problem of Marginalization of Anglophone Communities

In November 1982, Paul Biya succeeded Ahmadou Ahidjo as president of the United Republic of Cameroon. He has presided over the country since that time, maintaining a centralized and unitary State throughout. The name of the country was changed again in 1984, returning to the pre-unification name, La République du Cameroun. The changes were not merely cosmetic. The Minister of National Education altered the General Certificate of Education (GCE), making French mandatory in English education. Students at the University of Yaoundé drafted a petition against the new GCE and peacefully protested. Police attacked the demonstrators violently with batons. Cameroonian lawyer Fongum Gorji-Dinka prepared a document called "New Social Order," addressed to the president, in

which Mr. Dinka accused Mr. Biya's regime of violating the constitution. Mr. Dinka called for independence. He referred to the events in 1972 as "Ahidjo's coup d'état" and was also the first individual to use the word "Ambazonia," in 1984, to describe a future, independent, Anglophone State. Mr. Dinka was charged with high treason before a military tribunal. The case collapsed in early 1986, and he went into exile in Nigeria and then the United Kingdom, where he was recognized as a refugee. These events would prompt Mr. Dinka to file a communication to the United Nations Human Rights Committee and, in 2005, the Human Rights Committee expressed the view that violations of his rights to liberty, security of the person, and the rights to be free from arbitrary arrest and/or detention had occurred.

In 1990, the Anglophone minority created the first opposition political party in the English speaking region, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) in Bamenda. Its president, John Fru Ndi, organized an inaugural meeting on May 26, 1990. Armored state vehicles and helicopter gunships were deployed in Bamenda and shot six young Anglophones dead. By August 1991, the economic and political marginalization of the Anglophone regions had intensified. The Anglophone regions' economic infrastructure was dismantled under the aegis of centralization. Teachers and students complained about the lack of English-speaking teachers and universities' loss of autonomy. The Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM) was formed in 1991 as part of a broader revival of Anglophone nationalism. The CAM was among the first organizations to advocate openly and explicitly for Anglophone self-determination. During a tripartite summit in 1991, Anglophones formally raised the issue of federalism as part of a political solution. During the 1992 elections, an Anglophone candidate ran in opposition to Mr. Biya, and although Mr. Biya was re-elected, the elections were characterized by irregularities. Anglophones turned out in low numbers because of a boycott. The Washington-based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs found "serious fault with the electoral process," which did not "make it possible to determine which candidate would have been the winner in a fair election." The Institute's report noted that the government had taken unusually extreme and illegitimate actions to ensure that President Biya would be elected again.

In 1993, the first All Anglophone Conference (AAC) took place, endorsing a return to a two-state federation. A year later, the second All Anglophone Conference, which took place in Bamenda, warned that an independent state of Southern Cameroons would be declared if the Biya regime failed to negotiate for two-state federalism within "a reasonable time." The Bamenda conference also renamed the AAC as the Southern Cameroons People's Conference (SCPC), which would later become the Southern Cameroons Peoples Organization (SCAPO), with the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) as its executive governing body. In 1995, the SCNC petitioned against the annexation of Southern Cameroons, and called upon the United Nations to "complete the process of self-determination and full sovereignty" for Southern Cameroons. Activists clamouring for English

speakers to have a role in deciding their own fate were severely punished. In September 1995, Abel Apong, Chrispus Achan Keenebie, John Kudi, and Jacob Djent were taken into custody and incarcerated without trial in connection with the planning and signing of a petition advocating for a referendum on the independence of the Southern Cameroons. The 1997 elections were plagued by considerable violence. The Biya regime sent troops into the Southern Cameroons, notably in Kumba, Bamenda, Bali, and Bafut. President Biya refused to create an independent electoral commission and major opposition parties boycotted the election. Southern Cameroonian political activists were attacked, shot, tortured, and placed in detention in appalling conditions. From March to August 1997, the State cracked down on activists who had protested the arrest and conviction of the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) chairman, Mr. Ebenezer Akwanga, who had been tried by a military tribunal and sentenced to 20 years in prison on charges of subversion and terrorism. There were sweeping arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, and unlawful killings in the villages of Bui and Mezam.

The 2004 elections were also “flawed by irregularities,” according to international election observers. The Social Democratic Front (SDF) protested, but the government violently disrupted opposition meetings and detained opposition political leaders. In February 2011, Chief Ayamba Ette Otun and other SCNC members were reportedly arrested by authorities for “circulating tracts calling for the independence of Southern Cameroon” and warning the government against the mistreatment of Southern Cameroonians. They were released several days later, according to Amnesty International. On August 2, 2013, more than SCNC members were arrested by gendarmes and police forces during a meeting in Kumbo, an English-speaking region. It was reported that they were detained and tortured. On August 8, 2013, SCNC activists who were meeting together were arrested and detained and the house where the meeting was held was searched and ransacked.

On December 27, 2014, state security forces attacked the villages of Magdémé and Doublé, in the Far North region of Cameroon, leading to the arbitrary arrests of about 200 individuals, 25 of whom died in detention, and massive destruction of property. Violence and repression were reignited in 2016, when the conflict between the Anglophone community and President Biya’s government began with peaceful protests. In the current Cameroon, women have been involved in countless peaceful protests with the aim to express their frustrations, hurts through the arbitrary arrest, unlawful kidnapping of their children, husbands and relatives, forceful ejection from their businesses, homes and turning them into sudden IDPs by the armed security forces as well as denouncing the unwanted killings perpetrated by both the separatist armed groups and military forces (Yogo, 2021).

5. Imagine a Woman Being Raped, Mutilated, Killed...?

After the 4th World’s Conference in 1995 which took place in Beijing, there was a significant emphasis on the roles and positions of women with regards to armed

conflict. This was a cause for concern and urgency at the international levels (UNIDDR, 2006; USS, 2019). Consequently, various other departments within the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe did joined their voices in accepting the birth of the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (Mona, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d; 2019e; 2019f; 2019g; 2019h; 2019i; Tazoacha, 2021; UNSCR, 2019). These bodies are increasingly developing very strong statements and policies to protect women. Hence what about us the African Women?

Therefore, we can drastically improve on women's roles and positions through the expansion of women's economic, political responsibilities and powers taking into considerations the diversity among women and their different roles and positions. Women have always had an influential role in the prosperity, security and growth of any community. These roles have varied depending on the time period, geography and race of the people. In our indigenous typical African setting, we will attest that, while our forefathers went away hunting, tapping and pasturing, the women stayed behind to nurtured the farms and the children. Wherever a tent was pitched, or a settlement made, it was because the women felt it safer for habitation. They knew how to protect themselves and their children in the absent of their husbands. This is an applied area in our history which we must revisit and learn from (Pearl, 1995; Mona, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d; 2019e; 2019f; 2019g; 2019h; 2019i).

5.1. Women as Household Heads

The reoccurrences of conflicts have forced women to become household heads and breadwinners, taking over responsibilities for various activities traditionally carried out by men. Unfortunately, not all women are equipped right on time for this and as such, they lack the adequate access to education, training, land, credit, waged labour and other required resources. One of the bottlenecks for most female-headed household and widows has been their limited full access to land and property rights. They faced the challenge of being prohibited from owning, renting and inheriting and properties in their names (Mpangala, 2004). Land title and tenure tend to be vested in men, either by legal condition or by socio-cultural norms. Land reform and resettlement have tended to reinforce this bias against tenure for women. Land shortage is common among women. Women farm smaller and more dispersed plots than men and are less likely to hold title, secure tenure, or the same rights to use, improve, or dispose of land. The impediments to women's empowerment encompass their lack of access to decision making processes, their low participation in local governance, as well as their limited access to technology inputs and credit. Land tenure is another stumbling block to women's full access and control of land and the agricultural output. These impediments to women's empowerment are also obstacles to agricultural development

and food security in their respective communities (Mona, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d; 2019e; 2019f; 2019g; 2019h; 2019i). However, in the post-conflict phase, when husbands or male relatives return home, the traditional division of roles and tasks tends to be restored again.

5.2. Women as Surviving and Coping Actors

Women definitely have a major role in creating a safer society for us today. They have shown us that they can tend the fields; hold homes together, raise the children, and put up with hardships only they can understand (Mona, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d; 2019e; 2019f; 2019g; 2019h; 2019i). Furthermore, women have exhibited the capacities to survive in extremely difficult circumstances such as during conflict by developing ways of coping with it (Nwolise, 2005). As a result, they have displayed a remarkable resilience in adapting to their new living conditions: a clearer example is what the women are witnessing today in the Cameroons, yet they are struggling on with their lives as the days go by, trusting for a lasting solution to the ongoing armed conflict which have left them as IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), unsecured, widows, childless, homeless, physically injured, traumatized, raped, violated, assaulted and broken.

5.3. Women and Informal/Formal Employment Opportunities

Anthropologically speaking, women are less mobile than men, both because of their child care and household responsibilities and because of socio-cultural norms that limit their mobility. As a result, women have less access to formal financial services because of high transaction costs, limited education and mobility, social and cultural barriers, the nature of their businesses, and collateral requirements, such as land title, which they cannot meet. Thus, a substantial number of women are driven into badly remunerated work in the informal sector, which tends to expand rapidly in conflict situations as formal structures cease to function properly (Lederach, 1997). A case to research more on is the rapid increase of sex workers in Douala and Yaoundé, Cameroon, where most of the IDPs are desperate teen girls who have eventually lost everything and have been deprived of education. In pursuit for the great need of human resources in post-conflict rehabilitation activities, formal employment opportunities for women initially increase, though later they often decrease because of the return of men and the reintroduction of traditional labour division (Mazurana & McKay, 1999).

5.4. Women as Victims

Women during conflicts suffer from systematic rape and other forms of sexual violence (Yogo, 2012). We as social scientists can disputably conclude that, women are regarded as symbolic bearers of caste, ethnic or national identity. And most times, sexual violence against women is a deliberate strategy to humiliate an entire community so to say. Interestingly, sexual violence against women often continues in the post-conflict phase, shifting from the public to the private space

of homes (Bouta & Frerks, 2002).

5.5. Women as Combatants

Research shows that if women are given similar access to resources and inputs as men, they stand to achieve equal or higher yields as that of men (Alaga, 2010). However, women's contribution to the development and security of every nation of has changed many times (Bukari, 2013). None of these changes has been easy for them. Women definitely have a major role in creating safer society for themselves and for their children (Bouta & Frerks, 2002). Women have actively participated in numerous wars, where their motives for becoming combatants appear to be as diverse as those for men, including enforced recruitment, agreement with the goals of war, patriotism, religious or ideological motives and economic necessity (UNIDDR, 2006). After conflict, female (ex-) combatants regularly encounter difficulties while reintegrating into society (Christie, 1997). Demobilization and reintegration programmes scarcely take into account their specific needs and interest, neither does family. Usually, female ex-combatants are often not accepted, despised and traumatized socially (Frederic, 1995).

5.6. Women as Peace Activists

From Rwanda through Somalia to Nigeria, Mali, and Ivory Coast and across the African continent, conflict situations have forced women to organize themselves in order to safeguard their basic necessities and to carry out activities related to education, health care, food distribution, and care for families, IDPs and refugees (Issifu, 2015b; 2015c). Due to the temporary absence of men, women also assume political responsibilities. In spite of the difficulties and challenges encountered by women during such a phase, many of these peace activities do have an emancipating function and should therefore be continued in the post-conflict phase (Yogo, 2021). As grandmothers, great-grandmothers, aunts, spouses, teachers, buyam-sellams (trans-local traders) and sisters- and as those more often victimized, the Cameroonian women took upon themselves to cease every opportunity possible to intervene in peace building since the inception of the ongoing Cameroon crisis. Though often marginalized, the Cameroonian women have been at the forefront to take risks necessary to promote dialogue across divided communities. In addition, they have carried out countless peace protests, organising themselves in groups, initiated activities related to education and healthcare. These activities had positive influenced in some affected communities as they recorded a period of ceasefire from both the armed forces and the armed separatist fighters. With the security situation worsening faster in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, a group of courageous women emerged under the auspices of the Northwest and Southwest Women's Task Force. Their initiatives as individual women and their foils in civil society have been mustering and campaigning for the end of the Anglophone crisis. The traditional ghost town Monday which was mandated since 2016 has gradually been eradicated as the women could resume

with their daily activities and have their children back in schools. Although it is still not a 100 percent safer, these measures implemented by the women have sprung a clarion call for everlasting peace and a sense of normalcy (Tazoacha, 2021).

5.5. The Tides Are Changing; Women in Ngo Security Risk Management

It is on records that, most nations celebrate the role of women in NGO security risk management. Despite the fact that security has historically been a male-dominated sector, and in many ways continues to be so, the number of women working in security is by no means negligible nor is the contributions of women to the sector hard to discern. On such an august occasions, institutions usually asked its network of female colleagues who work in NGO security risk management to share some of their experiences with the world. While security risk management may be perceived as a “boys club”, it is far from that. Today, women are increasingly leading teams in all NGO operating contexts, from field level to headquarters. Some of the major bodies looking at security were co-founded or are under female leadership: Insecurity Insight, Humanitarian Outcomes. With some of the most senior security positions in major NGOs currently headed by women: Oxfam, ActionAid International, Tearfund, Action Contre la Faim, Canadian Red Cross, Terre des Hommes, Handicap International, Première Urgence Internationale and Cordaid, to name but a few. The ACT Alliance Safety and Security Community of Practice have elected for the first time a female chairperson.

Women like Marieke van Weerden, Director of Safety and Security at VSO International, is proud of the fact that two-thirds of the security focal points in VSO country offices are women.

Like in other industries, women joining a male-dominated sector face challenges. One colleague recalls the challenge of not starting at the same level or with the same respect as male counterparts, but with time her contributions were appreciated by her male colleagues.

Efforts are underway to move away from “gender-oriented” work to placing greater value on contributions. As one colleague puts it:

“What makes me an effective woman in security management is my passion for the work and the people who I do it for, my family, my friends and my colleagues, and most all of those whose perceptions I can change. As a woman, I am proud to be a part of this profession and even more so of the growing number of women who are joining the profession, balancing families and changing perceptions. Female or male, security is a challenging life choice and all are appreciated.” Thus, there should be an endeavour to ensure that work has a balanced gender perspective. And part of this, as a colleague noted, involves “fostering peer support among security specialists and...provide(ing) a platform for women in the sector to be more visible.”

5.6. Benefits of Having Women in Security

Rebecca Maudling, Company Director at International Location Safety attested that, the benefits of more women working in NGO security risk management are myriad. Adding that, the involvement of women in NGO security has led to a more inclusive and holistic approach, with women's concerns heard and addressed. Researchers have seen women in security take the conversation to a new level, identifying that insecurity can come from within as well as outside an organisation itself and that NGO staff members' individual characteristics and emotions play a part in their security: from the role stress can play in bad security decision-making to how gender and gender identity can affect an individual's security in given contexts. In the words of Christine Persaud, she shared that:

“Just over 10 years ago, there were only a few of us women in security—I was often greeted with eyebrows raised...and then confusion when they would find out I was not ex-military or ex-police. It has been a challenging journey in which I would often be purposefully deployed to deal with the most difficult and sensitive security situations. I believe it is because security in our sector has always been gendered, meaning it is about people and how we relate to and understand each other.”

In the process of demobilization, Aid workers are a diverse group and the people they aim to help in some of the most challenging contexts during or after conflicts in the world are also diverse. Two female colleagues recall that as women they have had access to both male and female community members and are often invited to join conversations with these groups, which has been critical to achieving durable outcomes. Some women in security have excellent soft skills, which are extremely important in NGO security risk management and in achieving access, especially within organisations that rely on acceptance as a primary security strategy.

We should also not forget our own staff:

“Many of our national field staff are women focused on delivery of our programme objectives, in often difficult and insecure contexts. Such staff put into daily practice our security management frameworks, approaches and methodologies and we need to constantly bear them in mind.”

Thanks to the contributions of women in security, more discussions are taking place on the risks that predominantly (although not exclusively) affect women, such as sexual harassment, aggression and assault. This allows aid staff, security advisors and survivors to have honest discussions about how to manage these events, placing the well-being of those affected at the forefront of NGO efforts. Female-led organisations such as Insecurity Insight and Report the Abuse have reported in the past, and more recently, that sexual violence against aid workers is a serious concern that needs to be addressed by NGOs.

Many women working in NGO security risk management have seen their presence appreciated by their colleagues. Their experience has shown that female staff finds it easier to express their fears, anxieties and responses to incidents, which

allows the organisation to better ensure staff security and thereby meet their duty of care. The benefits of women in security positions, however, do not only extend to women, but to male staff as well:

“Working as a security trainer, concentrating on sexual aggression, trauma and well-being is a privileged position to be in. It feels like taking your place at the table, looking up and seeing a mixture of surprise, acceptance and the odd nod from assorted people present. It is so satisfying when both men and women can share their thoughts, feelings and concerns about their own security and their experiences in the field, knowing that you, as a woman have ‘been there’ and see it all entirely from their own perspective. I’m so grateful for that opportunity.”

5.7. What about the Next Generation of Women in Security?

Many female colleagues have noted the remarkable change over the last decade, not only in the numbers of women working in NGO security risk management but in the way their presence and contributions are valued by male and female co-workers. As one colleague puts it:

“There is a hunger for diversity of perspective and experience in the security management sector. This is demonstrated in the fact that international, regional and national staff regularly expresses their excitement that our organisation has a woman leading on safety and security management! They often say they want to see more!” On January 23rd 2020, Spain appointed a woman to head the country’s oldest police force, the Guardia Civil, for the first time in the agency’s 175-year history. The interior ministry said in a statement it had appointed Maria Gamez, formerly the central government representative in the southern province of Malaga, as the “first woman” at the helm of the 80,000-strong Guardia Civil force. It was not until January 1st of 2016 that women were allowed to apply for combat positions in the United States military. According to Veterans Advocate Jennifer Silva, “This shift opened the opportunity for women to fill 220,000 military combat positions.” The original U.S. military draft was male-only, thus openly excluding women from military service since. Security-related fields across the international community continue to perpetrate gendered ideals which prohibit women from contributing, specifically in counterterrorism. The existing gender bias associates women in security with roles of peacekeeping, while inherently placing them on the periphery in the counterterrorism sector. In 2014, the United Nations Secretary General announced that there should be reconsideration.

The landscape, however, does not appear completely positive for women trying to enter the security sector as one of our male security colleagues reflects. He has worked with very efficient female security focal points who feel uncomfortable attending security coordination meetings at field office level due to the gender imbalance. Equally, he has experienced many of his female co-workers struggling to find work within the NGO security sector, despite their strong security risk management skills. Our colleague expresses his frustration at this and urges people to acknowledge the contributions women can make as security advisors or

managers.

Despite these challenges, one veteran from the security field has a message for the younger generation of women in security:

“When I joined my organization as global security adviser, I quickly came to know that in fact there are many women working in this field of work, and they are making a difference. Women should not feel discouraged to apply for NGO security positions.”

The contributions of the women who started in this sector years ago have not gone unnoticed by the younger generation of women entering the field of NGO security risk management:

“At first I was apprehensive about entering a male-dominated field of work but thanks to the efforts of my female predecessors to debunk gender preconceptions, my experience has been extremely positive, with women’s input deemed insightful and valuable by male colleagues as we suggest new ways to overcome operational security challenges.”

“My preconceptions have been smashed so many times. Women can lead, and are leading in security risk management. As someone who is starting out in this sector, it is reassuring and inspiring to see.”

“As a young woman in what has traditionally been a man’s world of security, I’m encouraged that in my time women’s contribution to security in the NGO community is now not just acknowledged but celebrated.”

There is much more that needs to be done to obtain a more equitable gender balance in the field of NGO security risk management, but the groundwork has been laid for an improved approach to security risk management within the aid sector. This is thanks to the efforts of those women who are working within security despite the challenges they have faced as well as the men who have welcomed and encouraged the greater participation of women in the field of security.

“The reason that I get up in the morning is to support women as they enable themselves to do their jobs, their missions and live their lives in the field (where they’re needed and where they should be), only in a safer environment than that which they/we currently experience.”

The contributions of women to security cannot be celebrated enough (UNSCR, 2019). So, when you’re the only woman in a room full of men, remember that, as one colleague excellently put it, the participation of women in security is not measured in numbers but in the quality of our contributions to the profession of security (United States Strategy on Women, 2019). Hence the importance of calling for women’s inclusion in security sector institutions, including the military and police forces (UNSCR, 2019). Like we know, no development can be effective where there is conflict. This brings us again to the reason behind the creation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 which reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building. Worth noting is the implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) which are the means to propel action in this sphere. Women in Security

cover a wide-range of issues as it explores the link between women, security, and development ([United States Strategy on Women, 2019](#)). As a forum to stimulate discussion and instructive debates, the NATO Association of Canada will examine the ways in which women both contribute to and are the focus of Canadian and NATO defence and security initiatives. This program also offers a critical look at the structures and institutions that shape the role of women in security at home and abroad ([UNSCR, 2019](#)).

6. Conclusion

It is no secret that, we need more women in security. Societies embarked on the fragile transition from war to peace face enormous economic, social, and political challenges. In attempting to support this transition, the international community often provides substantial amounts of external assistance. This aid can play an important and constructive role in meeting pressing social needs and building a durable peace, but it would be naïve to assume either that positive effect are the automatic result of good intentions or that donors are motivated entirely by the objective of peace building.

This paper reviews evidence on the roles of women before, during and after conflicts. Elaborate on the impact of aid in “post-conflict” settings and offers suggestions for making aid more effective in supporting efforts to build a durable peace.

It is quite clear that women’s role in security in Sub-Saharan Africa is critical. However, it is often neglected by the households and society in general. This has serious implications during demobilization, rehabilitation and overall development of the region. Women and children are the most vulnerable in societies; they’re the most affected before, during and after the war. Meanwhile, they’re not war instigators, but they become the most affected. The tactics used by terrorists against civilians is not different from what conflict entrepreneurs or rebels are using in contemporary times against women. Thus, women are targeted and use as weapons of war. In the Cameroons where there is an ongoing genocides within the English Speaking Regions, thousands of women have been raped; the same can be said of Congo, Rwanda, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, etc. as tactics of war. This explains the reason why the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security have recognised the relevance of women’s experiences in conflict to its peace and security mandate. Advancing women’s rights in conflict resolution and peace processes is among the objectives of the Council. However, the endemic discrimination, marginalisation and sexual violence against women in the face of Resolution 1325 are significant barriers to achieving its objectives. Although, there is no denying the fact that, support for local women in peace building has increased over the years since the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 was approved. It is also evident that, funding for women’s group and activists has reduced over the years. This is because, since 2001, international efforts for global peace have shifted from supporting women’s groups and activists to the global

fight against terrorism. Thus, support for the global fight on violence against women has attracted very few contributions for women's movements with respect to security.

Building lasting peace and security requires women's participation. Half of the world's population cannot make a whole peace.

* Ten years after the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on increasing women's participation in matters of global security, the numbers of women participating in peace settlements remain marginal.

* While improvements have been made, women remain underrepresented in public office, at the negotiating table, and in peacekeeping missions.

* The needs and perspectives of women are often overlooked in post conflict disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), as well as in security sector reform, rehabilitation of justice, and the rule of law.

* Many conflicts have been marked by widespread sexual and gender-based violence, which often continues in the aftermath of war and is typically accompanied by impunity for the perpetrators.

* A continuing lack of physical security and the existence of significant legal constraints in post-conflict societies hamper women's integration into economic life and leadership.

* Best practices for increasing women's participation include deployment of gender-balanced peacekeeping units, a whole-of-government approach to security sector and judicial reform, and more intentional solicitation of the input of women at the community level on priorities for national budgets and international programs.

In sum, we would like to make some valid recommendations that; the United Nations, African Union, large donor countries, like the European Union, the Economic Community of West African States, Spain, private actors in development and cooperation agencies, etc. should make a greater effort to finance women groups, movements and activists in a continually manner. More so, and to also establish links with a broader spectrum of local actors that work in the gender dimension, as well as adapting themselves to the organisational reality and the day-to-day lives of women. Thus, supporting this agenda will help to ensure sustainable peace for women, and will open, a sure commitment to a broader inclusive knowledge of what is really going on in conflict areas, as well as of the real needs of people who fall victim to violence. Hence, we conclude with the words of a scholar who said during an international meeting of Land and Security in Switzerland, 2015 that; "When you and I in authority and power today, fail to do what ought to be done, we risk creating gaps which, not even our generations upon generations can fix. Therefore, as citizens of the globe and the Cameroons in particular, it's only a way forward to walk on the part we would ever desire to walk on, if given the same opportunities (Yogo, CSP 2015)."

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Almighty for His grace, wisdom,

and mercy throughout the writing of this paper. It covers days of deep thinking and collaborations.

Moreover, I remain grateful to my family for their unwavering support and, especially my glorious husband Prince Alain Gerard Pangout who has been my sponsor.

Finally, this paper is dedicated to the hard work of my mentor General Dr. ZAMBA Abayomi Dominic who after collaborating tirelessly with me to ensure the success of this work, transited on the 25.12.2023. My thoughts are that, every reader, reviewer; scholar of this work would spend a few moment of silence in remembrance of a great Sociologist/Intelligent Officer par excellence that has gone behind the scenes. As an early scholar, it hasn't been easier for me to proceed with this paper, but I am encouraged to keep on because this was what General Dr. Zamba Abayomi stood for.

We salute highly the Scientific Research Publishing (SCIRP) Team for their acceptance in publishing our work. Special regards to Ms. Sarry Sun, Editor/Assistant Editorial Office for her positive and relevant encouragement through the publication process.

I wish to acknowledge the significant input of Mr. Yari Yogo from the Justus-Liebig Universität Giessen towards my paper during a short notice.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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