

Women as Strategic Assets for National Defence and Security: Mainstreaming Gender, Social Inclusion and Community Development in Nigeria

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

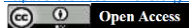
women,
national defence,
national security,
gender mainstreaming,
social inclusion,
community development,
peace and security,
Nigeria.

Vol.01, No.04, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22637486>

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute an important but insufficiently utilised resource for national defence and security. Although women experience disproportionate effects of conflict and insecurity, their contribution to prevention, intelligence, mediation, peacebuilding, community resilience and security-sector operations remains comparatively underrecognised. This study examines women as strategic assets for national defence and security, with particular attention to gender mainstreaming, social inclusion and community development in Nigeria. The study adopts a systematic document analysis design based on peer-reviewed literature, national policy documents and reports from the United Nations, African Union, Nigerian government institutions and relevant development and security organisations. Documents published principally between 2020 and 2026 were reviewed alongside foundational instruments, including United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and Nigeria's National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. The analysis is organised around four themes: women's participation in defence and security institutions; gender-responsive security governance; women's contribution to community-based prevention and resilience; and the relationship between social inclusion, community development and national security. The findings indicate that women's strategic value extends beyond numerical representation in security institutions. Women contribute distinctive perspectives, community access, early-warning capacity, mediation, intelligence gathering, protection, humanitarian response and post-conflict recovery. However, institutional barriers, gender stereotypes, limited representation in decision-making, inadequate financing and weak implementation of gender policies constrain these contributions. The study concludes that mainstreaming gender into Nigeria's defence and security architecture is both an equality imperative and a strategic requirement for effective national security. It recommends institutionalising gender-responsive security governance, expanding women's meaningful participation in security institutions and peace processes, strengthening women-led community resilience structures, and establishing measurable accountability for implementation of Nigeria's Women, Peace and Security agenda.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

National defence and security are traditionally conceptualised around the protection of territorial integrity, sovereignty, state institutions and citizens from external and internal threats. In practice, however, contemporary security environments are increasingly complex. Terrorism, violent extremism, organised crime, kidnapping, communal conflict, trafficking, cyber threats, climate-related insecurity, displacement, misinformation and socioeconomic vulnerability frequently intersect. These threats cannot be effectively addressed through military force, policing and intelligence alone. They require a wider security architecture that combines state capability with social resilience, community participation, inclusive governance and preventive action.

Within this changing security environment, women should be understood not merely as vulnerable populations requiring protection but as strategic actors capable of contributing to defence, security and peacebuilding. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) established an important normative foundation by recognising women's roles in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction. It also called for increased representation of women at decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions concerned with conflict prevention, management and resolution (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2000). The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda that developed from Resolution 1325 consequently moved international policy discourse beyond the treatment of women exclusively as victims of conflict towards recognition of their agency and leadership.

The strategic relevance of women's participation has become increasingly evident. Women are embedded in families, communities, professional institutions, civil society organisations and local networks through which information, trust and social relationships are transmitted. Their proximity to community-level realities can provide access to information about emerging tensions, grievances, displacement, exploitation and other forms of insecurity that may not be immediately visible to formal security institutions. Women can therefore contribute to early warning, mediation, community engagement, countering violent extremism, humanitarian response and recovery.

The African context makes this question particularly important. The African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions a peaceful and secure Africa alongside full gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Its development priorities explicitly connect human-capital development, employment, social protection, gender and women's development with peace and security. The African Union's Continental Results Framework for the WPS agenda similarly seeks to accelerate women's participation and leadership in peace processes while strengthening monitoring and reporting across national, regional and continental levels (African Union Commission [AUC], 2019).

Nigeria occupies an important position within this continental agenda. The country faces a complex security environment involving terrorism and insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, farmer-herder conflict, trafficking, displacement and other forms of organised criminality. These challenges affect women in distinctive ways, but women also contribute to the prevention and management of insecurity within communities and institutions.

Nigeria has progressively developed policy instruments to recognise this contribution. Its first National Action Plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 was developed in 2013, followed by a second plan in 2017. The country subsequently developed its Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for 2024–2028. NAP III was formally launched in December 2025 and seeks to strengthen women's participation in peace and security, protection, prevention, relief and recovery. It also provides for stronger coordination, monitoring, reporting and accountability and is intended to be localised across Nigeria's states and the Federal Capital Territory (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation [FMINO], 2025; Government of Nigeria, 2024).

The importance of this development lies not simply in the existence of another policy document but in the opportunity to reconceptualise women's participation as a national-security capability. The central question is whether Nigeria is sufficiently utilising the knowledge, skills, networks and leadership of women across the full security continuum—from prevention and early warning to operational security, mediation, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery.

The argument advanced in this study is that women should be treated as strategic assets rather than peripheral participants in national defence and security. This does not imply that women possess inherently peaceful or superior qualities compared with men. Nor does it suggest that women should be included simply to satisfy numerical targets. Rather, meaningful participation expands the pool of expertise, experience and social networks available to the national-security system. A gender-responsive security architecture is therefore potentially more capable of identifying threats, understanding community dynamics, building trust and designing responses that reflect the needs of the entire population.

Gender mainstreaming is consequently not synonymous with appointing more women. It involves integrating gender perspectives into security policy, planning, budgeting, training, operations, intelligence, recruitment, deployment, institutional culture, monitoring and evaluation. The objective is

to ensure that security institutions understand how threats affect different groups and how different groups can contribute to preventing and managing those threats.

The community dimension is equally important. Women's participation in security should not be confined to formal institutions. Women leaders, educators, health workers, traditional and religious actors, community organisers, entrepreneurs, social workers, youth mentors and civil-society actors frequently operate at the point where national policy meets community reality. Their inclusion can strengthen community ownership of security and facilitate communication between citizens and security institutions.

This study therefore examines the strategic value of women in national defence and security by bringing together three interconnected concepts: gender mainstreaming, social inclusion and community development. It argues that the effective integration of these dimensions can strengthen preventive security, community resilience and national stability.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's security architecture has historically been dominated by conventional state institutions, including the Armed Forces, police, intelligence agencies, paramilitary organisations and other law-enforcement bodies. These institutions remain indispensable. However, the persistence and changing character of insecurity demonstrate that national security cannot depend exclusively on kinetic capability.

One major weakness is the limited integration of gender considerations into security planning and decision-making. Women constitute approximately half of the population, yet their representation and influence within formal security decision-making, peace processes and community-security structures have historically remained limited. Existing research on Nigeria's security sector identifies institutional, cultural and gender-related barriers that have constrained women's roles and confined them in some circumstances to specialised functions rather than allowing their full professional potential to be utilised (Akinjobi-Babatunde, 2015).

This limitation has practical security consequences. When women are insufficiently represented within security institutions, policies and operational decisions may fail to incorporate knowledge concerning the gendered dimensions of insecurity. In communities affected by terrorism, kidnapping, displacement and communal violence, women may possess information and social access that formal institutions cannot easily obtain. Excluding them can therefore create an intelligence, prevention and community-engagement deficit.

The problem extends beyond representation. Gender policies and national action plans have frequently faced challenges involving implementation, coordination, funding, institutional ownership and monitoring. Nigeria's experience with previous WPS action plans demonstrates the difference between policy commitment and operational implementation. The development and launch of NAP III provides an opportunity to address these weaknesses, but the effectiveness of the plan will depend on whether its commitments are translated into institutional practices, budgets, measurable targets and accountability mechanisms.

A further problem is the separation between security policy and community development. Insecurity often emerges or becomes entrenched in environments characterised by poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, weak institutions and limited opportunities. Women are central actors in household welfare, social networks, local economic activity and community mobilisation. Their empowerment and inclusion can therefore have implications beyond gender equality, extending to social resilience and prevention.

The central problem addressed by this study is consequently the **underutilisation of women as strategic actors within Nigeria's national defence and security architecture**, coupled with insufficient integration of gender, social inclusion and community development into preventive-security policy.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine women as strategic assets for national defence and security through the mainstreaming of gender, social inclusion and community development in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the strategic contribution of women to national defence and security;

- ii. assess the role of gender mainstreaming and women's meaningful participation in security governance;
- iii. examine women's contribution to community-based conflict prevention, social resilience and peacebuilding; and
- iv. assess the implications of social inclusion and community development for strengthening women-centred national security.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What strategic contributions can women make to national defence and security?
- ii. How can gender mainstreaming and women's meaningful participation strengthen security governance in Nigeria?
- iii. What role can women play in community-based conflict prevention, social resilience and peacebuilding?
- iv. How can social inclusion and community development strengthen women as strategic assets for national security?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Women as Strategic Security Actors

The concept of women as strategic security actors represents a shift from viewing women primarily through the lens of vulnerability to recognising their agency. Women experience insecurity in distinctive ways, but they also participate in security provision, conflict prevention, mediation, peacebuilding, humanitarian response and community recovery. The WPS framework provides the strongest international foundation for this approach. UNSCR 1325 recognises women's important role in preventing and resolving conflict and calls for their full participation in peace processes and increased representation in decision-making institutions (UNSC, 2000). Subsequent WPS resolutions reinforced these commitments.

Women's strategic value derives partly from their position within social structures. Women often occupy roles that connect households, schools, markets, religious institutions, community associations and local governance structures. These networks can provide opportunities for identifying grievances and emerging threats and for building trust between communities and public institutions. Strategic participation should nevertheless be understood as meaningful participation. Numerical presence alone does not guarantee influence. Women can be physically present in institutions while remaining excluded from operational decision-making, leadership positions, intelligence processes or strategic planning. Consequently, the objective should be meaningful access to authority, professional development and decision-making rather than representation for symbolic purposes.

2.1.2 Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming involves systematically incorporating gender perspectives into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes. In security institutions, this means examining how policies, recruitment, training, deployment, procurement, infrastructure, operations, intelligence and personnel systems affect women and men. Gender mainstreaming is therefore broader than establishing gender desks or appointing female personnel. A security institution may employ women without being gender-responsive if institutional culture, career structures, operational planning and decision-making remain insensitive to gender considerations.

Nigeria's National Security Strategy recognises this principle by identifying gender sensitivity as relevant to security and stating that women should be engaged as agents of development to promote social inclusion, sustainable peace and security (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). The policy direction is consistent with UNSCR 1325 and the broader WPS framework.

2.1.3 Social Inclusion and Security

Social inclusion refers to the ability of individuals and groups to participate meaningfully in social, economic, political and institutional processes. In security governance, inclusion is important because security institutions derive legitimacy from the populations they protect. Exclusion can create mistrust between communities and the state. When particular groups perceive that security institutions neither represent them nor understand their concerns, cooperation may decline. Conversely, inclusive

institutions can increase public confidence and facilitate information-sharing, reporting and community participation.

Women's inclusion therefore has a dual significance. It promotes equality and rights while potentially strengthening institutional effectiveness. The inclusion of women in security institutions can also provide role models and demonstrate that security is a shared national responsibility rather than an exclusively male domain.

2.1.4 Community Development and National Security

Community development involves strengthening the capacities of local populations and institutions to identify problems, mobilise resources, participate in decision-making and improve social and economic conditions. Its relationship with national security is particularly relevant where insecurity is driven by local grievances, exclusion, poverty, unemployment and weak state-community relations. Women are central to community development because they participate extensively in household economies, education, health, social welfare and community organisations. Women-led initiatives can therefore contribute to resilience while simultaneously strengthening social cohesion.

Evidence from Nigeria demonstrates the potential of women-led peacebuilding groups. Mercy Corps' research on Women's Critical Discussion Groups and Women's Peacebuilding Councils found that women-led structures can contribute to locally led, gender-responsive peacebuilding and provide lessons for implementing the WPS agenda at community level (Mercy Corps, 2024).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Feminist Security Theory

Feminist Security Theory challenges conventional security approaches that define security predominantly in terms of military power, state sovereignty and territorial protection. It argues that security should also consider the lived experiences of individuals and communities and the gendered structures that shape vulnerability, power and access to security. The theory is useful to this study because it challenges the assumption that security institutions can adequately understand security threats without considering gender. It also draws attention to the exclusion of women from security decision-making and questions whose experiences and interests are represented in security policy. Applied to Nigeria, Feminist Security Theory supports the argument that women should not simply be protected by security institutions but should participate in defining security priorities and designing responses.

2.2.2 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory broadens security beyond territorial defence to include protection from fear, want and indignity. The approach emphasises the interconnectedness of economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security (UNDP, 1994). The theory provides a strong foundation for understanding women's strategic contribution because many of the threats affecting women occur at the intersection of social, economic and physical insecurity. Women's participation in prevention, community development, humanitarian response and peacebuilding can therefore contribute to several dimensions of human security simultaneously.

2.2.3 Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory emphasises the value of networks, trust, reciprocity and social relationships in facilitating collective action (Putnam, 2000). The theory is particularly relevant to the community dimension of this study. Women frequently operate within dense networks involving families, neighbourhoods, religious institutions, markets, schools and community organisations. These networks can facilitate information exchange, conflict mediation and collective responses to insecurity. The theory consequently provides a basis for viewing women not simply as beneficiaries of security policy but as holders of social capital that can be mobilised for preventive security.

Together, Feminist Security Theory, Human Security Theory and Social Capital Theory provide a complementary analytical framework. Feminist Security Theory explains why women's perspectives and participation matter within security governance; Human Security Theory broadens the definition of security; while Social Capital Theory explains how women's community networks can support prevention, trust and resilience.

2.3 Empirical Review

International evidence increasingly supports the strategic significance of women's participation in peace and security. UN Women reports that women continue to be substantially underrepresented in

formal peace processes despite evidence that their meaningful participation contributes to more durable and inclusive peace outcomes. In 2024, women represented only 7% of negotiators and 14% of mediators in formal peace processes globally, illustrating the persistent gap between normative commitments and actual participation (UN Women, 2025). The evidence also demonstrates that women's participation has value beyond formal negotiations. Women contribute to conflict prevention, local mediation, social cohesion, humanitarian action and post-conflict recovery. UN Women identifies women as important actors in economic recovery, social cohesion and political legitimacy and emphasises that inclusive mediation can produce a fuller understanding of conflict causes and facilitate locally owned solutions (UN Women, 2024).

African policy frameworks increasingly recognise these contributions. The AU Continental Results Framework on WPS was developed to monitor progress in women's participation and leadership in peace and security across Africa. It explicitly seeks to strengthen partnerships with women's groups, civil society, research institutions and other peace and security actors (AUC, 2019).

Nigeria's experience reflects both progress and persistent challenges. The country has established WPS policy frameworks and has gradually expanded gender-sensitive reforms within security institutions. UN reporting indicates that Nigeria has made progress in integrating gender-sensitive and human-rights-based approaches into security-sector reform, including gender-policy implementation in the Armed Forces, Police and Civil Defence Corps and specialised training for security personnel (United Nations Nigeria, 2025).

However, institutional barriers remain. Research on women in the Nigerian Police Force shows that historical gender biases constrained women's integration and, in some circumstances, restricted them to specialised functions involving women and children (Akinjobi-Babatunde, 2015). The lesson is that increasing women's numerical presence is insufficient unless institutions simultaneously address organisational culture, professional opportunities, leadership pathways and discriminatory practices. Community-level evidence is also significant. Mercy Corps' research on women's peacebuilding groups in Nigeria found that women-led structures can expand gender, peace and security efforts at community level and generate lessons for the implementation of WPS policy (Mercy Corps, 2024).

Nigeria's NAP III represents an opportunity to consolidate these gains. The plan recognises women's participation in conflict prevention, mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and the broader peace and security architecture. It also identifies emerging issues including technology-facilitated insecurity, climate change and food insecurity (Government of Nigeria, 2024).

The empirical evidence therefore suggests three broad conclusions. First, women contribute to security through both formal and informal mechanisms. Second, meaningful participation is more important than numerical representation. Third, community-level inclusion is necessary if national gender policies are to produce practical security outcomes.

2.4 Knowledge Gap

Existing literature provides substantial evidence concerning women, peace and security, gender equality and women's participation in peacebuilding. However, four gaps remain.

First, much of the literature approaches women principally from a protection and rights perspective rather than explicitly examining them as strategic assets within national defence and security.

Second, studies frequently focus separately on women's participation in security institutions, peacebuilding or community development without integrating these dimensions into a single national-security framework.

Third, relatively limited attention has been paid to the relationship between women's participation in formal security institutions and their informal contributions through community networks, social capital, early warning and local peacebuilding.

Fourth, Nigeria's recent launch of NAP III creates a new policy environment requiring research that examines how gender mainstreaming can move from policy commitment to operational capability.

This study addresses these gaps by conceptualising women as strategic security actors whose value extends across formal defence and security institutions, community-based prevention, social inclusion and development.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a systematic document analysis design. The approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to synthesise evidence concerning women's participation in national defence, security governance, community peacebuilding and social inclusion using existing scholarly and institutional evidence. The study examined peer-reviewed literature, national policy documents, international normative instruments and reports produced by authoritative organisations. Foundational documents, particularly UNSCR 1325 (2000), were included because they provide the normative foundation for the WPS agenda, while recent evidence published principally between 2020 and 2026 was prioritised for empirical and policy analysis.

3.2 Search Strategy

Relevant literature was identified through structured searches of Google Scholar and other academic search platforms, supplemented by searches of institutional repositories. Search terms included combinations of:

women and national security Nigeria;
women in defence and security Nigeria;
women peace and security Nigeria;
gender mainstreaming security sector Nigeria;
women and conflict prevention Nigeria;
women community peacebuilding Nigeria;
women security sector reform Nigeria;
women violent extremism prevention Nigeria;
gender responsive security governance; and
social inclusion community security Nigeria.

Institutional searches included the United Nations, UN Women, African Union, Federal Government of Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, security-sector institutions and relevant development organisations.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Documents were included when they:

- i. directly addressed women, gender, peace, security, defence, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, community resilience or social inclusion;
- ii. focused on Nigeria or provided directly relevant African or international comparative evidence;
- iii. were peer-reviewed publications, official policy documents, recognised institutional reports or authoritative normative instruments;
- iv. were published principally between 2020 and 2026, except foundational theoretical and normative documents; and
- v. contained substantive evidence or analysis relevant to at least one research question.

Documents were excluded when they were opinion pieces without substantive evidence, lacked identifiable institutional or scholarly authority, focused exclusively on issues unrelated to peace and security, or duplicated information contained in stronger primary sources.

3.4 Data Extraction and Analysis

Data were extracted according to publication characteristics, geographical focus, security issue, role of women identified, institutional or community mechanism, principal finding and policy implication. The evidence was subsequently organised into four analytical themes corresponding to the research questions: (1) women as strategic actors in national defence and security; (2) gender mainstreaming and security governance; (3) women and community-based prevention and resilience; and (4) social inclusion, community development and national security.

The analysis employed thematic synthesis rather than statistical meta-analysis because the included evidence consisted of heterogeneous academic studies, policy documents and institutional reports. Evidence was triangulated across sources, and claims of causality were avoided where the underlying documents established only association, contribution or plausible pathways.

4.0 Discussion of Findings

4.1 Women as Strategic Assets for National Defence and Security

The evidence reviewed demonstrates that women's strategic contribution to national defence and security extends beyond their numerical presence within military, police and paramilitary institutions. Women contribute through professional security roles, intelligence and information gathering, community engagement, mediation, humanitarian response, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. UNSCR 1325 explicitly recognises women's contribution to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and reconstruction, while contemporary UN Women evidence shows that women play important roles in preventing conflict and sustaining peace even though their participation in formal security processes remains limited (UNSC, 2000; UN Women, 2025). In Nigeria, the relevance of this contribution is heightened by the nature of insecurity, which often occurs within communities rather than exclusively on conventional battlefields. Women may possess social access and contextual knowledge that can support early identification of threats, community engagement and humanitarian response. Their participation can also improve the ability of security institutions to interact with women, children and other vulnerable populations affected by insecurity. The finding is therefore that women represent a strategic human resource for national defence and security whose value lies in professional competence as well as access to social networks, community knowledge and prevention capacities. Their inclusion should consequently be understood as an expansion of national security capability rather than merely an equality intervention.

4.2 Gender Mainstreaming and Security Governance

The evidence indicates that meaningful gender mainstreaming can strengthen security governance by incorporating gender perspectives into policy, planning, recruitment, training, deployment, intelligence, operations, budgeting and institutional accountability. Nigeria's National Security Strategy already recognises gender sensitivity as a component of security policy and identifies women as agents of development, social inclusion and sustainable peace (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). Nigeria's NAP III further provides a framework for women's participation, protection, prevention, relief and recovery and establishes a multisectoral structure for implementation, monitoring and reporting (Government of Nigeria, 2024). However, documentary evidence shows that the principal challenge is not the absence of policy commitments but uneven implementation. Research on women in the Nigerian Police Force demonstrates how institutional culture and gender stereotypes historically restricted women's roles despite their formal inclusion (Akinjobi-Babatunde, 2015). Recent UN-supported security-sector reforms demonstrate progress through gender-sensitive institutional policies and training, but continuing underrepresentation indicates the need for deeper institutional change (United Nations Nigeria, 2025). The finding is therefore that gender mainstreaming becomes strategically meaningful only when it changes institutional practice. This requires moving beyond gender desks and symbolic appointments towards gender-responsive recruitment, career progression, leadership development, operational planning, budgeting, data systems and performance measurement.

4.3 Women, Community-Based Prevention and Social Resilience

The evidence shows that women can make significant contributions to community-based conflict prevention, mediation, early warning and social resilience. Women are often embedded in networks that connect households, community organisations, markets, schools, religious institutions and local leadership structures. These networks can provide information about emerging grievances and facilitate dialogue before disputes escalate. Evidence from Nigeria's women-led peacebuilding initiatives demonstrates that women's groups can create spaces for dialogue, strengthen community participation and contribute to locally led peacebuilding (Mercy Corps, 2024). UN Women similarly identifies women as important actors in conflict prevention, mediation, social cohesion and community recovery, emphasising that inclusive peace processes can improve local ownership and produce a fuller understanding of conflict dynamics (UN Women, 2024). The strategic significance of these contributions is particularly relevant to Nigeria because many security challenges have localised social and economic dimensions. Community-based prevention can identify tensions before they become violent, strengthen relationships between citizens and security institutions and improve the legitimacy of security interventions. Women should therefore be integrated into early-warning systems, community-security platforms, peace committees, local mediation structures and prevention programmes rather than being engaged only after conflict has already occurred.

4.4 Social Inclusion, Community Development and National Security

The fourth finding is that social inclusion and community development provide an important foundation for converting women's participation into sustained national-security outcomes. Women's security contributions cannot be separated from their socioeconomic conditions. Poverty, unemployment, displacement, limited access to education, exclusion from decision-making and gender-based discrimination can reduce women's capacity to participate effectively in peace and security processes. Conversely, education, economic empowerment, leadership opportunities and community development can strengthen women's agency and the social networks through which prevention and resilience operate. The African Union's Agenda 2063 explicitly connects women's empowerment and gender equality with participatory development and peace and security, reflecting an understanding that inclusive development and security are mutually reinforcing (AUC, 2015). Nigeria's NAP III similarly places women, children, families and vulnerable groups within a broader national-stability framework and seeks to localise implementation across the federation (FMINO, 2025). The implication is that treating women as strategic security assets requires investment beyond security institutions themselves. Community development programmes, livelihoods, education, social protection, leadership development and inclusive local governance can increase women's capacity to contribute to prevention and resilience. The finding is therefore that gender equality, social inclusion and community development should be understood as mutually reinforcing components of preventive national security.

5.0 Strategic Findings

First, women constitute an underutilised strategic resource for national defence and security. Their contributions extend across formal security institutions, intelligence, community engagement, mediation, humanitarian response and peacebuilding.

Second, gender mainstreaming strengthens security governance when it is integrated into institutional structures, recruitment, training, leadership, operations, budgeting and accountability rather than treated as a symbolic representation exercise.

Third, women possess significant potential for community-based prevention through social networks, early warning, mediation, dialogue, peacebuilding and resilience-building initiatives.

Fourth, women's effectiveness as strategic security actors depends partly on the wider social environment. Social inclusion, economic opportunity, education, leadership development and community development can increase women's capacity to contribute to national resilience.

6.0 Conclusion

This study examined women as strategic assets for national defence and security, with particular attention to gender mainstreaming, social inclusion and community development. The analysis demonstrates that women's strategic value cannot be reduced to their presence within formal security institutions. Women contribute across the security continuum through professional service, intelligence, community engagement, mediation, early warning, humanitarian response, peacebuilding and recovery. The evidence also demonstrates that meaningful participation matters more than numerical representation. Women must have opportunities to influence policy, command, operational planning, intelligence, peace processes and institutional decision-making. Gender mainstreaming must therefore become an organisational practice rather than a stand-alone programme.

Nigeria's Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security provides an important policy opportunity. Its successful implementation can strengthen the connection between women's participation, security-sector reform, community resilience and national development. However, implementation will require sustained political commitment, institutional ownership, financing, monitoring and accountability.

The central conclusion is that women should be regarded as strategic partners in national defence and security rather than as passive beneficiaries of security policy. A national-security architecture that systematically incorporates women's professional capabilities, knowledge and community networks is likely to be more inclusive, locally responsive and preventive. Mainstreaming gender is therefore not simply a question of social justice; it is a strategic investment in Nigeria's capacity to anticipate, prevent and manage insecurity.

7.0 Recommendations

Recommendation One

The Federal Government of Nigeria should institutionalise women's meaningful participation as a strategic component of national defence and security planning.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence, Armed Forces of Nigeria, Nigeria Police Force and other security institutions, to establish measurable targets for women's participation in recruitment, professional development, operational assignments and decision-making positions.
- ii. Security institutions to strengthen leadership development, mentoring and career-progression programmes for women and ensure that women's participation extends beyond specialised gender-related functions to mainstream operational and strategic responsibilities.

Recommendation Two

The Federal Government should strengthen gender mainstreaming across security institutions and national-security governance.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Office of the National Security Adviser, in collaboration with relevant security institutions and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, to integrate gender analysis into security policies, operational planning, training, budgeting and monitoring frameworks.
- ii. Security institutions to institutionalise gender-responsive data systems and periodic gender audits to identify participation gaps, discriminatory practices and barriers to women's advancement.

Recommendation Three

The Federal Government should strengthen the participation of women in community-based conflict prevention, early warning, mediation and peacebuilding.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, in collaboration with state governments, security agencies, traditional institutions and civil-society organisations, to establish and strengthen women-led community peace and early-warning structures in conflict-affected and high-risk communities.
- ii. State and local authorities to formally link women-led community structures with existing security and conflict-prevention mechanisms to facilitate timely information-sharing, mediation and referral of emerging threats.

Recommendation Four

The Federal Government should integrate women's empowerment, social inclusion and community development into preventive national-security strategies.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, in collaboration with relevant economic, education, employment and social-protection institutions, to prioritise programmes that strengthen women's education, livelihoods, leadership and participation in vulnerable communities.
- ii. The National Technical Working Committee on Women, Peace and Security to establish measurable indicators for assessing the contribution of women's inclusion and community-development interventions to social cohesion, resilience and national security under NAP III.

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