WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS, SECURITY AND PEACE-BUILDING IN NIGERIA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES OF EUNICE SPRING OF LIFE FOUNDATION

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ABSTRACT
Not much literature exists on the contributions of women in security and peace-building in Nigeria – thus this article is a discussion of the contributions (present and potential) of women and women organizations in the security and peace-building process in Benue State by examining the programmes and activities of Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF); a Makurdi based non-governmental organization. The paper utilized both primary and secondary instruments to collect its data: questionnaire, books and journals. Findings show that through the advocacy and support of ESLF, nine (9) women were elected as chairpersons in nine (9) LGAs of the state and sensitizing and empowering youths led to an improvement in the security and peace of Benue communities. The study concluded that when women begin to contribute to the making of security and peace-building decisions and policies, security and peace in Nigeria and Benue State will improve. The paper recommends the promotion of women participation in security, conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution and peace building.

Introduction

All over the world, it is common for women to be relegated to the background, sidelined or totally ignored in many areas of community decision and policy making including the very important area of security and peace-building. But for any community, country and indeed the world to make progress in its pursuit of these ideals, women should also contribute since their life experiences is different from those of men, who dominate. The importance of drawing from the experiences of women is critical to security and peace-building because "during conflict, inequalities are exacerbated and can manifest in many ways, including sexual and gender based violence, a lack of access to basic resources to meet needs, and increased responsibilities at a time when women are already overburdened" (UN Women, 2014). And as the most impacted during conflicts, only women can better narrate their experiences from which recommendations can be made. The difference in the experiences of women during conflict was first formally recognized by the United Nations in October 2000 when it passed Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 after finding out that women and children constitute more than 80% of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide.

Although so much need to be done in recognizing the role of women in contributing to security and peace-building, UN SCR 1325 changed the narrative which saw women only as victims needing protection to seeing women as agents of conflict resolution, security and peace-

building. The argument in support for this perspective is that after the peace keepers and/or peace enforcers who are mostly men leave the scene; it is necessary and important to engage women in building and maintaining peace as a primary and formal element in the affected community – and not only as an adjunct responsibility. It was for this reason that General David J. Hurley, a former Chief of the Defense Forces in Australia argues for the integration of a gender perspective into the peace and security efforts of countries, the protection of women and girls' human rights and the promotion of their participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution. Another international milestone that pushed for the inclusion of women in decision-making for security and peace prior to the SCR 1325 is the Beijing declaration and platform for action of 1995. Since the Beijing Conference of 1995 and the SCR of the year 2000, societies and countries across the globe are beginning to realize that without the contributions of women, it is almost impossible for security and peace to be achieved on a long term basis.

In Nigeria and most African societies, the important role of women towards improving security and building peace is better expressed or appreciated from the family angle since women are the wives and tenders of children. This is why mothers have the most influence on children than fathers. In Nigeria, most kidnappers, drug peddlers, bandits, thugs, cultists, armed robbers, militants, terrorists, arsonists, armed pastoralists, etc are males – and since women are the mothers and/or care givers of children, they have the most influence in 'catching them young' by early instilling in the boy child the virtues of peaceful living, making legitimate and honest means of livelihoods, contentment, abhorring crime and the individual and societal damaging effects of crime and criminality.

Nigeria is one of the most troubled countries in the world and nowhere else are women needed to contribute to improving security and peace than the country. The history of Nigeria cannot be written or told without the many incidences of violent crises and conflicts that have taken place in many parts of the country with the Nigerian military currently involved in fighting crime, terrorism and banditry in 34 of the country's 36 states and the federal capital territory, Abuja. Since July 2009 when it reared its ugly head, Boko Haram terrorists continue to claim lives and property in the country's North particularly in the Northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. Although the Nigerian military is now gaining some grounds in the fight against Boko Haram and breakaway groups like ISWAP and Ansaru, kidnapping, armed robberies and banditry has become the lived reality of Nigerians. On 28th March 2022, an Abuja to Kaduna train owned, operated and managed by the Federal Government of Nigeria was attacked by terrorists and nine (9) passengers were killed and hundreds abducted. The family of a Pakistani who was a victim paid N100 million for his release. In one case, N800 million in cash was paid to the terrorists for the release of seven (7) of the passengers. In June 2022, over forty (40) worshippers at the St. Francis Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State were murdered in cold blood when terrorists invaded the church during a Sunday morning service. Some months ago, the Kuje Minimum Custodial Center, located 30 minutes to the international airport in Abuja the seat of the Federal government was attacked and many criminals including 64 Boko Haram terrorists were freed. The next day, the advance security team of the former Nigerian president; Muhammadu Buhari was attacked on its way to Katsina State.

As one of the 36 states in the country, Benue State; located in the North-Central geopolitical zone with an estimated population of 6.67 million people is not immune to the insecurity problems in Nigeria – because the state is one of the 34 states bedeviled with insecurity manifesting in armed robberies, kidnappings, armed pastoralist attacks, cultism, political thuggery and their attendant negative impacts on peace and peace-building. In a country with this kind of reality, why are there few literatures that discusses the present and potential contributions of women and women organizations to security and peace-building? Since women have different conflict experiences, should they not also sit at the table where decisions and policies for security and peace-building are made? Are there recommendations that can be implemented so that women become active stakeholders in the decision and policy making level of the security and peace-building architectures in Nigeria? It is from this background and questions that this article discusses women and their present and potential contribution to security and peace-building in Nigeria by examining the programmes and activities of Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF); a Makurdi based non-governmental organization that targets women

and youths in the twenty-three (23) local government areas of Benue State.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to discuss the contribution of women and women organizations (present and potential) in security and peace-building in Nigeria by examining the programmes and activities of Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF). Other specific objectives of the study include:

i. To find out whether the advocacy and enlightenment campaigns of ESLF is empowering and supporting women seeking elected political offices in Benue State.

ii. To find out the impact of ESLF workshops and seminars organized to sensitize and empower youths of Benue State.

iii. To find out whether there have been improvements in security and peace-building since ESLF began implementing its programmes and activities in Benue State.

iv. To make recommendations on ways to improve security and peace in Nigeria.

Research Methodology

The study utilized both secondary and primary instruments to gather its data. The secondary instruments are books and journals while the primary instrument is the questionnaire. The study used both random and purposive sampling techniques in arriving at its sample size. To choose the local governments where the research would take place, the names of the twenty-three (23) local government areas were written on sheets of papers and separated according to their senatorial zones; A, B, and C. The sheets were folded and dropped into three boxes marked "A", "B" and "C" and a blind-folded research assistant was asked to pick a sheet from each box. The three local governments are Makurdi, Gboko and Otukpo. The researcher and two research assistants each went to one local government area and fifty (50) respondents were purposively selected and administered the questionnaire in each local government area. Respondents were purposively selected because it is important that they understand the phenomenon being investigated. They were eighty (80) females and sixty (60) males whose age ranges from 25 years to 60 years and they are students, civil servants, university lecturers, teachers, farmers, traditional chiefs and market women. The questionnaire contains nine (9) questions and divided into two sections: Section A contains three questions on the demography of the respondents like age, sex and occupation while Section B has six questions that sought answers to the research questions.

Conceptual Clarifications

Security: Security is one of the most desired values for humans and animals as it has to do with the state of being free from danger or threat. Buzan (1984) described security as an underdeveloped concept because of difficulties of conceptual clarity on what it means. Although this is 2024, many still hold tight to Buzan's views concerning security because they agree that security means different things to different people per time, scope, situation and environment which make it difficult to have a one-fit-all-situation definition of the term. But in his contribution to clarifying the meaning of security and before Buzan's argument, Wolfers (1952) defines security as "the absence of threats to acquired values" while Baldwin (1997) argue that any definition of security must first address two questions: security for whom and security for which value? From a simplistic angle, the question of "security for whom" should be that it is for the safety of individuals, the state and the international system while "security for which value" identifies the purpose of security which is for the protection and the preservation of values such as physical safety, economic welfare, autonomy, psychological wellbeing, etc. It is based on this that in this article, we define security as the condition and situation where individuals living in Nigeria and Benue State are safe and secure from physical harm and enjoy both economic and psychological wellbeing.

Peace: Ikejiani-Clark and Ani (2009) describe peace as one of humanity's highest values and why it is one of the most sought after phenomenon by individuals, societies, countries and indeed the world. In many instances and situations, peace is viewed as the opposite of war (as different from conflict; because not every conflict is violent but most wars are

violent) from the knowledge that war is one of humanity's daunting problems. But peace is not only the absence of war as it also has to do with the establishment of positive, life-affirming and life-enhancing values and social structures (Barash and Webel in Tsuwa and Otsapa, 2014). Cussort (1989) made us see that like most social and behavioral concepts, defining peace is difficult because of how its definition always have rhetorical uses for political leaders who often benefit from the ambiguity of the term. However, and from a strict psychological angle peace is the state of mind where an individual or a group of people enjoy harmony and balance.

In his clarification of the meaning of peace, prominent peace scholar, Gunnar Johnson argues that what constitutes peace involves three categories: peace as a world without war, peace as world justice and peace as world order (Johnson, 1976). As noted earlier, it is common for most people to describe peace as the absence of war and war as the absence of peace but the concept of what peace means is not so simplistic. While peace is the absence of war, it does not end there. This is why one needs to ask: even when there is no war, is there structural violence (poverty, fear, deprivation, oppression, injustice, unemployment and marginalization)? This means that we cannot speak of peace in a society where most residents are poor, hungry, unemployed, marginalized and treated unjustly. Where there is no war but there is structural violence, what exists is negative peace because although bullets are not been fired nor bombs thrown, peace is threatened because those who are hungry, poor and frustrated are likely to become terrorists, armed robbers, bandits, cultists, kidnappers, etc thus endangering lives and property. The frustration-aggression theory makes case for this kind of situation. On the other hand, positive peace is a situation or condition where there is no war and structural violence is low – or absent. Drawing from Johnson (1976) three categories of the conceptualization of peace; we define peace as a Nigeria and Benue State without war, a Nigeria and Benue State where there is justice and a Nigeria and Benue State that is in order.

Peace-building: This connotes the prevention of the outbreak, continuation or resurgence of armed violent conflict through a combination of intentional political, economic, humanitarian and human right measures and initiatives. In building peace after a violent conflict had taken place, several measures and initiatives are rolled out on a short-term or long-term basis that would help maintain the peace by addressing the immediate and remote causes of a particular conflict. It is advised that for any measure and/or initiative geared towards the attainment of peace and peace-building to be successful; those directly involved in the conflict should be carried along from the beginning. This means that the peace-building measures and initiatives to be implemented at any given time should be locally owned by those affected by the conflict, even if the coordinating authority is state, national or international. This is important because for any peace-building programme or measure to become successful, it must be designed to meet with the specific needs of the locals such that it addresses the security and humanitarian needs that emanated out of the factors that led to the conflict in the first place.

The Peace Process and the Role of Women

There are three streams in the peace-building process sometimes referred to as the "peace process umbrella" – and they are classified into Stream One, Stream Two and Stream Three. **Stream One** is the place where high-level discussions, negotiations and decisions about peace are made. This stream is made up of principal actors who wield power in the political, economic and military dimensions of a society; the sectors that are critical to the peace building process. It is in Stream One that matters such as decisions and policies concerning military deployments, economic sanctions and embargoes, war, constitutional reforms, etc are made.

Stream Two is the civil society level involving engagements and discussions by civil society actors with political and government policy makers. Members of Stream Two engage in the peace process through organized protests and by lobbying those in government (those who are members of Stream One). Although actors in this stream do not have power to decide on issues of peace and its enforcement, they have the ears of some Stream One decision and policy makers.

Stream Three is the level involved with responding to the needs of those directly affected by violent conflicts in the communities. It is at this level that food and water and the provision of alternative livelihoods are carried out, making members of this level the closest to the people and those who fuel the feedback mechanisms that those in Stream One needs for

their decisions and Stream Two for their engagements or protests for peace and conflict resolution. Members of Stream Three are those tasked with the responsibility of executing and implementing the decisions of members of Stream One (as sometimes influenced and guided by the actions of those in Stream Two). It is at this level that Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF) operates in.

In these three streams of the "peace process umbrella", women are, in most societies and countries under-represented at the level of Stream One which is dominated by men. It is at the level of Stream Two and more at Stream Three that many women and women organizations and groups play active roles for peace and security.

Insecurity in Benue State (2013-2023): A Review of Some Nigerian Newspapers

For many years, but particularly since July 2009 when the Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism began in Nigeria no day passes by without reports of one terror attack or another across the country, particularly in the northeast and northwest geopolitical zones. However in recent years, the attacks have come in form of armed herdsmen attacks, banditry, armed robberies and kidnappings and today a gunshot is like a doorbell in most Nigerian cities, towns and villages. While terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria is most prevalent in the North-Eastern region in states like Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, armed banditry and kidnapping is commonplace in the North-Western region in states like Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina and Kaduna. In the North-Central geopolitical zone, the main security challenges are pastoralists and farmers' clashes/attacks, kidnappings, armed robberies and communal clashes in states like Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa In Benue State and for many years, no month passes by without reports of attacks by armed pastoralists in local government areas like Guma, Logo, Gwer-West, Gwer-East, Agatu and on the outskirts of Makurdi; the state capital.

Benue State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria and it was created in 1976. According to Godwin (2018), over 1600 people in Benue State were killed between 2013 and 2018 in attacks carried out by pastoralists. In the same period, the Benue State Emergency Management Agency (BESEMA) reported that 117,771 people were internally displaced and relocated to eight camps within the state. One of the biggest insecurity tragedies in the state occurred on 1st January 2018 when 73 persons were killed by armed herders in Guma and Logo government areas. On 11th January 2018, the state government organized a mass burial ceremony for the victims in Makurdi, the state capital. In September 22nd 2022, the *Vanguard Newspaper* reported that 14 people were murdered and 30 were injured when armed herdsmen attacked Mchia and Mou communities in Logo local government area. The *Tribune Newspaper* on 19th October 2022 reported of the killing of 23 people in reprisal attacks in Ukum and Logo local government areas. There is no one single generally agreed reason for these attacks because while others see them as religious in nature; that is between Christians and Muslims, there are those who attach economic attributes to them; the contestations over grazing and farming rights by Fulani pastoralists and indigenous farmers.

On 15th September 2022, *ThisDay Newspaper* reported of the killing of thirteen people within a week in separate attacks in Guma local government area. In a statement on Facebook monitored by this researcher, the then Chief Press Secretary to the former governor of Benue State, Mr. Nathaniel Ikyur stated that the continuing insecurity in the state has created more than two million internally displaced persons housed in different internally displaced camps across the state but particularly in Agan in Makurdi Local Government Area and Daudu in Guma Local Government Area. In November 2017, consistent attacks by armed pastoralists forced the former governor of the state through the House of Assembly to pass a law prohibiting open cattle grazing across Benue State but attacks have not ceased. The insecurity situation that continues to disturb the security and peace-building efforts in Benue State is not limited to the activities of armed pastoralists as it also includes armed robberies, kidnappings, cultism and political thuggery.

On 30th August 2022, the *Tribune Newspaper* reported the arrest of three suspected armed robbers who had been terrorizing some parts of Makurdi, the state capital. According to the state police command spokesperson, items recovered from the suspects include one locally made pistol loaded with three rounds of live ammunitions, wraps of Indian hemp, assorted illicit drugs and charms. On 16th October 2022, three robbers were killed by policemen in the Afia axis of Ukum local government area where a gun, ammunition, machete and charms were

recovered. The recurring cases of charms are an indication that armed robbers operating in Benue State engage in spiritual fortifications before embarking on crime but clearly the charms are disappointing them. On February 10th 2022, The *Daily Trust Newspaper* reported that the Benue police authority had arrested and paraded nine (9) suspects in Makurdi for alleged involvement in cultism and armed robbery related activities. During investigation, they confessed to being members of the System Black Movement (SBM) Confraternity. The SBM is one of the many violent cult groups in Benue State that young people are involved with. Others are: Buccaneers, Black Axe, Second Son of Satan (SSS), Temple of Eden, White Bishops, Gentlemen Clubs, Executioners, Black Scorpion and Red Sea Horse. Their members are usually males between the ages of 16 and 35 who are secondary and tertiary students, artisans, commercial bus drivers and conductors, commercial motor cycle operators popularly known as "okada" and aspiring musicians.

On August 22nd 2002, the *Vanguard Newspaper* reported of the arrest of 18 suspected members of a kidnap syndicate along the Utonkon Road in Ado Local Government Area of the state. Instructive in this particular case is that the kidnappers were arrested after locals who sighted and suspected their movements in their community alerted the police. On 12th August 2022, officers of the Benue police command also arrested two suspected kidnappers along Gboko Road in Makurdi who confessed to targeting women.

Table 1: Victims of insecurity in Benue State, 2009-2022

Victims	Number Affected/Estimated cost
Persons killed	28,997
Police stations burnt	5
Houses destroyed (excluding thatched houses)	54,476
Markets	33
Farm produce destroyed	N21billion

Source: Duru (2023)

The table above shows the level of insecurity in Benue State from 2009 to 2022. However, it is important to note that these numbers are likely higher since many cases of attacks and destructions are not reported by their victims for reasons ranging from distrust for security officers and fear of victimization by their attackers. Benue State is an agrarian state where majority of the people depend on subsistence agriculture and continuing insecurity is increasing unemployment and individual and household multidimensional poverty that has negative impacts on security, peace and conflict resolution in the state.

Security and Peace-building in Benue State: Impact of the Programmes and Activities of the Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF)

Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF) is a non-governmental organization established in 2016 with its office in Makurdi, the capital of Benue State, North-central Nigeria. The foundation was established for the purpose of providing developmental efforts in Benue State from a non-political, non-religious and non-profit making standpoint without bias to race or creed to its pirmary target of women, youths, children, persons with disabilities and other marginalized persons. The foundation works with stakeholders across the 23 local government areas of the state towards contributing to the improvement of the health of the people of Benue State, create access to quality education for the less priviledged and the needy, contribute to promoting good and inclusive governance, promote improved agricultural production for the benefit of the poor and vulnerable and promote youth engagement in agricultural business through capacity building, resource mobilisation, advocacy, research and partnerships. The vision of the organization is to build a society without barriers to decent living with a mission to work with the poor and vulnerable towards improving their lives through networking and building their consciousness to reduce poverty, improve

health and education and improve agricultural practices. The goal of ESLF is to contribute significantly to improving the overall wellbeing of the poor and vulnerable, particularly women and youths by reducing the incidences of poverty, poor health services and poor access to education while mitigating their impacts on the lives of the target population through sustainable approaches.

One of the core programme areas of operation of ESLF is Governance - and according to its Programme Manager, Mr. Tine Agernor it is under this area that the organization organizes protests, advocacy outreaches and sensitization workshops that directly help to improve security and peace-building in Benue State because they believe that governance and development can only take place where there is security and peace. The organization outreaches the twenty-three (23) local government areas of Benue State, with councils like Guma, Makurdi, Agatu and Logo consistently under attack by armed pastoralists and kidnappers. There are also cases of political disputes and disagreements between rival political parties that lead to attacks and counter-attacks by hired thugs and arsonists.

Some of the programmes and activities of the ESLF include the following:

I. ESLF has been contributing to efforts at implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Project in Benue State. The WPS project is implemented by International Alert through UN Women with funding from the Norwegian Government.

II. In 2017, ESLF held a town hall meeting and a walk with youth in partnership with the National Youth Network on HIV/AIDs (NYNETHA) to mark the International Youth Day with the theme: Youths Building Peace.

III. Partnered other organisations to implement the Benue Youth Interactive Forum to mark the 2019 International Youth Day with the theme: Transforming Education. Over 400 youths drawn from the 276 council wards of Benue State brainstormed and made recommendations on ways of improving education in the State.

IV. Conducted advocacy to public officials and political leaders across Benue communities and this led to the appointment of seven (7) women as local government area chairpersons out of the 23 local government areas in the state. This is the highest number of women that have occupied political office at the local government level since the state was created in 1976. And due to the organization's high level advocacy before the 2020 Benue State local government election, nine (9) women were elected as chairpersons of local government areas.

V. Implementing an on-farm training of 50 farmers drawn from five (5) rural farmer cooperative groups (mostly women groups) on ginger cultivation on ESLF's Model Farm.

VI. Trained 50 women and youths in five (5) areas of food processing in partnership with the World Bank Centre for Food Technology and Research, Benue State.

VII. Currently working on a USAID funded project to enhance ease of doing agribusiness in Benue State with focus on rice, maize, soya-beans, cowpea and aquaculture value chains.

VIII. The annual Benue Women and Youth Economic/Entrepreneurship Summit held to build and strengthen knowledge and skills of about 6000 women and youth on opportunities for business in Benue and enterprise management through women and youth in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

IX. Over 1400 women and youths sponsored to acquire vocational skills training in their chosen areas of interest. Of this number, four (4) youths were sponsored to undergo Master vocational training in leather and fibre works in China and have since returned to Benue State and stepped down skills to other youth.

X. Provided eighteen (18) most needy trained beneficiaries with most of them being women with start-up packs to start their businesses.

XI. Facilitated a N100 million loan facility, domiciled in a microfinance bank and currently being disbursed to micro small

and medium enterprises involved in the agriculture value chain. Many women farmers across the state have accessed the loan with which they are engaged in various agric value chain activities.

XII. Over five hundred (500) rural farmers including women in five (5) communities of Raav, Taraku, Aondona, Howe and Angbarye benefited from inputs and their skills built on modern farming techniques. Harvest was shared using an agreed formula by the farmers on one hand and ESLF on the other. Crops cultivated included soya beans, maize, sesame, cassava and rice.

The programmes and activities of the Eunice Spring of Life Foundation speaks to the growing perspective that women should be more represented at the leadership and decision-making level - because every gender should be seated at the table of decision and policy-making concerning the security of lives and property of communities. Through its dogged advocacy and support for the participation, involvement and inclusion of women in active politics and government, nine (9) Benue women were recently elected as chairpersons in nine (9) of the twenty-three (23) local government areas of the state, which meant that these women became the chief security officers of their respective local council areas. Questioned about this, 140 respondents representing 93.3% agreed with the assertion that ESLF helped the women into office while 10 respondents representing 6.6% disagreed with the impact of the Foundation in this regard.

The ESLF is also a platform for the engagement, sensitization, education and the empowerment young people in Benue State, particularly males who are usually those who commit crimes and criminality in the state. These engagements through seminars and workshops are keeping many hitherto idle young people off the streets where they are vulnerable and susceptible to been used for crime and criminality. During these seminars, they are taught the importance of earning money legitimately and the benefits of staying away from crime. When asked about the impact of these seminars and workshops on youths of Benue, particularly on young males, majority of the respondents, 134 representing 89.3% of sample population are of the opinion that Benue State has witnessed a reduction in the number of young people who engage in crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, car theft, drug abuse and cultism because of ESLF. On whether the free education and enlightenment campaigns offered by ESLF has made young people in Benue State understand that they have nothing to gain from participating in activities that disturbs the peace of their immediate communities in particular and of the state in general, 138 respondents representing 92% of the sampled population agreed in the affirmative.

Asked if they have noticed any improvement in the security and peace in their communities and local government areas since the ESLF began implementing its programmes and activities, 124 respondents in Gboko, 98 respondents in Otukpo and 131 respondents in Makurdi say that the programmes and activities of ESLF has led to a reduction in the rate of political thuggery, armed robberies and kidnappings in their communities. On the impact of this improved security and peace on the socioeconomic life of their communities, majority of respondents; 124 representing 83.3% of the sample respondents in Gboko, 98 representing 65% of the sample respondents in Otukpo and 131 representing 87.3% of the sample respondents agree that many young people; indigenes and non-indigenes alike are now investing in the agricultural sector and this has led to a reduction in the number of idle youths available to be hired as political thugs, kidnappers, terrorists, armed robbers and cultists. Also, 76 respondents representing 50.6% of the sample respondents say that many of the women and youths they know who are beneficiaries of the ESLF farm trainings and empowerment programmes now own their own businesses while others are gainfully employed in companies.

Conclusion

For peace and the security of lives and property to improve in Nigeria and Benue State, it is important to promote the participation of women in the security, peace building and conflict prevention discussions and decisions of their communities, the state and country – because the current male dominated security setup is yet to proffer a lasting solution to the problem of rising insecurity. When women are empowered and given opportunities to head key security agencies like the police or army, they are able to directly impact on security and peace-building because their experiences of conflict

and strategies to managing conflict would be different from those of men. Through its advocacy for women inclusion in politics and the empowering of both women and youths in Benue State, Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF) is contributing to the improvement of security and peace-building in Benue State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Recommendations

Increasing the number of women in elective and appointive public office positions is important. In Nigeria and Benue State, men still dominate the Stream One category of the peace process umbrella so the decisions and policies made concerning security and peace-building do not take into cognizance the experiences of women. When women begin to contribute their knowledge and experiences at the Stream One level, a different approach to security and peace-building would be explored – and it is likely to be the ice-breaker. Along this line, more women should be encouraged and recruited into the military and the security agencies like the Police, Department of State Security (DSS), Customs, Army, Navy, Airforce, Immigration, etc – and assured that they would be treated equal as their male counterparts during promotion. This is important because Nigeria operates a central command and control security architecture and no woman has ever headed key security institutions like the Director of the DSS, Inspector General of Police, Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, Chief of Air Staff, Chief of Defense Staff or as the Minister of Defense. When women become a part of the policy and decision-making organs of Nigeria's political and security systems, a different perspective, strategy and approach to the protection of lives and property and how to build peace would be brought to the table.

A non-kinetic approach like financial empowerment and job creation that improves the socioeconomic condition and living standards of women and youths in Nigeria would go a long way in arresting insecurity and improve the prospects of peace-building. Millions of Nigerian youths are idle (unemployment rate is 12% in Benue State) and so they are vulnerable to becoming threats to security and peace-building. The Arab Spring that engulfed the MENA region began after 26 year old unemployed university graduate; Ahmed Bouzizi doused himself with petrol when the fruits he was hawking to eke out a living were confiscated by a police woman. Therefore, governments, corporate organizations and wealthy individuals in Nigeria must reinvent ways to productively and gainfully engage the youth bulge in state and country or the army of armed robbers, bandits, terrorists, cultists, kidnappers, etc would continue to grow – and one day, there would be a Nigerian Ahmed Bouzizi.

Funding non-governmental organizations whose programmes and activities directly impact on security and peace-building is encouraged. Thus, wealthy individuals, corporate organizations, local and international donors, Nigerian states and federal government should commit to financially supporting NGOs that advocate for the empowerment of women and youths since women have been identified as important to the security and peace-building of communities, states and Nigeria. This is important because financial constraint is one of the main obstacles NGOs in Benue State and Nigeria face.

Engaging locals in the planning and execution of peace-building initiatives and programmes is important. Any strategy that aims to build peace in any community, state or country that does not involve the local people is likely to fail because "he/she who wears the shoe knows where it pinches" and because "you cannot shave a man's head in his absence". The involvement of locals in the formulation, planning and execution of any security and peace-building strategy is very important because it is those directly affected by a crime or conflict that most understand the issues and are in the best position to narrate their experiences from which recommendations can be made.

The number of DSS, police and military officials in Benue and Nigeria is grossly inadequate per the population and size of the state (6.67 million people and 34,059 km^2) and country (225 million people and 923,768 km^2). The officers and men of the Nigerian police are less than 400,000 and there are 774 local governments in Nigeria. When we divide 400,000 by 774, we have approximately 517 police men for one local government area in Nigeria. So for Benue State with 23 local government areas, the number of police men in the state is 11,891 protecting the lives and properties of 6.67 million residents in the two hundred and seventy-six (276) council wards of the state. But these numbers are less because the duty of about a quarter of police officers is

guarding political and business VIPs while others are in administration- so in reality, less than 300,000 is available for community policing across Nigeria. The DSS and military are not better; the DSS are not more than 150,000 (with many guarding only VIPs) and the military not more than 200,000 (with some guarding only VIPs).

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