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Women's Religious Networks and Grassroots Peace Mediation in Conflict Affected Communities in Nigeria

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Background: The constant ethno-religious and communal tensions in Nigeria have continued to jeopardize societal stability and communal integrity but the role played in peace mediation by women collective actions of faiths in the grassroots has not been well examined in the scholarly literature. In most conflict-driven societies, religious networks are informally structured women in churches, mosques, and faith-based groups and organise a coalition of religious values, social capital, and interpersonal trust to carry out dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict prevention. The value of such networks in enhancing locally based peacebuilding mechanisms is thus significant to know their roles and effectiveness.

Method: The research design embraced in the study was a qualitative research design that aimed at examining how networks by women of God in grassroots mediation work in conflict stricken communities in Nigeria. The data were produced with the help of the in-depth interviews, observations of the participants, and analysis of the documents with members of the women-based faith-based groups, community leaders, and peace practitioners. The analysis was themed and examined the ways in which women intervene in local conflicts and can use strategy of community engagement and religious motivations through relational networks to initiate reconciliation process.

Results: Results show that religious networks by women have various functions in grassroots peace mediation. They serve as reliable brokers, mobilisers of the communities and mediators in split communities. These networks aid in de-escalating tensions, promoting reconciliation, and promoting social cohesion through religious meetings, social outreach actions, and informal communication lines. Nevertheless, their performance is challenged by the ingrained patriarchal standards restricting the involvement of the women in the institutional decision-making system, insecurity, financial constraints and insufficient institutional facilitation. Overall, in spite of these limitations, the investigation demonstrates that women religious networks could play a great role in local resilience, prevention of conflicts, and peacebuilding, in case they are well supported.

Keywords: Women religious networks, Grassroots peace mediation, Faith-based peacebuilding, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Violent conflict in Nigeria has taken a variety of fluid forms throughout the last twenty years; insurgent actions in the North-East to communal conflict in the Middle Belt and a series of inter-ethnic conflict in some areas of the South. These wars have

transformed social relations, frayed the local structures of governance, and destabilized the everyday life forms. Although formal descriptions of the process of peace-building often revolve around national and state-level actions, a significant part of the de-escalation activity is performed through communities. In these contexts, the informal actors such as religious leaders, elders, and to an increasing extent women associations have created the outlines of the mediation processes in a manner that does not even feature in official accounts. This landscape should be further analyzed with regard to religious networks of women.

In Nigeria, social organisation is still central to religious institutions. Communal interaction, moral discourse and religion are organized by churches, mosques, prayer groups and faith-based associations. In addition to the functions of doctrines, these institutions are used to encourage collective discourse, welfare, and response to crises. The comparative studies of the African conflicts settings have noted that women participation in the institutions often goes beyond the practices of devotion to encompass community leadership and reconciliation (Akpan et al., 2024). This involvement makes inherited assumptions more complex that put women in a major role of passive receivers of security results. Women instead are the translators of moral power, resolvers of domestic conflicts and links between fragmented constituencies. The Nigerian situation has been no exception as in the face of incompetence by the formal security responses, grassroots mediation is usually born. The fragility of states and local resilience stimulate the reliance on community-based mechanisms that appeal to the community shared religious values. In North-East Nigeria, according to Emmanuel (2025), locally based peace efforts have helped in counterbalancing the reprisal cycles by organising faith accounts that stress on forgiveness and coexistence. Even though these interventions are frequently initiated by male clerics, religious groups by women like prayer circles, fellowship unions, and mosque committees, have provided the organisational platform upon which the messages of reconciliation are transmitted. The fact that they are embedded in family networks allows them to access constituencies that are otherwise closed to formal peace negotiations.

The academic interest towards the female in Nigerian conflicts has often been swinging between two extremes: victimization and accomplity. As an example, Iweze and Okadigwe (2025) illustrate that women in the Aguleri-Umueri conflict had an unstable role, sometimes organizing the peace and sometimes supporting hostility in the community. The mentioned ambivalence highlights the need to focus on the agency of women in a non-romanticised way. There are ways in which women religious networks can reconcile, but it is equally influenced by dominance within the power structures as well as interpretations of doctrine. An evaluation of their mediating role must hence take into consideration internal tensions, denominational variations and social expectations that shape the role of women in it. Outside Nigeria, studies of faith-based involvement have enlightened the potential of religious training and religious guidance to overcome radicalisation and societal distrust (Dasopang, Nasution, and Lubis, 2023). Likewise, Maua (2025) asserts that religious practices in peace-support missions provide access to empower women in the situation where the institution permits them to engage in decisions. These observations can be paralleled with the new Nigerian scholarship that predicts the collective action of women in the maintenance of local peace. In their discussion of the Oshi Ekwa Leka women of

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Eziobodo, Ndu, Nwafor, and Adama (2023) report how customaryreligious networks helped in the settlement of disputes by ritualised dialogue and social sanction. Their results indicate that women associations win their legitimacy not only due to gender solidarity but also due to their place in the moral and cosmological orders that are accepted by the whole society.

However, the connection between religious networks and gender inclusiveness is intricate. Kazanskia (2025) argues the positive effects of religious communities on the development of inclusive leadership practices but such effects are conditional upon the flexibility of doctrines and institutional openness. The diverse theological interpretation and local governance in the plural religious world of Nigeria give disproportionate chances of women leadership. In his study of women in Nasarawa as leaders of peace amid the 2023 elections, Ari (2024) presents a picture of how women organised prayer groups and interreligion to tame political violence. Her discussion shows that the intersection of religious identity and civic activism is possible and depicts how spiritual authority can be turned into political mediation.

Although much research has been done on conflict and peace building in Nigeria, the analysis has been biased towards giving priority to state institutions, international bodies, and male religious leaders. The role of women in these instances has been recognized rhetorically especially in policy discussions affected by international gender structures, and at the same time there is a dearth of empirical studies that describe women religious networks as mediating agents in their own right. This leads to a gap between the apparent presence of women in religious life of communities and the peripheral viewability of their input in the academic and policy studies. The available literature establishes that women can assume diverse roles in a conflict environment, including being peace makers or even direct participants in a conflict (Iweze & Okadigwe, 2025). Nonetheless, this dichotomous framing clouds the organisational aspect of the involvement of women. It is one thing to appreciate an individual agency; it is another to observe how are coordinated the mediation strategies of religious networks, fellowships, women wings of churches and mosques, inter-faith associations. Lack of long term study of this organisational level constrains the knowledge about the ways of conception, legitimisation and maintenance of the grassroots peace initiatives.

Additionally, despite the fact that recent researches like Akpan, U. et al. (2024) highlight that women should be included in the process of post-conflict in African settings, the Nigerian setting shows that there are still several hindrances to formal acceptance. Women interventions are often taken outside formal levels of negotiation making their efforts informal and sporadic in records. This marginality creates doubts in sustainability of their effects and prerequisites of their initiatives to the overall governance patterns. In the absence of empirical elucidation, policy suggestions that support the inclusion of women may end up being a dream and not reality.

Another issue is the lack of conceptual advancement of religious networks in the Nigerian peace studies. Although faith-based organisations are greatly recognised, little effort has been directed to the internal politics that facilitate or restrict the leadership of women in the organisations. According to Ifatimehin, Bashir and Ifatimehin (2025), social cohesion among residents in conflict zones is too weak, with lack of participatory governance being one of the causes of instability. However, little is known about how religious associations of women play a role in or reinvent

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social cohesion. This distance prevents a delicate understanding of the intersection of the moral authority, ritual practice, and collective trust in grassroots mediation.

Against the above gaps, a critical issue of concern is the way through which women religious networks can work in Nigeria, conflict-based societies, mediate on disputes, and the structural constraints that they face..

Therefore, the study seeks to:

i.   To examine the structure and organisational dynamics of women's religious networks in conflict-affected communities in Nigeria.
ii. To analyse the strategies and mechanisms employed by women's religious networks in mediating and transforming grassroots conflicts.
iii. To assess the socio-cultural and institutional factors that enable or constrain the effectiveness of women's religious networks in local peacebuilding processes.

Research Question

i.   How are women's religious networks structured and organised within conflict-affected communities in Nigeria?
ii. What strategies and mechanisms do women's religious networks employ in mediating and resolving grassroots conflicts?
iii. What socio-cultural and institutional factors influence the effectiveness of women's religious networks in grassroots peace mediation in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Conceptualising, Religion, women's religious networks and grassroots peace mediation

Religion is more than a definition, it is systems of belief, rites, moral education and group identity that takes people back to the transcendent forms whilst acting as a social institution in historical and cultural conditions. It controls the collective life by controlling behavior, enhancing moral imagination, and passing ethical standards to the next generation, which is among the points of Dasopang, Nasution, and Lubis (2023) in the discussion of counter-radicalisation. Religion, according to Ifatimehin, Bashir, and Ifatimehin (2025), sociologically unites communities, offers symbolic resources to identify and moral obligation, and mediates social cohesion in conflict-affected situations. Moreover, religion has a mobilising potential that has the potential to realise boundaries, as seen in the Aguleri-Umueri war example by Iweze and Okadigwe (2025). Religion is organised in networks, which are churches, mosques, councils that organise the process of collective action and incorporate authority, which improves the community engagement in case of trust and shared leadership are established (Maua, 2025; Kazanskaia, 2025). It defines gender, authority and participation relationally, which may result in recognition or marginalization of the contribution of women (Akpan et al., 2024). In practice, religion is revealed in grassroots peace-building in terms of rituals, as well as prayer and scriptural accounts, which enact moral and civic practices, as seen by Emmanuel (2025) and Ari (2024), which make religion influential based on the content of doctrinal content and also on the lived, institutionalised and relational practices that organise the life of the people and community.

Womens Religion Networks

Women religious networks are organised associations of women to religious institutions as well as faith-based communities, which integrate the same beliefs,

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moral obligations and social responsibilities into organised relational systems that transcend individual devotion. Existing in churches, mosques, native contexts, and interfaith forums, these networks are characterised by long-term coordination, recognisable leadership, and shared goals, which serve to mediate between institutional hierarchy and grassroots mobilisation (Kazanskaia, 2025; Akpan et al., 2024). They represent relational capital with dense webs of trust, kinship and shared ritual, which offer platforms of conflict mediation, moral teaching and ethical socialisation, especially in communities experiencing conflicts (Emmanuel, 2025; Dasopang, Nasution, and Lubis, 2023; Muchoki, Kagema, and Mwongera, 2025). They have an impact that differs according to theological interpretation, leadership, and socio-political conditions in some cases strengthening communal boundaries in addition to fostering peace (Iweze & Okadigwe, 2025). The networks are overlapping with civic activism, converting spiritual engagement into political or communal action in times of crisis (Ari, 2024; Maua, 2025) and frequently rest on the processes of faith, gender, and identity, where local tradition mediates social and communal processes (Ndu, Nwafor, and Adama, 2023).

Grassroots Peace Mediation

Grassroots peace mediation in Nigeria is a type of locally based processes in which conflicts are resolved and social solidarity rebuilt without necessarily using formal systems of the state or international mediation, but functioning on the family, religious, customary councils and neighbourhood forums. Its power is based on moral plausibility, cultural legitimacy, and relational closeness as opposed to statutory sanctions, which enables mediators to have an understanding of grievances and social pasts that external actors might ignore. These are participatory and relational processes, which tend to bring together dialogue, prayer meetings, rituals of reconciliation among other culturally intelligible activities that would restore trust and preclude escalation. Influential actors such as revered elders, religious leaders, and associations of women hold influence based on social status and communal identity thereby mediating based on the shared values. Grassroots mediation is contextually specific, influenced by religious and cultural standards and rooted in historical traditions of indigenous conflict-management, which give it legitimacy and permanence. Nonetheless, its efficiency might be limited by the hierarchies, modes of exclusion and the dominant power relations, which points to the fact that it is not necessarily fair but rather negotiated in a local context of social and moral orders.

Theoretical framework
Religious peacebuilding theory

The Religious Peacebuilding Theory was developed in the late twentieth century when theorists disagreed with secular theories of conflict by sidelining the role of religion, early contributions to which were made by Scott Appleby in The Ambivalence of the Sacred (2000) and John Paul Lederach in Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies (1997). According to the theory, religion is a source of moral authority that could legitimise a reconciliation, justice and restorative dialogue and is inherently ambivalent in that it could either produce violence or compassion depending on the interpretive leadership and institutional orientation. The relational model developed by Lederach also placed importance on the engagement of grassroots as well as reconciliation as a long-term social process entrenched to work within communities. Later African scholarship reaffirms this dual

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ability, demonstrating how religious actors may be able to justify inclusive peace-making, promote reintegration, and prevent radicalisation by morally forming and structuring involvement, and also expressing how religious identities can solidify communal divisions or not be structurally sustainable when decoupled to responsible governance. Modern advances are concerned with past constraints on gender by anticipating the presence of women and lay actors as people of peace in religious networkings. Analytically, Religious Peacebuilding Theory contextualizes the nature of religion in terms of being an asset of transforming conflicts through its dynamic and constructive or divisive effects on that context, power relations, and inclusivity of religious authority.

Social capital theory
The first systematic expression of Social Capital Theory was presented by Pierre Bourdieu in 1986 who characterized social capital as the total of resources embedded in enduring networks and associated it with power and inequality, and maintained that access to influential connections reproduces class privilege. James Coleman (1988) redefined it as functions by looking at it as obligations, expectations, information flows, and common norms making coordinated action possible, but critics have criticized his lack of interest in power asymmetries. The theory was popularised by Robert Putnam (1993; 2000) who related dense civic networks to trust and democratic performance, differentiating between bonding and bridging capital which strengthens internal solidarity and connects heterogeneous groups respectively. Although the strength of the theory is the understanding that social relations are productive assets that have material and political outcomes, the modern literature, especially on African contexts where there is a conflict, demonstrates that social capital is normatively ambivalent: closely knit networks can result in peace, inclusion, and collective efficacy, but they can also reproduce exclusion, elite dominance, or intergroup animosity when unattached to accountable governance and inclusive leadership.

Methodological Positioning
The present research is based on a qualitative research paradigm and an interpretivist epistemological position. The interpretivism approach is based on the fact that social reality is socially constructed and context-dependent (Akpan et al., 2024). In this paradigm, the research aims at listening to the sense, the motivation, and the tactics that women in religious networks use to become grass-root peace makers, knowing that these are all embedded in cultural, religious, and socio-political realms of the Nigerian communities. This methodological orientation can be carefully applied to the subjective experiences, ethical commitments and relational dynamics that take center stage in faith-based peace interventions. The qualitative approach is also explained by the fact that the study is explorative. This phenomenon where women take the initiative of peace mediation on a grassroots level in a religious setting is not studied thoroughly enough, especially in Nigeria, and must be measured in a way that could capture detailed, descriptive data that cannot be sufficiently measured by quantitative tools (Emmanuel, 2025; Ndu, Nwafor, and Adama, 2023). The research is thus more of a depth than a breadth study as it concentrates on the processes, perceptions and strategies that characterize women participation in the process of religiously mediated peacebuilding. According to this positing, the research paper uses the case study approach, which offers a constrained space in which the dynamics of women religious networks can be examined intensively (Ari, 2024). The case study approach conforms

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to the theoretical aspects of the Religious Peacebuilding Theory since it focuses on relational, contextual and processual aspects of the peace interventions, which allows the researcher to connect theory and practice in a particular socio-cultural context. Besides, the methodological position recognises the interaction of ethical reflexivity and insider knowledge. Since the communities in conflict-affected areas are sensitive, the researcher understands that it is necessary to establish trust and respect the local norms but at the same time remain authentic to the participants and their views (Maua, 2025; Iweze & Okadigwe, 2025). This moral reflexivity confirms the interpretivist approach by making the researcher an active participant in observation and dialog, but not an objective critic. Lastly, this qualitative, interpretivist research design is such that the study can question the conditions which enable and restrain women to engage in grassroots peace mediation. It not only offers a solid ground on the dynamics of the functioning of religious networks as a means of conflict resolution but also contextualize these practices on the macro-socio-political and gendered frameworks of the conflict-prone communities in Nigeria (Ifatimehin, Bashir, and Ifatimehin, 2025; Kazanskaia, 2025). This is the methodological positioning that therefore secures that the research is able to capture the complexity, relationality and culturally embeddedness of women-led faith-based peace initiatives.

Pre-Colonial Conflict mediation in women.
Historical records of pre-colonial African societies depict the role women played in the mediation of conflicts to be significant but undervalued as they had power in the conflict in family, community, and between communities. In most ethnic groups in Nigeria, women had been charged with the roles that went beyond the domestic scopes and they were seen as the agents of peace and social order (Ogunlade et al., 2022). Their involvement was often justified by the cultural norms and spiritual authority, which gave women the moral capital of the necessary capabilities to reconcile and negotiate and reestablish the balance between opposite forces. These roles show that the involvement of women in the pre-colonial peace processes was structural and relational and these were incorporated within the indigenous governing systems (Rigual, Udasmoro, & Onyesoh, 2022). Analytically, the participation of women in conflict mediation before the colonial intervention was many-sided. The strategies used by them were ritualistic and symbolic intervention, active negotiation and community diplomacy (Rosemary Chinyere, 2022). An example might be women leaders of the Amaigbo Women Association of Imo State who mobilized their collective power to resolve conflicts by frequently referring to shared norms and spiritual values to persuade people into compliance and reconciliation (Rosemary Chinyere, 2022). Likewise, within the Tiv and Jukun communities of Taraba State, there were women who acted as intermediaries between warring groups using kinship, social groups, and traditional ceremonies to build trust and collaboration (Uniga Uniga, 2025). Such practices highlight a unique form of mediation where women and their relational power and a social capital were the major contributors towards the maintenance of peace. Moreover, the roles of pre-colonial mediation by women were contextual depending on the interaction of the gender, social hierarchy, and communal governance. In contrast to established political systems that were brought to society by the colonialists, pre-colonial communities tended to use consensus-building processes that appreciated the experiential knowledge and moral authority of women (Akpan et al., 2024). This appreciation enabled women to act as mediators in complicated conflicts, which included land matters, succession and even inter-group

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animosity. It is also important to note that they did not limit their intervention to conflict resolution but also engaged in preventive roles, which include supporting social norms, domestic conflict mediation before it escalates, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge about conflict management (Ogunlade et al., 2022; Tukur, 2023). More importantly, the effectiveness of women of pre-colonial mediation was based on mobilisation of social and cultural networks. Such networks allowed information circulation, mass action, and enforcement of norms, which were in the basis of the initial communal peace structures (Obuzor & Emeodu, 2025). Further, religious and spiritual structures directly supported the authority of women to mediate, which justified their mediation efforts and reduced the opposition of those in power (Maua, 2025; Dasopang, Nasution, and Lubis, 2023). According to scholars, these integrative strategies, which integrated moral authority and relational negotiation in addition to community embeddedness, were a precursor of modern models of grassroots and faith-based peacebuilding (Akpan et al., 2024; Emmanuel, 2025). However, constraints to the agency of women are also noted in historical analyses of pre-colonial mediation. Although roles that were culturally accepted gave women a voice of influence, it was limited in patriarchal systems that defined the extent of their involvement, which was often restrictive to their involvement in decision-making (Rigual, Udasmoro, and Onyesoh, 2022). These restrictions imply that the mediation ability of women was limited to the social norms and society acceptance negotiation as opposed to institutionalized authority. However, the long-term effectiveness of such interventions proves that the role of women was very active in keeping social cohesion and reducing long-term conflicts in pre-colonial Nigeria (Polit, Bello, and Puldu, 2025; Ndu, Nwafor, and Adama, 2023).

Females In Colonial Period Conflict Mediation.
Colonialism in Nigeria was characterized by a radical change in the traditional system of governance and hierarchy, which had major implications on the roles that women played in conflict resolution. In contrast to pre-colonial scenarios, where women used to have significant power due to their relational networks, moral legitimacy, and ritual authority, colonial administrations tended to reorganise power relations in a way that excluded their involvement in official dispute resolution (Akpan et al., 2024). The colonial legal frameworks and indirect rule apparatus gave precedence to male chiefs and the formal authorities hence restricting women to access formal avenues of negotiation and arbitration (Ogunlade et al., 2022). However, the influence of women remained informal and community based and this proved very adaptive and resilient in ensuring social cohesion through the external governance patterns. Empirical evidence shows that women in colonial Nigeria negotiated conflicts by balancing in the colonial expectations with the norms of the indigenous people in Nigeria. As an example, women associations, market networks, and religions became the important arenas of resolving controversies directly arising out of land allocation, taxation and tensions within the community (Rosemary Chinyere, 2022; Obuzor & Emeodu, 2025). In such spaces, there was persuasive power that women used their social capital and shared solidarity to solve the conflicts which were not resolved by the colonial apparatus or were incompetent in addressing them (Rigual, Udasmoro, and Onyesoh, 2022). The two-fold participation shows that mediation approach of women was naturally adaptive, a fusion of cultural legitimacy and tactical negotiation in order to shape the course of events by bypassing formalised colonial hierarchies. Moreover, the mediation roles of women were limited and transformed by structural disruption

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that was brought about by colonialism. Formal authority was regularly scaled back to women by the means of codifying male-dominated chieftaincy and judicial systems, which forced women to utilize extra-institutional strategies, including community advocacy, moral suasion, and religiously authorized interventions (Saleh, 2022; Dasopang, Nasution, and Lubis, 2023). In Northern Nigeria, women peacebuilding was often part of the religious networks, in which they used moral authority and spiritual authority to access the ethnic, religious, and socio-political conflict, which crossed social, ethnic, and religious boundaries (Maua, 2025; Tukur, 2023). Such interventions were more relevant especially in regions under colonial taxation strategies, coerced labour and inter-ethnic conflicts, and this goes to underscore the abilities of these women to work in restricted institutional environments.

Women during the Post-independent Conflict Mediation.
The post-independent stage in Nigeria was the period of the important shift in the involvement of the women in the conflictual mediation processes both due to the heritage of the colonial exclusion and the new trends of the modern rule in the country. After achieving independence, women began to move in both formal and informal directions to influence what happens in the community by utilizing the dual legacy of indigenous and increasing civic space (Akpan et al., 2024). Contrary to the time of colonialism, when women mediation was mostly informal, post-independence institutions such as local councils, women associations, and religious organisations provided women with their own means of institutionalising intervention into the peacemaking processes (Rosemary Chinyere, 2022; Polit, Bello, and Puldu, 2025). As a result, the roles of women became more transparent, but were still limited by the sociopolitical structures and gendered roles that frequently left women in the background or as consultants in the official decision-making processes. Analytical research indicates that the mediation strategies of women after the independence were found to be entrenched in social networks and cultural capital. The associations of market women, religious networks, and grassroots organisations were becoming the most important in the process of brokering peace during the cases of intercommunal conflict, ethno-religious tension, and domestic quarrels (Ndu, Nwafor, and Adama, 2023; Rigual, Udasmoro, and Onyesoh, 2022). With the help of these networks, women could use relational authority, moral persuasion, and collective solidarity to change things when state mechanisms were either ineffective or absent (Omar, Magaji, and Jafaru, 2025). It is worth noting that the mediation of women at the time tended to incorporate preventative actions along with reconciliation interventions with the aim of addressing the causes of discord at the same time controlling the immediate consequences of conflicts (Emmanuel, 2025; Ifatimehin, Bashir, and Ifatimehin, 2025). In addition, women of post independence Nigeria exercised strategic agency through combining formal political action with traditional and religious negotiation. Northern and Southeastern Nigeria has shown evidence that women actively engaged in interfaith mediation, peace committees, and civic advocacy and usually lived in between the state authorities, traditional leaders, and communities affected (Maua, 2025; Saleh, 2022). They did this by not only mediating conflicts but also pushing the remnant gendered restrictions that came with colonial governance systems and declaring their ability as principal stakeholders of community security and development (Obuzor & Emeodu, 2025; Uniga Uniga, 2025). Nevertheless, structural and socio-cultural constraints continued to be apparent on the way of post-independence women mediators. Patriarchal traditions, political unrest, and the partial

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application of the law limited the extent to which women could gain power, forcing them to resort to informal persuasion, negotiation, and coalition-building to reach resolution results (Ogunlade et al., 2022; Tukur, 2023). Moreover, the economic differences and the insecurity in the region tended to overlap with gender-based obstacles and affected the success of the women mediation programs, especially in the conflict-prone regions in Borno, Taraba, and Yobe States (Omar, Magaji, and Jafaru, 2025; Saleh, Bilyaminu, and Usman, 2025). Nevertheless, the presence of women in conflict mediation over the past sixty years as the post-independence period revealed their strength and the timeless applicability of culturally demoted, community-based strategies to peacebuilding.

The Religious Networks of Women in the Modern Grassroots Peace Mediation.
In Nigeria, the Nigerian grassroots peace mediation has also become more and more centred on the centrality of the women religious networks as a form of stabilising and transformational forces in the conflict-afflicted communities. These networks cut across denominational, ethnic, geographic lines, using common moral and spiritual constructs in order to resolve conflicts and reconciliation (Maua, 2025; Kazanskaia, 2025). Women religious networks have direct contact with communities unlike formal state institutions that in most cases face bureaucracy or lack of accessibility to the communities and hence they are able to apply the relational authority and cultural norms to the working of conflict resolution systems and its result (Ndu, Nwafor, and Adama, 2023). As a result, these networks offer a synthesis of peacebuilding, that is, it combines spiritual leadership with practical negotiation approaches, thus, resolving the short-term as well as structural aspects of localised conflicts. Practical experience shows that the strength of the women religious networks is seen in the ability to mobilise the collective involvement and marshal the moral appeal. Women often work as go-between and use religious rhetoric and culturally promising stories to promote dialogue between conflicting sides (Dasopang, Nasution, & Lubis, 2023; Muchoki, Kagema, and Mwongera, 2025). This will build trust and legitimacy, which will see women entering into arenas of influence that are usually dominated by male elders or formal political players. Also, the institutionalisation of such networks by faith-based organisations, women groups and interfaith councils have increased their ability to maintain peace initiatives in the long run (Saleh, 2022; Obuzor & Emeodu, 2025). Through a combination of relational networks and organisational structures, women can have a constructive role of mediating recurring conflicts and developing models of conflict prevention instead of reactively responding to violence. In addition to direct mediation, religious networks of women are found to have overall resilience and social cohesion in their community. Examples of Northern and South-Eastern Nigeria show that women tend to launch the programmes, which connect the concepts of peacebuilding and social support, education, and economic empowerment (Tukur, 2023; Ari, 2024). By incorporating peace programs into regular social and spiritual activities, women increase the local ability to oppose the growth of conflict and develop inclusive governance systems (Akpan et al., 2024; Emmanuel, 2025). Notably, these projects address hierarchical and gendered constraints by proving women as capable of shaping both interpersonal and intergroup relationships, which leads to the formation of sustainable change processes in the society. Structural and contextual constraints however mediate the effect of these networks. Included among the issues that may constrain the effectiveness of women mediation activities are insecurity, political instability, and deep-rooted patriarchal cultures, especially within

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areas with ethno religious conflicts like Borno, Taraba, and Yobe states (Omar, Magaji, and Jafaru, 2025; Saleh, Bilyaminu, and Usman, 2025). Women usually bypass such limitations by means of coalition-building, coalition with the male community leaders, and using the moral legitimacy of the religious institutions to legitimise their interventions (Uniga Uniga, 2025; Polit, Bello, and Puldu, 2025). Their functionality, therefore, depends on the personal agency and on the strategic realisation of institutional and relational networks that overlap with the structures of faith, culture, and community.

Women's Religious Networks and their roles in Grassroots Peace Mediation.

Religious networks of women in modern Nigeria are increasingly described as central players in the grassroots peace mediation processes as they serve as a point of spiritual power, socio-cultural involvement, and the ability to resolve conflicts. These networks use religious training, common moral standards, and solidarity to come into conflict-ridden situations, which are sometimes beyond the formal apparatus of the state (Kazanskaia, 2025; Maua, 2025). Placing mediation in the backdrop of the known cultural and spiritual contexts, women can justify their participation in conflict resolution on domestic, communal and intergroup levels. Through this, they are also negotiating the stakes of traditional patriarchal systems and new forms of female leadership, which increases the scale and effectiveness of the local peacebuilding efforts (Ndu, Nwafor, and Adama, 2023; Obuzor and Emeodu, 2025). The ability to serve as mediators, to transfer moral authority into working strategies of dialog and reconciliation, is of utmost importance of these networks. Religion rhetoric and ethical imperatives are commonly used by women to build trust between opposing sides and provide secure zones of communication and negotiation (Dasopang, Nasution, and Lubis, 2023; Muchoki, Kagema, and Mwongera, 2025). One such intermediary role is especially prominent in those areas where ethno-religious segregations are deeply rooted and traditional conflict management systems might be viewed as either biased or unavailable (Saleh, 2022; Saleh, Bilyaminu, and Usman, 2025). Through mediation in the networks of kinship, faith, and community membership, women expand the jurisdiction of the peace efforts to the regions that are frequently overlooked by the institutional frameworks of governance, thus, lowering the chances of the escalatory cycles of violence (Emmanuel, 2025; Tukur, 2023). Outside the process of negotiation, the religious networks of women also help in peace making by ensuring mobilisation of social capital and development of collective resilience. These networks often connect conflict mediation with the programmes to social support, education, and economic empowerment as a comprehensive view of peace that incorporates the security and community well-being (Ari, 2024; Omar, Magaji, and Jafaru, 2025). This type of socio-economic intervention integration into the framework of faith-based organisations enhances validity of the role of women mediation and mitigates the root causes of the conflict, namely poverty, marginalisation, and mistrust among different groups (Akpan et al., 2024; Ifatimehin, Bashir, and Ifatimehin, 2025). The co-existence of emphasis on urgent dispute management and structural change implies the unique role of religious networks of women in sustainable peace. The role of the women in the mediation on the grassroots is also enhanced by the strategic organisation of the women religious networks. Women institutionalise pathways of the steady dialogue, advocacy, and monitoring of local strife by forming formalised groupings, including women fellowship organisations, interfaith councils, and committees with the community

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(Polit, Bello, and Puldu, 2025; Uniga Uniga, 2025). The organisational capacity also allows such co-ordination of resources, spread of peace messages and the application of mechanisms of conflict-prevention which are not limited to ad hoc intervention. Furthermore, the effectiveness of women networks in relation to traditional, governmental and religious authorities depends on social, political and security context (Rosemary Chinyere, 2022; Rigual, Udasmoro, and Onyesoh, 2022).However, the success of women networks depends on the social, political and security context. The female mediators have to operate on challenging terrains with patriarchal restraints, insecurity, socio-political instability, which in many cases may demand subtle negotiation, coalition building, and ethical cajoling to make the results successful (Ogunlade et al., 2022; Omar, Magaji, and Jafaru, 2025). Their success therefore will depend on their capacity to capitalize on relational authority, sustain community confidence and induce the cultural coherent practices into the mediation process. Through this manner, the religious networks by women can be seen as very adaptive and context-sensitive peacebuilding approaches that reconcile the difference between the realities at the grassroots and the larger governance structures (Maua, 2025; Kazanskaia, 2025).

Factors That Hinder Effectiveness Of Women's Religious Networks in Grassroots Peace Mediation In Conflict Affected Communities In Nigeria.
A complex interaction between structural, cultural and situational factors limits the success of women religious networks in grassroots peace mediation to conflict impacted communities in Nigeria. First of all, the established patriarchal beliefs preclude the acceptance of the authority of women in both the religious and communal life, which does not allow them to manipulate the decision-making process and provide the relevant legitimacy to successfully mediate (Akpan et al., 2024; Rosemary Chinyere, 2022). Moreover, the mobility and accessibility are affected by long-term insecurity especially in those areas characterized by armed insurgency and intercommunal violence putting women mediators at personal risk and weakening the continuity of interactions with conflicting parties (Omar, Magaji, and Jafaru, 2025; Emmanuel, 2025). The scarcity of resources also undermines these networks, with the lack of funding and logistical assistance making it difficult to organise mediation operations, capacity-building, and follow-up mechanisms, which are needed to resolve the conflict in the long term (Polit, Bello, and Puldu, 2025; Maua, 2025). These issues are compounded by social isolation and rooted distrust within and between communities, which often hinders dialogue despite the presence of networks of women, and sometimes the mediators themselves are in a politically or ethnically compromised position (Ifatimehin, Bashir, and Ifatimehin, 2025; Saleh, Bilyaminu, and Usman, 2025). Further, the overlap between socio-economic marginalisation and gender roles often diminishes the time and effort women can put in mediation, thus making engagement more inconsistent and limiting the effectiveness of long-term peacebuilding programs (Ari, 2024; Tukur, 2023). All these structural, cultural, and operating barriers emphasize the frailty of the women-led religious networks in the conflict mediation, which necessitates the combination of support systems, policy acknowledgment, and security assurance to increase its efficiency and viability (Kazanskaia, 2025; Obuzor and Emeodu, 2025).

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Conclusion

In deriving the critical analysis on the role of women religious networks in grassroots peace mediation in the conflict-afflicted communities in Nigeria, one can state that these networks have an important but underestimated role in establishing dialogue, reconciliation and social cohesion. Women mediators use religious doctrines, culture and the connection networks to resolve conflicts, reduce violence and enhance harmony in the community. Nevertheless, their efficiency is often compromised due to structural constraints, such as social norms and patriarchy, insecurity and scanty resources and socio-economic marginalisation, which limit their power and scope of operation. Nonetheless, these obstacles notwithstanding, there are signs that, given proper support, religious networks by women can help in closing rifts, building trust, and becoming the driving force of sustainable peace at the grassroots level. Thus, the paper explains the urgency of acknowledging, empowering, and resourcing these networks as an active participant in peacebuilding efforts and that the matter of women involvement in mediation is not just a moral or symbolic issue but a practical need to stabilize and sustain the conflict-related communities in Nigeria.

Recommendations

i.   Structured training and resources on women engaged in grassroots peace mediation needs to be offered by government agencies, religious bodies and the civil society organisations. This involves conflict resolution, conflict negotiation, and availability of funds that will make them effective and able to work safely and sustainably in communities that are affected by conflicts.

ii. The frameworks that acknowledge women as important stakeholders in the peacebuilding processes should be created and implemented actively by the policymakers and people in the communities. This entails a reform of old and religious conventions that restrict the leadership role of women and putting in place institutionalized avenues of their involvement in mediation and decision making platforms.

iii. The women religious networks are to be stimulated to establish the inter-community ties and interact with the national and global peacebuilders. This collaboration may help in the exchange of knowledge, enhance their power, and increase coordination in dealing with communal disputes besides offering means of offering psychosocial and financial assistance to women mediators.

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