

## **Consolidating the Impact of African Women in International Relations and Peace Studies**

Christian Osemuyi Oseghale & Ambesi Polycarp Neba

### **Abstract**

African women make diverse substantial contributions to International Relations and Peace Studies. Their works as peace activists, diplomats, researchers, and advocates have improved our knowledge of conflict resolution and human security. By emphasising individual experiences and viewpoints in our understanding of global challenges, we may create more effective strategies for advancing global peace and equality. This paper's objective is to raise awareness on the contributions of African women with a view to providing new frameworks for analysis, developing collaborative networks and offering actionable policy recommendations. It argues that although African women's contributions to International Relations (IR) and Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS) are phenomenal, their inputs have received little recognition in recent years. African women have been actively or indirectly involved in conflicts throughout history, serving as combatants, spies, couriers, sex slaves, brides, and mothers. Nonetheless, African women continue to suffer gender hurdles and subjugation, which appear to have belittled or sullied their illustrious achievements. Using a desktop research approach, this work aims to recognise and celebrate the tremendous contributions made by African women researchers in shaping International Relations, Peace Studies, and Conflict Resolution initiatives throughout the world. Despite past gains and developments, African women continue to confront diverse hurdles and impediments. This paper concludes that there is need to continue highlighting and accentuating the plight of women, particularly the predicament of African women, for their utmost liberation and development; and that African women's movements should continue to pressurise national and regional bodies to put a priority on ensuring gender equity, in order to increase and intensify women's participation in the decision-making process and economic development efforts.

*Keywords:* African women, consolidation, global peace, international relations, peace studies

## **Introduction**

Although seldom acknowledged over the years, the contributions and impact of African women in the study of International Relations (IR) as well as in Peace and Conflict Study (PCS) are remarkable indeed. African women in the course of global history have been involved directly or indirectly in wars, either at the logistical, ideological, and combatant levels as fighters, spies, carriers and, at the same time, as sex slaves, wives, and mothers. However, these unique roles and positions, and the adverse effects of their participation in war on women's lives, have been downplayed over the years to the advantage of male ex-combatants who usually obtained most of the benefits. This longstanding marginalization has undermined women's capacities in carrying out war operations and has also led to their being excluded from the post-conflict peace building projects (Oluwaniyi, 2019). At whatever time there has been conflict, women and children are known to have suffered excessively, both during and after wars. Women and children are often the most vulnerable victims of war, the ones hardest hit during violent conflicts.

History is replete with terrible abuses against women and children – from the 1.1 million children killed during the Holocaust to the numerous women and children raped or killed during the Rwandan genocide. According to Madzima (2013), women are usually excluded from formal peace negotiations, especially in Africa; there was the example of Sierra Leone where, at the end of the civil war, and in spite of their relentless grassroots efforts, women were left out of the final negotiations that culminated in the Lome Peace Accord of 1999. However, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000), if implemented by relevant parties, may have the capacity to change all of these narratives; the African Union's July 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa stated thus: "We hereby agree to ensure the full and effective participation and representation of women in peace processes including the prevention, resolution, management of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa as stipulated in United Nations Resolution 1325 (2000)." The UNSCR 1325 has paved the way for more resolutions and action plans, and it took the first step in creating new international norms that protect women and integrate them into all levels of engagement. UNSCR 1325 has also identified women as active agents, which has empowered women to demand what is rightfully theirs. Unlike the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Union (AU), since its establishment in 2001, also has been supportive of women rights' issues.

African women have made major contributions to International Relations and Peace Studies in a variety of capacities, including as peace activists, diplomats, and researchers. Their experiences and viewpoints have improved discussions about conflict resolution, human security, and gender equality. One of the most visible manifestations of African women's influence on International Relations is their involvement in peace-building. Women have been prominent participants in global peace processes, frequently playing key roles in negotiating ceasefires and crafting peace treaties. For example, during the Liberian Civil War (1989-2003), women founded the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign, which was instrumental in persuading warring parties to negotiate. Leymah Gbowee, a key figure in this movement, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her efforts. Furthermore, African women have achieved success in diplomacy and international organisations. For example, Amina Mohammed of Nigeria is now the United Nations' Deputy Secretary-General. She formerly served as the Nigerian Minister of Environment and Ban Ki-moon's Special Advisor on Post-2015 Development Planning. African women in academia contribute significantly to Peace Studies and International Relations via research and scholarship. Christine Chinkin, a famous expert of international law and conflict resolution from the United Kingdom, for example, is of Nigerian descent. Her research has focused on women's human rights in armed situations and the role of international law in achieving peace.

African women's experiences offer unique insights into conflict resolution and human security. Their perspectives challenge traditional approaches that prioritise military solutions over peaceful means. For example, African women have emphasised the importance of addressing root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education. They have also highlighted the need for inclusive peace processes that involve all sectors of society.

### **Gender Studies**

Gender studies continue to add to scholarship by rethinking knowledge categories, and new frameworks, such as intersectionalism, and by developing to improve interdisciplinary studies in feminism. The book, *Holding the World Together: African Women in Changing Perspective*, contributes to this study by examining the position and duties of African women. This topical and entertaining book examines the various ways in which African women have represented themselves throughout history, from pre-colonial times to the present. The bringing together of researchers from different generations, nations, disciplines, races, genders,

ethnicities, continents, and faiths to participate in interdisciplinary discussions on an ever-changing topic – gender studies in Africa – gave rise to the book. Achebe and Robertson emphasised the multifaceted debate on gender studies in Africa while acknowledging the ongoing effort to fight inaccurate stereotypes about African women (Achebe & Robertson, 2019). Significant progress, according to Friendrich (2017), has been made in advancing women's participation into elected office and leadership positions in the public and private sectors, civil service and trade unions. As sixteen countries in the Continent of Africa have surpassed the 30 per cent mark of representation in national parliaments established at the Beijing World Conference, though mostly from Southern Africa and East Africa, of which Rwanda is maintaining the highest percent of women representation in the world.

Radical African feminists and some Western feminist scholars have together argued and emphasised moving away from an exclusive focus on women's disadvantages, and examining power relations between women and men as feminist perceptions on war connect the realities of local African women to the realities facing women globally; they describe how gender identities are socially produced and managed as a means of moving forward. Consequently, understanding how "femininity" is socially built in such a way that women become disempowered requires understanding how "masculinity" is produced and inscribed in power systems. According to White's "All the men are fighting for freedom, all the women are mourning their men, but some of us carried guns: A raced-gendered analysis of Fanon's psychological perspectives on war" (2007), women who escape wartime atrocities are frequently forced to live with the vivid and horrific pictures of rape, war, and the death of their loved one for the rest of their life. Despite the fact that African women's movements have made significant progress and played a critical role in creating a more gender-focused regional organisation, African women continue to face gender barriers and subordination, which appear to have swallowed up all of the presumed success. As a result, this dissertation evaluates the contributions made by African women to the study of international relations, as well as peace and conflict studies in Africa. Gender activists are stepping up their efforts to secure the minimum 15 ratifications required to put into effect a protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights aimed at advancing gender equality. Gender activists have also successfully promoted agreements that advance the rights of African women. In 2007, 51 of the 53 AU nations have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was enacted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and is commonly referred to as the International Bill of Rights

for Women. In 2003, campaigners successfully persuaded African heads of state to accept a protocol on women's rights. They are currently urging states to adopt the agreement, making it legally binding (Banks, 2008). According to Tripp (2016), the key elements that culminated in the expansion of women's organisations included wider political space following democratic revolutions in the 1990s, the spread of international norms related to gender equality, and donors' which increased interest in providing support for women's movements and led to the development of regional institutions many of which endorse gender equity concerns.

### **African Women in International Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies Historically**

African women have played significant roles in international relations, including peace and conflict studies, contributing to diplomacy, activism, and community development. Throughout history, African women have demonstrated great resilience and independence in the face of adversity. Their contributions to International Relations, Peace, and Conflict Studies are frequently overlooked or underrated. However, a growing body of studies highlights their importance in shaping diplomacy, activism, and community development. African women, in particular, have achieved significant political gains in recent years. Adams (2019, p. 1) asserts "African women's movements continue to pressure national and regional actors to prioritize gender equity, advocating for the transformation of rhetorical commitments to changes in practice." The African Union (AU), the continental political entity, took a significant step towards fostering gender equality in its highest decision-making positions, culminating in the election of five women and five men as AU commissioners in 2003. In 2004, Ms. Gertrude Mongella was appointed to lead the African Union's Pan-African Parliament, which has 25% female members. Ms. Marie-Angelique Savane of Senegal leads another AU agency, the African Peer Review Mechanism, which supervises good governance criteria (Hammed & Kabo, 2013).

The fact that many African governments have signed the Beijing Platform and several international instruments that promote the rights of women have not altered the reality on ground as these instruments, up to now, have not been translated into changes that positively affect women's daily lives. As women remain or are seen to be at the bottom of the social ladder as compared to men, particularly in Africa where women have limited access to land, finance, health, and education, gender inequality remains highly apparent. African women's movements have been instrumental in establishing a more gender-sensitive regional organisation. Knowing these

women, who have been at the centre of historical movements over the centuries, allows us to gain a better knowledge of African women's major contributions to historical developments that brought us to where we are today. A few of these women are listed below:

1. Queen Nanny (1680-1750) of the Windward Maroons: She was a Jamaican political leader, military strategist and Obeah woman. Originally born in Ghana, Queen Nanny led the Windward Maroons in a successful war against the British.
2. Yaa Asantewaa (1863-1923): She was the Queen Mother of the Ejisuhene who led the Ashanti in a war against British colonization between 1900 and 1901.
3. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978): Often remembered as the mother of the prolific musician and activist Fela Kuti, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was a pioneering African feminist, social activist, educator and anti-colonial freedom fighter; she was the founder of the Nigerian Woman's Union, which became the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies in 1953.
4. Miriam Makeba (1932-2008): Affectionately known as Mama Africa, Miriam Makeba was an artist, activist and major participant in both the anti-Apartheid and Pan-African movement. Makeba wrote and performed music that critiqued the Apartheid government of South Africa, advocating for an end to racial disenfranchisement, both from within South Africa and while in exile.
5. Wangari Maathai (1940-2011): The famous Kenyan environmentalist, women's rights activist and Nobel Laureate, Professor Wangari Maathai is remembered for her compassion and dedication to improving the lives of the most disenfranchised groups in society (Njoroge-MJoroge, n.d).

These five African women represent many others who were sung and unsung (Tume et al., 2023). Forbes Magazine, in March 2020, released its first ever Pan-African list of the 50 most powerful and influential women from across the Continent of Africa. Amongst these 50 Most Powerful Women in Africa are: Rebecca Enochong (Cameroon), Founder and CEO, AppsTech; Irene Charnley (South Africa), Founder, Smile Communications; Jennifer Riria (Kenya), Group CEO, Echo Network Africa and founding member, Kenya Women Finance Trust; Louise Mushikiwabo (Rwanda), Secretary General, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF); Charlize Theron (South Africa), Hollywood actor;

Angélique Kidjo (Benin), four-time Grammy award winner and humanitarian; Lesly Kanza (Tanzania), Head of Africa and member of the executive committee, World Economic Forum; Ibukun Awosika (Nigeria), Founder and CEO, The Chair Centre Group; and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Nigeria), former Chair, Board of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) and now Director General World Trade Organisation (Mogoatlhe, 2020). These personages drawn from the 50 African women listed by Forbes magazine depict the contemporary strides and contributions African women have made and continue to make, and they represent thousands of others sung and unsung.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite some notable progress in addressing women's challenges in Africa and their role in social, political, and economic life in the past and in the present, more African women continue to face gender barriers in the workplace, primarily through employment policies and discriminatory employment practices. When considered from a development viewpoint, African women's contributions to social, political, and economic life remain restricted due to their lack of empowerment. The AU's increased emphasis on women's rights concerns, particularly gender equity, corresponds with the emergence of independent women's movements across the continent. Adams (2019), citing Tripp (2016), said data collected by the Association for Women's Rights in Development indicate that 40% of contemporary women's advocacy organizations in Africa were founded between 2000 and 2005; during the same time span, various AU gender institutes were founded. Despite the advancements in women's rights over the last few decades, they are today living in a regional and worldwide setting in which not only are women's human rights contested, but the historical achievements of the women's movement are under threat. The unjust treatment of women in Africa and around the world is exacerbated by the fragility of democratic institutions, a conservative backlash, an economic crisis, and weakened opportunities for feminist movements to express themselves in their fight for human rights (Adams, 2019; Hutchison & Jephtha, 2019; Pereira, 2017).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study considered as objectives the following:

- Evaluate the impact of African women's involvement on the effectiveness of peace processes and international relations policies both within and outside of Africa, with the goal of raising awareness about the importance of gender inclusivity in international relations

and peace studies, as well as promoting a broader understanding of African women's roles.

- Analyse how inter-sectional factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education level affect the participation and impact of African women in international relations and peace studies, with the view of identifying emerging trends and future directions for the involvement of African women.
- Formulate actionable policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the participation and influence of African women in international relations and peace studies.

### **African Women's Contributions to International Relations and Peace**

According to Olasunkanmi (2014), there is a notion in African civilisations that African women have the potential to link people together. In truth, peace building, family survival, and the future of marriage rely heavily on the African woman, as portrayed by Leymah Roberta Gbowee (born 1972, Liberia), a Liberian peace campaigner notable for gathering women to persuade officials to stop Liberia's civil conflict. She eventually went to Liberia and trained as a trauma counsellor, working with former child soldiers who fought in the country's civil conflict. Their efforts resulted in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on August 18, 2003. Gbowee received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her work.

Another African woman of note who has been at the forefront of peace advocacy and conflict resolution efforts include Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (born 1938), who became Africa's first elected female head of state on January 16, 2006. Sirleaf led Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction efforts and enacted measures to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Her presidency was a watershed moment for Liberian women's rights and involvement in politics.

Women's organisations were active throughout the transition from the OAU to the AU, calling for gender-balanced leadership within AU institutions and lobbying for stronger commitments to women's rights (Adams 2006). The contributions and roles of the women and women's organisations to the process of conflict resolution and peace building have often been neglected in discussions of war and peace. The appointment of African women to high positions in global governance bodies in the twenty-first century reflects a commitment to diversity, albeit parity is still far from a reality. Three notable appointments include: South Africa's Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, who has been serving as United Nations (UN)



Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women since 2013; Uganda's Winnie Byanyima, who served as the Executive Director of OXFAM International from 2013 to 2019; and, more recently, Nigeria's Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who made history by becoming the first woman and African to hold the office of Director-General of the World Trade Organisation. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, a Nigerian-American economist, has contributed significantly to peace and conflict studies, notably in Africa. During her stint as Nigeria's Finance Minister, she was instrumental in negotiating an end to the Niger Delta war and supervised the execution of the Amnesty Programme. Okonjo-Iweala has promoted non-violent conflict settlement in Africa, emphasising conversations and negotiations. Her collaboration with international organisations, as well as her advocacy for African nations in global forums, has had a considerable influence on International Relations. Her contributions to peace and conflict studies have helped to stabilise and develop the continent (Bimha, P. Z. J., 2021; Alimi & Njama, 2021).

### **African Women's Under-Representation in Academia**

African women researchers in International Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies confront considerable obstacles as a result of their under-representation in academia. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), women make up just 30% of all researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2023. This under-representation causes a lack of diversity in viewpoints and experiences, which can lead to a distorted understanding of global concerns.

**Stereotypes and Bias:** African women scholars frequently face stereotypes and bias, which can impede their professional development. These prejudices can be both unconscious and apparent, and they might be from co-workers, pupils, or organisational systems. For example, a research published in the *Journal of International Women's Studies* discovered that African female professors are frequently seen as "angry" or "emotional" while discussing gender and racial problems, although their male colleagues are not susceptible to the same stereotypes. African women scholars frequently have less access to resources and opportunities than their male counterparts. This may include limited access to research funds, academic networks, and publication chances. According to the literature assessment, African women academics face significant barriers to research funding, limiting their ability to conduct high-quality research and contribute to the field.

**Work-Life Balance:** African women academics typically face significant challenges in balancing their professional and home lives. This can be

especially tough for women who are caring for their family while still performing housework. A study published in the *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* revealed that African women academics face greater work-life conflict than their male counterparts, which can have an impact on their productivity and well-being.

**Inadequate Mentoring and Support:** Many African female scholars report a lack of mentoring and support from their older counterparts. This might include restricted access to mentorship connections, as well as a scarcity of role models who can offer direction and support. A study published in the *Journal of International Women's Studies* found that African women scholars report feeling isolated and marginalized within their academic departments, which can hinder their career advancement (Akanji, et al., 2020; Tabassum, & Nayak, 2021; Antoninis et al., 2023).

African women scholars in International Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies face numerous challenges due to their under-representation in academia. According to UNESCO's findings for 2023, women make up around 30% of all researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa (Akinsola, & Ogunlela, 2015; Antoninis et al., 2023). This result represents a progressive gain over past years, but it also underlines the continued hurdles to gender parity in scientific research in this region. The implications of the figure not only throws light on women's engagement in research, but it also emphasises the need for policies and programs targeted at improving female representation in STEM subjects (namely, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Work-life balance is another key difficulty, with African female researchers reporting greater levels of conflict than their male counterparts. This can affect their productivity and well-being. Furthermore, they frequently lack mentorship and assistance from senior colleagues, as well as access to mentoring connections and role models. These issues are essential to the growth of African women researchers in the fields of international relations, peace, and conflict studies, thus they must be addressed.

### **Advocacy for Gender Equality**

African women's advocacy groups have emerged as fundamental players in the global discourse on gender equality, particularly within the context of international relations. These organisations strive to influence policy, promote women's rights, and incorporate gender ideas into international frameworks. Their efforts are critical to tackling systemic disparities and fighting for women's involvement in decision-making processes at all levels. African women have historically faced enormous impediments to political and economic engagement as a result of colonial legacies,

patriarchal norms, and socio-economic constraints. In response to these issues, many advocacy groups have been formed, with the goal of empowering women and advocating for their rights. Organisations like the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) and the African Women's Association have been instrumental in mobilising women across the continent.

The key functions of African women's advocacy groups include working with national governments and international organisations to achieve gender equality. They frequently attend forums such as the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and regional summits like African Union (AU) gatherings. Their lobbying activities seek to influence legislation that impacts women's rights, such as health, education, and economic empowerment. These organisations offer training and tools to strengthen female leaders in their communities. They equip women for roles in government and policy-making by improving their leadership, negotiating, and public speaking abilities. This capacity training is critical to boosting women's presence in political settings.

**Networking and Solidarity:** Advocacy groups help women connect across areas and sectors. This solidarity helps to exchange best practices, mobilise resources, and form a united front against gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination. Conferences and seminars provide opportunities for activists from many backgrounds to collaborate.

Furthermore, educational initiatives that empower young African women are critical for developing future leaders capable of successfully navigating complicated international relations settings. By investing in education and capacity-building projects, these organisations guarantee that women's voices are heard in global talks about peace and security. Many advocacy groups do research on issues impacting African women, offering useful data for policy-makers. Through emphasising differences in access to education, healthcare, and economic prospects, they create a persuasive argument for targeted efforts to achieve gender equality.

**Public Awareness Campaigns:** Advocacy groups also conduct public awareness campaigns to educate communities on women's rights problems. These programs frequently target negative cultural practices like as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and domestic abuse, while also promoting positive narratives about women's contributions to society. African women's advocacy groups have a significant impact on international relations frameworks by integrating gender perspectives, ensuring that gender considerations are included in international agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and

regional treaties such as the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. Challenging global norms by raising awareness of local concerns on global platforms, these organisations challenge current standards that frequently disregard or distort African women's experiences. Building Alliances with Global group's through collaboration with international feminist groups increases their exposure and effect on global gender equality policy. Advocacy groups play an important role in monitoring governments' compliance with international gender equality commitments. They hold governments responsible via reporting procedures established by international organisations.

### **Methodology**

Desktop research, also known as secondary research, was adopted for this study. It involves gathering existing data from various sources rather than collecting new data through primary methods such as surveys or interviews. This type of research is particularly needful when exploring topics that have already been studied extensively or when resources for primary data collection are limited. It typically includes reviewing academic journals, books, reports, policy papers, and credible on-line resources. The topic consolidating the Impact of African Women in International Relations and Peace Studies is multifaceted and requires a comprehensive understanding of historical contexts, current trends, and theoretical frameworks. Desktop research can be particularly effective in this area for several reasons. There is a growing body of literature focused on gender studies, international relations, and peace studies that highlights the contributions of African women.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Feminist theory was adopted for this study because it is a critical framework that seeks to understand and address gender inequality by examining the social roles, experiences, and interests of both women and men across various disciplines. The theory has roots in Marxism, particularly that influenced by Engels' work on family dynamics and women's subordination. It originated in the 18th century and gained momentum during the equality movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Feminist theory in International Relations (IR) focuses on understanding how gender shapes global politics, emphasizing the roles and experiences of women. It critiques traditional theories that often overlook women's contributions and perspectives, particularly in the context of African women. Feminist theory emphasises the relevance of gender in understanding power relations, as well as their contributions to peace-building, conflict resolution, and political involvement. African women

have made significant contributions to peacekeeping, conflict resolution, and human rights advocacy. In practice, feminist philosophy influences policy and programs aimed at fostering gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa. This involves encouraging women to participate in political decision-making and combating gender-based violence in crisis zones.

Furthermore, it guarantees that policies and programs reflect African women's unique experiences and demands. Feminist theory recognises the interconnectedness of race, class, ethnicity, and other social categories, emphasising how colonial histories, economic inequities, and cultural settings shape women's experiences. Despite their contributions, African women confront several problems, including patriarchal institutions and brutality during crises. To effectively consolidate the impact of African women in International Relations and Peace Studies, feminist theory proposes that future generations of female leaders in IR can be fostered by supporting grassroots movements through funding and resource allocation directed towards women-led organisations that focus on community-based conflict resolution and education, as well as by implementing policies that ensure women's representation at all levels of government.

Critics of feminist theory frequently focus on its apparent limits or omissions. Some believe that conventional feminist rhetoric has not sufficiently addressed inter-sectionality, the manner in which many types of identification (such as race, class, and sexual orientation) intersect to create unique experiences of oppression. This critique highlights the need for a more inclusive approach that recognizes the diverse realities faced by different groups. Feminist theory serves as both a lens for understanding oppression and a call to action against it. However, it faces critiques regarding its inclusiveness and effectiveness in addressing the complexities of identity and systemic discrimination.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Bringing it all together, in promoting and projecting the plight of women globally four international conferences on women have been held. The first is Mexico (1975), followed by Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). Twenty six years after Beijing Conference, and UN resolution 1325 of year 2000, women's equality is still far from being a reality as ongoing high violence against women in all parts of the world is still on the increase; armed conflicts, incidences of HIV/AIDS among women, are on the increase; and there are also gender inequality in employment, lack of sexual and reproductive health rights and a lack of equal access under the law to land and property. As World Health

Organization has noted, violence against women mainly with intimate partner violence and sexual violence have become a major public health problem which is a violation of women's human rights (WHO, 2021).

African women's contributions to International Relations and Peace Studies have received more prominence in recent decades. This acknowledgement arises from a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in conflict resolution, peace-building, and governance. The data presented here emphasises African women's contributions to various disciplines, the problems they encounter, and the avenues for extending their effect. African women's leadership participation in peace processes is critical to peace discussions throughout the continent's many conflicts. For example, women played an important role in the peace talks that ended Liberia's civil war, with personalities such as Leymah Gbowee spearheading grassroots initiatives that emphasised women's engagement in peace-building efforts. Their engagements frequently resulted in unique viewpoints that prioritise community concerns and social justice. Consolidating African women's effect in International Relations and Peace Studies demands a holistic strategy that addresses structural constraints and amplifies their contributions via strategic efforts targeted at empowerment and visibility.

African women activists have been in the forefront of promoting gender equality within international frameworks. Initiatives such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security highlight the need of women's involvement in peacekeeping and security decision-making processes. African women have actively participated in these frameworks to ensure their opinions are heard. Their involvement in the importance of community resilience development cannot be overstated, since they frequently work directly with their communities to promote conflict resilience. They frequently act as mediators and educators, facilitating discussion between competing parties at the local level. This grassroots movement is critical for long-term peace because it targets the underlying causes of conflict via community participation. African women researchers are increasingly contributing to International Relations and Peace Studies by doing research and scholarship on gendered experiences of war and post-conflict healing. Their work frequently questions established narratives dominated by male viewpoints, resulting in a more nuanced understanding of security concerns.

Despite their significant successes, African women still confront a variety of challenges, including institutional barriers. Institutional impediments within political systems typically impede women's advancement to

leadership positions in both governmental and non-governmental organisations. These barriers might include discriminatory laws, cultural norms that promote male leadership, and a lack of support networks. Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue in many African countries, limiting women's ability to fully participate in public life. Conflicts exacerbate violence, making it difficult for women to engage safely in peacekeeping activities. Inadequate access to financial resources is a significant obstacle since it impedes effective advocacy and participation; yet, many women's groups operate with little funding, restricting their capacity to successfully organise or sustain long-term programs. Lack of exposure can reinforce misconceptions about women's positions in society.

There are numerous techniques that may be adopted to strengthen African women's roles in International Relations and Peace Studies. These include strengthening women's leadership networks, advocating for gender equality policies, investing in capacity building programs, establishing dedicated funding streams for women's organisations, promoting gender perspectives in conflict studies research, and investing in technology. Building strong networks may help with information sharing, mentorship, and advocacy activities, while enlisting males as allies can help influence cultural attitudes. Training programs can help women take an active part in International Relations and peace-building endeavours. Furthermore, encouraging research into gender perspectives in conflict studies may enhance academic debate and give evidence-based suggestions to policy-makers.

### **Conclusion**

African women are not just victims in armed conflicts; they participate actively in African wars and peace-making as well as peace building, although a greater percentage of these women remain unsung. Nonetheless, some of the female combatants join willingly with the intention of escaping the crises in war situations, majority of the female combatants are compulsorily recruited into the fighting forces with male combatants utilizing various methods to lord it over them, including rape, killing of loved ones, or other threats to the lives of these women. In promoting and projecting the plight of women, especially in Africa, there is need for all round gender activism on the basis of which African women's movements should continue to pressure national and regional bodies to act equitably; there is also need for sustained advocacy for the transformation and recognition of the contributions, efforts and impact African women have made and are still making in the study of International Relations and Peace and Conflict study in Africa.

The role of African women in International Relations and Peace Studies is increasingly recognized as being vital to the achievement of sustainable peace and development across the continent. Despite historical marginalization, African women have demonstrated resilience, leadership, and a unique perspective that enriches the discourse on peace and security. African women's advocacy groups are instrumental in promoting gender equality within international relations frameworks through policy advocacy, capacity building, networking, research initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and active participation in global dialogues.

The inputs of African women not only empower them but also foster more inclusive governance structures that benefit society as a whole. Their contributions historically set a foundation for current engagement; their active participation in peace processes demonstrates their capability as negotiators; their leadership roles challenge existing norms; and their advocacy efforts push for systemic changes towards gender equality. As we move forward, recognizing and consolidating these contributions, and overcoming systemic barriers placed on the path of African women, will be crucial for achieving sustainable development goals across Africa.

### **Recommendations**

To consolidate the impact of African women in these fields, it is fundamental to discourse these barriers through comprehensive strategies that promote inclusivity, enhance capacity building, and foster collaboration among various stakeholders, hence the recommendations below.

1. To increase African women's role in International Relations and Peace Studies, the following are recommended:

- development of educational programs that focus on international relations and peace studies for women at all levels
- establishment of mentorship programs for young women with experienced professionals
- promotion of policy advocacy at local, national, and international levels
- support for initiatives that integrate gender perspectives into peace-building frameworks and conflict resolution processes, and
- enforcement of international conventions, resolutions, articles, and protocols to enhance gender balance.



2. To increase women's representation in decision-making roles, the following are recommended:

- implementation of quotas or affirmative action policies
- promotion of female leadership through training programs
- networking of African women working in international relations and peace studies, and
- adequate and secure funding for women-led initiatives.

3. To complement the above, the following are also recommended:

- in-depth study and documentation of African women's roles and contributions to peace processes
- promotion of initiatives that involve men as allies in advocating for gender equality, and
- use of technology platforms (webinars, online courses, etc.) for advancing the knowledge of African women researchers, activists and peace workers.

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#### **Writers' Brief Data**



Dr Christian Osemuyi Oseghale is a lecturer in Caleb University, Imota Lagos, Nigeria. Email: [trustnigent1@gmail.com](mailto:trustnigent1@gmail.com). Orchid number: 0009-0001-0276-0607



Dr Ambesi Polycarp Neba is a lecturer in Wellspring University, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Email: [neba.ambesi@wellspringuniversity.edu.ng](mailto:neba.ambesi@wellspringuniversity.edu.ng)



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